

First and foremost, it is a substantial victory for middle class families across the country who would no longer have to worry about a massive tax hike come January 1. It would offer hope to millions of Americans who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own by making sure that they won't suddenly find themselves out in the cold without the unemployment insurance benefits that they were counting on. And it would offer real tax relief for Americans who are paying for college, parents raising their children, and business owners looking to invest in their businesses and propel our economy forward.

So I urge the House of Representatives to act quickly on this important matter. Because if there's one thing we can agree on, it's the urgent work of protecting middle class families, removing uncertainty for America's businesses, and giving our economy a boost as we head into the new year.

Thanks very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:31 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to H.R. 4853. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Remarks at a Reception at the Department of State December 13, 2010

Thank you. I have to say, just first of all, looking out at the audience, I'm reminded of, Hillary, how hard we've been working because I recognize everybody. [Laughter] I've seen all of you here. I've seen you in your home countries. And we are grateful to you.

First of all, thanks not only to Hillary for her gracious introduction, but I think there's a consensus building that this may be one of the best Secretaries of State we've ever had in this country's history—[inaudible]. One of my better decisions. [Laughter] It is a bipartisan view, by the way. [Laughter]. That doesn't happen very often.

Before I say anything else, I want to echo what I know Hillary addressed earlier, just say a few words about our friend and partner, Richard Holbrooke. We're honored to be joined by Richard's wife Kati and their family, David, Anthony, Lizzie, Christopher. I just had a chance to take a few moments with them before we came out to talk about their husband, dad, friend.

Richard Holbrooke has been serving this Nation with distinction for nearly 50 years, from a young Foreign Service officer in Vietnam to the architect of the accords that ended the slaughter in the Balkans, to advancing our regional efforts as our Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and countless crises and hot

spots in between. He is simply one of the giants of American foreign policy.

And as anyone who has ever worked with him knows, or had the clear disadvantage of negotiating across the table from him, Richard is relentless. He never stops, he never quits, because he's always believed that if we stay focused, if we act on our mutual interests, that progress is possible. Wars can end; peace can be forged.

This is the conviction that animates his work in Afghanistan and Pakistan and that of his SRAP team, many of whom join us tonight. Where are they? There they are back there. Richard recruited them. He mentored them. And I want you to know that in our meetings he consistently gave you guys unbelievable credit. He was so proud—and is so proud—of the work that you do. And I thank you for all the progress that we're making in that region, which is so vital to our national security.

So tonight we're all praying for Richard's recovery. To Kati and the family, our thoughts are with you. And I know that everyone here joins me when I say that America is more secure and the world is a safer place because of the work of Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. So Michelle and I, to the entire family, just know we are thinking and praying for you and for Richard every single day. And he is a tough son of a gun,

so we are confident that, as hard as this is, that he is going to be putting up a tremendous fight.

Now, part of the reason that Hillary Clinton wanted Richard as part of her team is because she too is relentless. She too is tough. She too does not quit. She recently pulled off what one journalist called “a Central Asian hat trick.” She went to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, and then she threw in, as a bonus, Bahrain. [Laughter] And because of the time differences, she was able to accomplish this all in one day. [Laughter]

Despite the jetlag, she has not lost her sense of humor. She recently cautioned foreign publics against watching too much American TV, because, she said, you’d think that we Americans spend all our time “wrestling and wearing bikinis.” [Laughter]

So thank you, Secretary Clinton, for your leadership, for your sense of humor, for your incredible dedication to our national security, more broadly, your incredible dedication to a world that’s more peaceful and secure and provides opportunity for all.

Now, I wanted to be here tonight, I’m grateful for the invitation, despite the fact that, as I said, I’ve met most of you. I’ve had a chance to work with many of you. We recently hosted a reception over at the White House, and we—I’ve had the opportunity to receive some of you, the newest Ambassadors to the United States, in the Oval Office. But I wanted to be here today for two reasons.

First, I want to thank our extraordinary State Department employees for the tireless work that you do. You are the backbone of American foreign policy, especially those of you who are serving far away from home on—during the holidays.

Day in, day out, you strengthen our alliances. You forge new partnerships. You prevent conflicts and the spread of deadly weapons. You promote global prosperity and global health. You stand up for human rights, and you stand up for universal values. In other words, you show the world the very best of America. And on behalf of the American people, I want to say thank you. You are doing an extraordinary job.

