

And he's right. Each of you has your own story. Each of you is writing your own chapter in the story of America and the story of American Armed Forces. Each of you have some losses. Each of you have made sacrifices. You come from every conceivable background: from big cities and small towns, from every race and faith and station. You've come together to serve a greater cause, one that matters to the citizens of your country back home and to strangers who live a world away.

So make no mistake, through your service, you demonstrate the content of the American character. Sal is right: Every single one of you is a hero.

Some people ask whether America's best days lie ahead or whether our greatness stretches back behind us in the stories of those who've gone before. And when I look out at all of you, I know the answer to that. You give me hope. You give me inspiration. Your resolve shows that Americans will never succumb to fear. Your selfless service shows who we are, who we always will be—united as one people and united as one Nation—for you embody and stand up for the values that make us what we are as a people.

America is not defined by our borders. We are defined by a common creed. In this holiday season, it's worth remembering that "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are the right to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

And that's what you're fighting for here in Afghanistan, and that's what you're protecting

back home. And that belief is more powerful than any adversary.

So we may face a tough enemy in Afghanistan, and we're in a period of tough challenges back home, but we did not become the nation that we are because we do what's easy. As Americans we've endured and we've grown stronger and we remain the land of the free only because we are also home of the brave.

And because of you, I know that once more, we will prevail. So thank you. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

Thank you, everybody, and happy New Year. Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:37 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Chief Warrant Officer Thomas Hager, USA, commander and conductor, 101st Airborne Division Band; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; Maj. Gen. John F. Campbell, USA, commanding general, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and regional commander east, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; Vice Adm. William H. McRaven, USN, commander, Joint Special Operations Command; CSM Scott Schroeder, USA, command sergeant major, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault); Chief Master Sgt. Craig Adams, USAF, command chief, 15th Expeditionary Mobility Task Force; U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry; and Thomas Gibbons, senior civilian representative, regional command east, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan. He also referred to Col. Todd D. Canterbury, USAF, and Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Farris, USA.

Remarks on the South Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement *December 4, 2010*

Good afternoon, everybody. Today I want to speak briefly about two issues that matter most to me and matter most to the American people: creating jobs and economic growth on which our country's prosperity depends.

Yesterday's job report showed that despite 11 consecutive months of private sector job

growth, despite creating more than 1 million private sector jobs this year, it's not enough. We have to do more to accelerate the economic recovery and create jobs for the millions of Americans who are still looking for work.

And essential to that effort is opening new markets around the world to products that are

“Made in America.” Because we don’t simply want to be an economy that consumes other countries’ goods, we want to be building and exporting the goods that create jobs here in America and that keeps the United States competitive in the 21st century.

That’s why today I am very pleased that the United States and South Korea have reached agreement on a landmark trade deal between our two countries. I’m joined this morning by my outstanding U.S. Trade Representative, Ambassador Ron Kirk, as well as Michael Froman, who was one of our lead negotiators. As you’ll remember, we did not finalize this agreement on my recent visit to South Korea. And I didn’t agree to it then for a very simple reason: The deal wasn’t good enough. It wasn’t good enough for the American economy, and it wasn’t good enough for American workers.

As I said in Seoul, I’m not interested in signing trade agreements for the sake of signing trade agreements, I’m interested in agreements that increase jobs and exports for the American people and that also help our partners grow their economies. So I told Ron and our team to take the time to get this right and get the best deal for America. And that is what they have done. The agreement we’re announcing today includes several important improvements and achieves what I believe trade deals must do: It’s a win-win for both our countries.

This deal is a win for American workers. For our farmers and ranchers, it will increase exports of American agricultural products. From aerospace to electronics, it will increase our manufacturing exports to Korea, which already support some 200,000 American jobs and many small businesses. In particular, manufacturers of American cars and trucks will have much more access to the Korean market, we’ll encourage the development of electric cars and green technology in the United States, and we’ll continue to ensure a level playing field for American automakers here at home.

In short, the tariff reductions in this agreement alone are expected to boost annual exports of American goods by up to \$11 billion. And all told, this agreement, including the opening of the Korean services market, will

support at least 70,000 American jobs. It will contribute significantly to achieving my goal of doubling U.S. exports over the next 5 years. In fact, it’s estimated that today’s deal alone will increase American economic output by more than our last nine free trade agreements combined.

