

see a whole bunch of good friends. We can't wait to give you a hug and a kiss and wish you a happy holiday. The guys with whiskers, I won't give you a kiss. [*Laughter*]

The President's Weekly Address *December 10, 2011*

Today, America faces a make-or-break moment for the middle class.

After the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes, some still want to return to the same policies that got us into this mess. They're the same policies that have stacked the deck against working Americans for way too long. They're part of a philosophy that says we're better off when everyone is left to fend for themselves and play by their own rules.

But I have a different vision. I believe that we are greater together than we are on our own. I believe that this country succeeds when everyone gets a fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone engages in fair play.

To ensure fair play, last year, we passed the toughest financial reform in generations.

See, for too long, the rules weren't the same on Wall Street as they were on Main Street. Risky bets were made with other people's money. Some folks made a lot of money taking advantage of consumers. It was wrong. And this irresponsible behavior on the part of some contributed to the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

So this financial reform refocuses the financial sector on what's really important: getting capital to entrepreneurs who want to grow their businesses and financing to millions of families who want to buy a house or send their kids to college.

A key part of that was putting in place the first-ever consumer watchdog, someone whose job it is to protect American families from being taken advantage of by mortgage lenders, payday lenders, and debt collectors.

Tens of millions of Americans use these services. Protecting them from unscrupulous practices is an important job. And that's why I nominated Richard Cordray to serve as the head of this consumer watchdog agency.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:10 p.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House.

As the former attorney general of Ohio, Richard helped recover billions of dollars on behalf of retirees and stood up to dishonest lending practices. He has the support of most attorney generals across the country, both Democrats and Republicans. Members of Congress from both parties say he's more than qualified for the job. And yet on Thursday, Republicans blocked his nomination. They refused to even allow it to come up for a vote.

That doesn't make any sense. Do Republicans in Congress think our financial crisis was caused by too much oversight of mortgage lenders or debt collectors? Of course not. And every day America has to wait for a new consumer protection watchdog is another day that dishonest businesses can target and take advantage of students, seniors, and servicemembers.

So I refuse to take no for an answer. Financial institutions have plenty of high-powered lawyers and lobbyists looking out for them. It's time consumers had someone on their side.

And while they're at it, Republicans in Congress should stop the games and extend the payroll tax cut for working Americans. Because if they don't, nearly 160 million Americans will see their taxes go up at the end of this month.

Congress cannot end the year by taking money out of the pockets of working Americans. Now's not the time for playing politics. Now's the time to do what's right for the American people.

No one should go home for the holidays until we get this done. So tell your Members of Congress, "Don't be a grinch." Tell them to do the right thing for you and for our economy. Thanks.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:35 p.m. on December 9 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for

broadcast on December 10. In the address, the President referred to Richard A. Cordray, Director-designate, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The transcript was

made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 9, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on December 10.

Remarks at “Christmas in Washington” *December 11, 2011*

Good evening, everybody. I just want to start by thanking all the folks who have joined us at the National Building Museum. Let’s give it up for our host, who also happens to be the host of the best late night show on TBS, Conan O’Brien. [*Laughter*] And I want to thank all the spectacular artists and choirs and glee clubs who’ve made this such a spectacular evening. Please give them a big round of applause.

I want to congratulate 30 years of “Christmas in Washington.” It’s always an extraordinary honor to be a part of this event because it benefits such a special place, the Children’s National Medical Center. For so many children and their parents, the work that they do to save lives and improve care is nothing short of a miracle. And that’s fitting, because this is the season to celebrate miracles.

This is the season to celebrate the story of how, more than 2,000 ago, a child was born to two faithful travelers who could find rest only in a stable, among cattle and sheep. He was no ordinary child. He was the manifestation of

God’s love. And every year we celebrate His birth because the story of Jesus Christ changed the world. For me and for millions of Americans, His story has filled our hearts and inspired our lives. It moves us to love one another, to help and serve those less fortunate, to forgive, to draw close to our families, to be grateful for all that has been given to us, to keep faith, and to hold on to an enduring hope in humanity.

Service to others, compassion to all, treating others as we wish ourselves to be treated, those values aren’t just at the center of Christianity, those are values that are shared by all faiths. So tonight let us all rededicate ourselves to each other. And in that spirit, from my family to yours, happy holidays. Merry Christmas.

God bless you all, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:31 p.m. at the National Building Museum.

The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq *December 12, 2011*

President Obama. Please have a seat. Good afternoon, everyone.

When I took office, nearly 150,000 American troops were deployed in Iraq, and I pledged to end this war responsibly. Today, only several thousand troops remain there, and more are coming home every day.

This is a season of homecomings, and military families across America are being reunited for the holidays. In the coming days, the last American soldiers will cross the border out of Iraq with honor and with their heads held high.

After nearly 9 years, our war in Iraq ends this month.

Today I’m proud to welcome Prime Minister Maliki, the elected leader of a sovereign, self-reliant, and democratic Iraq. We’re here to mark the end of this war, to honor the sacrifices of all those who made this day possible, and to turn the page, begin a new chapter in the history between our countries, a normal relationship between sovereign nations, an equal partnership based on mutual interests and mutual respect.