Now, the other reason I wanted to be here was to say how much the United States values the partnerships and friendships of the nations that are represented here. As you know, my administration has pursued a new era of engagement around the world, an engagement that’s grounded in mutual interest and mutual respect. It depends on trust. It depends on candor. That’s the essence of our diplomacy and the essence of our partnerships.

And our commitment to diplomacy, to building partnerships of mutual interest and mutual respect, is going to remain a fundamental cornerstone of our foreign policy. It will not change, because not only is it right for America, but it’s right for the world.

And let me say that our engagement includes building partnerships between our peoples. That’s what Michelle and I worked to do during our recent visit to India, for example, which occurred during Diwali. As many of you’ve seen, during a Diwali celebration with some of the schoolchildren, Michelle joined in the dancing. So did I. The difference was, she was good. [Laughter] The headlines were a little bruising to my ego. [Laughter] They said, “President Obama Visits India; Michelle Obama Rocks India.” [Laughter]

It was just one small example, but it spoke to a larger truth, one that’s at the heart of this holiday season. When we reach out to one another, when we see beyond the differences that supposedly divide us, when we come together—even if it’s for some dance or some song or a shared story, a shared memory—we’re reminded that fundamentally we are the same. There’s a commonality between us. There is an essential human experience that we all share.

And it gets lost in politics and it gets lost in rivalries. And there are barriers of ethnicity and religion and language. And yet scratch the surface, take the time to get to know somebody else from a different culture, a different race, a different ethnicity, and it turns out that there are hopes and dreams that bind us together.

And our jobs, both as political leaders and as diplomats, is to make sure that those bonds are strengthened and broadened; that they penetrate into our respective nations; that each of us

is able to stand in the other person's shoes and see through the other person's eyes; that people are no longer simply "the other," or simply foreigners, but are in fact our brothers and sisters.

And if we're insistent enough about the capacity to understand each other, then that translates concretely into some war that doesn't happen, some village that isn't destroyed, some child that gets something to eat, some disaster that is averted. That's what all of you do. That's your essential task. And you do it very, very well.

And so to Secretary Clinton, to the State Department, thank you for doing so much extraordinary work over the past year, much of it to little notice and little acclaim. I know what you do, and I know how important you are.

And to the diplomats and dignitaries from our friends and partners around the world, let me say to you that we are absolutely confident that in the new year we will have more opportunities to work together and that if we stay focused on our task, then the world is going to be a better place for our children and our grandchildren.

So merry Christmas and happy holidays, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:04 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to David and Anthony Holbrooke, sons, and Elizabeth and Christopher Jennings, stepchildren, of Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke.

## Statement on the Death of United States Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard C. Holbrooke *December 13, 2010*

Michelle and I are deeply saddened by the passing of Richard Holbrooke, a true giant of American foreign policy, who has made America stronger, safer, and more respected. He was a truly unique figure who will be remembered for his tireless diplomacy, love of country, and pursuit of peace.

For nearly 50 years, Richard served the country he loved with honor and distinction. He worked as a young Foreign Service officer during the Vietnam war and then supported the Paris peace talks which ended that war. As a young Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, he helped normalize relations with China. As U.S. Ambassador to Germany, he helped Europe emerge from a long cold war and encouraged NATO to welcome new members.

As Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, he was the tireless chief architect of the Dayton Accords that ended the war in Bosnia 15 years ago this week, saving countless lives. As Ambassador to the United Nations, Richard helped break a political impasse and strengthen our Nation's relationship with the U.N. and elevated the cause of AIDS

and Africa on the international agenda. And throughout his life, as a child of refugees, he devoted himself to the plight of people displaced around the world.

When I became President, I was grateful that Richard agreed to serve as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The progress that we have made in Afghanistan and Pakistan is due in no small measure to Richard's relentless focus on America's national interest and pursuit of peace and security. He understood, in his life and his work, that our interests encompassed the values that we hold so dear. And as usual, amidst his extraordinary duties, he also mentored young people who will serve our country for decades to come. One of his friends and admirers once said that "if you're not on the team and you're in his way, God help you." Like so many Presidents before me, I am grateful that Richard Holbrooke was on my team, as are the American people.

Earlier this evening at the State Department, I met with Richard's wife Kati and their family, David, Anthony, Lizzie, Christopher, and Sarah, and I spoke to Kati after Richard's passing. I expressed to them the gratitude of the