

of growing and strengthening the American economy.

I'm very much looking forward to the discussion we're going to be having as you guys continue your work. I'm grateful for all of you for being here, because while those around this table may not always agree on every issue, what does bind us together is that we want to see our businesses grow. We want to see our workers get hired. We want our people to succeed. We want America to compete. We want to stay on

top in the 21st century. And I'm confident we can do that with your help.

So thank you very much, everybody. And I think you guys are going to strike this podium so I can sit down and listen a little bit. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:19 a.m. in Room 430 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to W. James McNeerney, Jr., Chair, and Ursula M. Burns, Vice Chair, President's Export Council.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 9, 2010

The President. Merry Christmas, everybody!

Audience members. Merry Christmas!

The President. Happy holidays. We are just thrilled to have all of you here.

Thank you, Secretary Salazar, for the kind introduction and for all that you're doing to protect our national parks and our public lands for the future of generations. I also want to recognize Neil Mulholland and everyone at the National Park Foundation and at the National Park Service who helped put this event together.

I want to thank Pastor Darrell Morton for that wonderful invocation, and of course, thanks to Common and all of tonight's performers for joining us here as we light the National Christmas Tree for the 88th time.

This is a very proud holiday tradition. Snow or shine, in good times and in periods of hardship, folks like you have gathered with Presidents to light our national tree. Now, it hasn't always gone off without a hitch. On one occasion, two sheep left the safety of the nativity scene and wandered into rush-hour traffic. [*Laughter*] That caused some commotion. [*Laughter*]

Often, the ceremony itself has reflected the pain and sacrifice of the times. There were years during the Second World War when no lights were hung in order to save electricity. In the days following Pearl Harbor, Winston Churchill joined President Roosevelt to wish our Nation a happy Christmas even in such perilous days.

But without fail, each year, we have gathered here; each year, we've come together to celebrate a story that has endured for two millennia. It's a story that's dear to Michelle and me as Christians, but it's a message that's universal: A child was born far from home to spread a simple message of love and redemption to every human being around the world.

It's a message that says no matter who we are or where we are from, no matter the pain we endure or the wrongs we face, we are called to love one another as brothers and as sisters.

And so during a time in which we try our hardest to live with a spirit of charity and good will, we remember our brothers and sisters who have lost a job or are struggling to make ends meet. We pray for the men and women in uniform serving in Afghanistan and Iraq and in faraway places who can't be home this holiday season. And we thank their families, who will mark this Christmas with an empty seat at the dinner table.

On behalf of Malia, Sasha, Michelle, Marian—who's our grandmother-in-chief—[*laughter*—and Bo—don't forget Bo—I wish all of you a merry Christmas and a blessed holiday season.

And now I'm going to invite the entire Obama crew up here to help me light this Christmas tree.

All right, everybody, we're going to count from five: five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:18 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he

referred to Neil J. Mulholland, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; Darrell D. Morton, pastor, Evangelical

Lutheran Church in America; and musician Lonnie R. “Common” Lynn, Jr. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

Statement on Senate Action on Defense Authorization Legislation December 9, 2010

I am extremely disappointed that yet another filibuster has prevented the Senate from moving forward with the “National Defense Authorization Act.” Despite having the bipartisan support of a clear majority of Senators, a minority of Senators are standing in the way of the funding upon which our troops, veterans, and military families depend. This annual bill has been enacted each of the past 48 years, and our Armed Forces deserve nothing less this year.

A minority of Senators were willing to block this important legislation largely because they oppose the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” As Commander in Chief, I have pledged to repeal this discriminatory law, a step supported by the Secretary of Defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and informed by a compre-

hensive study that shows overwhelming majorities of our Armed Forces are prepared to serve with Americans who are openly gay or lesbian. A great majority of the American people agree. This law weakens our national security, diminishes our military readiness, and violates fundamental American principles of fairness, integrity, and equality.

I want to thank Majority Leader Reid, Armed Services Committee Chairman Levin, and Senators Lieberman and Collins for all the work they have done on this bill. While today’s vote was disappointing, it must not be the end of our efforts. I urge the Senate to revisit these important issues during the lame duck session.

NOTE: The statement referred to H.R. 5136.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Former President William J. Clinton and an Exchange With Reporters December 10, 2010

President Obama. I thought it was a slow day, so I’d—

Q. Slow news day, huh?

President Obama. —bring the other guy in.

Obviously, there’s a big debate going on about taxes and about the need to grow the economy and to create jobs. And just about every day this week, I’ve been making an argument as to why the agreement that we’ve struck to provide billions of dollars in payroll tax cuts that can immediately help rejuvenate the economy, as well as tax cuts for middle class families, unemployment insurance for folks who desperately need it, credits for college, credits for—child tax credits, as well as a range of business investments credits are so important to make sure that we keep this recovery moving.

I just had a terrific meeting with the former President, President Bill Clinton. And we just

happened to have this as a topic of conversation. And I thought, given the fact that he presided over as good an economy as we’ve seen in our lifetimes, that it might be useful for him to share some of his thoughts.

I’m going to let him speak very briefly. And then I’ve actually got to go over and do some—just one more Christmas party. So he may decide he wants to take some questions, but I want to make sure that you guys heard from him directly.

[*At this point, former President Clinton made remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Former President Clinton. So in my opinion, this is a good bill. And I hope that my fellow Democrats will support it. I thank the Republican