This deal is also a win for our ally and friend South Korea. They will gain greater access to our markets and make American products more affordable for Korean households and businesses, resulting in more choices for Korean consumers and more jobs for Americans.

I would add that today is also a win for the strong alliance between the United States and South Korea, which for decades has ensured that the security that has maintained stability on the peninsula continues. It’s also allowed South Korea its extraordinary rise from poverty to prosperity. At a time in which there are increasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, following the North’s unprovoked attack on the South Korean people, today we are showing that the defense alliance and partnership of the United States and South Korea is stronger than ever.

I’m especially pleased that this agreement includes groundbreaking protections for workers’ rights and for the environment. In this sense, it’s an example of the kind of fair trade agreement that I will continue to work for as President, in Asia and around the world.

This agreement also shows that the United States of America is determined to lead and compete in our global economy. We’re going to stand up for American companies and American workers, who are among the most productive and innovative in the world. And we’re going to compete aggressively for the jobs and markets of the 21st century.

Now, reaching this agreement was not easy. But I want to give special thanks to my partner, South Korean President Lee, for his commitment to a successful outcome. And again, I want to thank Ron and Mike for their outstanding work and their entire team for their tireless efforts. They were up late a lot of nights over the last several months.

We’re going to continue to work with our Korean partners to fully implement this agreement

and build on our progress in other areas, such as ensuring full access for U.S. beef to the Korean market.

And I look forward to working with Congress and leaders in both parties to approve this pact. Because if there's one thing Democrats and Republicans should be able to agree on, it should be creating jobs and opportunity for our people.

Which brings me to the other issue I want to address. Earlier today the Senate voted on two provisions to extend tax cuts for the middle class. And I'll admit, I am very disappointed that the Senate did not pass legislation that had already passed the House of Representatives to make middle class tax cuts permanent. Those provisions should have passed. I continue to believe that it makes no sense to hold tax cuts for the middle class hostage to permanent tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans, especially when those high income tax cuts would cost an additional \$700 billion that we don't have and would add to our deficit.

But with so much at stake, today's votes cannot be the end of the discussion. It is absolutely essential to our hard-working middle class families and to our economy to make sure that their taxes don't go up on January 1.

I've spoken with the Democratic leadership in Congress, and I look forward to speaking with the Republican leadership as well. And my message to them is going to be the same: We need to redouble our efforts to resolve this im-

passe in the next few days to give the American people the peace of mind that their taxes will not go up on January 1. It will require some compromise, but I'm confident that we can get it done. And the American people should expect no less.

As we work our way through this issue, we must not forget that last week some 2 million Americans who have lost their jobs also saw their unemployment insurance expire, right in the middle of the holiday season. And that's not how we should do business here in America. I believe it is simply wrong to even consider giving permanent tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans while denying relief to so many Americans who desperately need it and have lost their jobs through no fault of their own.

So we are going to continue to work on this issue through the weekend, into early next week. And I'm going to be rolling up my sleeves with the leaders of both parties in Congress. We need to get this resolved, and I'm confident we can do it.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:21 p.m. in Room 430 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Deputy National Security Adviser for International Economic Affairs Michael B. Froman.

Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors Reception December 5, 2010

The President. Everybody, thank you so much. Please have a seat, have a seat. Well, what a good-looking crowd. [*Laughter*] Say we do what we can, huh? [*Laughter*] Happy holidays, everybody. And on behalf of Michelle and myself, I want to welcome all of you to the White House.

And I want to start by giving special thanks to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and all the Members of Congress who are here. Nobody has done more for our country over the last couple of years than Nancy Pelosi.

None of this would be possible without some people who have put great effort into this evening: David Rubenstein, Michael Kaiser, the Kennedy Center trustees, and all the people who have made the Kennedy Center such a wonderful place for Americans of all ages to enjoy the arts.

And on that note, I also want to give special thanks to Caroline Kennedy—where's—is Caroline here tonight? Hey, Caroline—and all the other members of the Kennedy family who are here tonight. It's wonderful to see them.