

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Frank G. Helmick, USA, commanding general, Maj. Gen. Rodney O. Anderson, USA, deputy commanding general, and CSM Earl L. Rice, USA, command sergeant major, XVIII Airborne Corps; Melissa Helmick, wife of Lt. Gen. Helmick; Linda Anderson, wife of Maj. Gen. Anderson; Gen. David M. Rodriguez, USA, commanding general, CSM Darrin J. Bohn, USA, command sergeant major, and CSM Roger Howard, USA, acting command sergeant major, U.S. Army Forces Command; Ginny Rodriguez, wife of Gen. Rodriguez; Gen. John

F. Mulholland, Jr., USA, commanding general, and CSM Parry L. Baer, USA, command sergeant major, U.S. Army Special Operations Command; Miriam Mulholland, wife of Gen. Mulholland; Lt. Gen. Joseph L. Votel, USA, commanding general, Joint Special Operations Command, and his wife Michelle; Philip and Maureen Miller, parents of posthumous Medal of Honor recipient S. Sgt. Robert J. Miller, USA; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Deputy Governor Hikmat Jassim Zaidon of Anbar Province, Iraq; and Mayor Anthony G. Chavonne of Fayetteville, NC.

Statement on the Legacy of Laura Pollan *December 14, 2011*

Today, as the National Endowment for Democracy awards the Democracy Service Medal posthumously to Laura Pollan, the founder of las Damas de Blanco, we honor and celebrate her life by recognizing her significant contributions to the struggle to defend human rights in Cuba.

Laura Pollan and the quiet dignity of the Ladies in White have courageously voiced the core desire of the Cuban people and of people everywhere to live in liberty. Taking to the streets in peaceful protest to draw attention to the plight of those unjustly held in Cuba's prisons, Laura Pollan and the Ladies in White have stood bravely against Cuban authorities who unleash mobs and resort to house arrest and temporary detention in a failed attempt to silence them. Through Laura Pollan's and the Damas' brave actions, the world bore witness to the repressive actions of Cuban authorities, eventually leading to the release of political prisoners wrongly jailed in the spring of 2003.

Though Laura is not with us today, her bravery in the face of repression and her selfless commitment to democracy and human rights in Cuba offer a living legacy that inspires us to keep moving forward. To las Damas de Blanco who will watch or listen to today's ceremony, you have our utmost respect for your efforts to stand up for the rights of the Cuban people, even in the face of this weekend's crackdown directed at you, and we honor each of you as well.

The United States is steadfast in supporting the simple desire of the Cuban people to freely determine their future and to enjoy the rights and freedoms that define the Americas and that should be universal to all human beings. I remain committed to supporting civil society in Cuba, including by protecting the ability of Cuban Americans to support their families in Cuba through unrestricted family visits and remittances.

Remarks on Ensuring Fair Pay for Homecare Workers *December 15, 2011*

Hello, everybody. As I said in Kansas last week, the defining issue of our time is whether we can build an economy where hard work pays off and responsibility is re-

warded. It's whether this is going to be a country where working people can earn enough to raise a family and build a modest savings and own a home, secure their own

retirement, look after their kids. That's the test of our time.

In some cases, building this kind of economy is going to require some action from Congress. And right now Congress needs to make sure that 160 million working Americans don't see their taxes go up on January 1. None of the workers who joined us here today can afford a thousand-dollar tax increase next year. And it wouldn't be good for the economy. Every economist indicates that it's important for us to extend the payroll tax cut and make sure that unemployment insurance is extended. So this Congress cannot and should not leave for vacation until that—until they have made sure that that tax increase doesn't happen. Let me repeat that: Congress should not and cannot go on vacation before they have made sure that working families aren't seeing their taxes go up by a thousand dollars and those who are out there looking for work don't see their unemployment insurance expire.

There's no reason why we shouldn't be able to extend these items—the payroll tax cut, UI—before the holidays. There's no reason the Government should shut down over this. And I expect all of us to do what's necessary in order to do the people's business and make sure that it's done before the end of the year.

Now, only Congress can prevent the payroll tax from going up next year. But there are also some things that we can do without Congress to help make sure that hard work pays off. And that's why we're here today.

Right behind me here is my friend Pauline Beck. One day back in 2007, Pauline was my boss. I was in California to take part in an event called Walk a Day in My Shoes, where you'd spend the day working the job of someone who was in the service industry. And I was lucky enough to be paired up with Pauline, and I have to tell you, it ended up being one of my favorite days of the entire campaign.

Pauline is a home health care worker. When we met, she was getting up every day at 5 a.m. to go to work taking care of an 86-year-old amputee named Mr. John. And each day, she'd dress Mr. John and help him into his wheelchair. She'd make him breakfast. She'd scrub

his floors. She'd clean his bathroom. She was his connection to the outside world. And when the workday was done, she would go home to take care of a grandnephew and two foster children who didn't have families of their own. Heroic work and hard work, that's what Pauline was all about.

And one of the things I remember about Pauline was her patience. She was patient with me even when I didn't wring out the mop properly or I didn't shake out the sheets before putting them in the laundry bin. But I also remember listening to her talk about the hardships in her life, and she did so without any self-pity. She was glad to be working hard, and she was glad to be helping someone. All she wanted in return for a hard day's work was enough to take care of those kids she was going home to, enough to save a little bit for retirement, maybe take a day off once in a while to rest her aching back.

Now, each of the folks who are here today has a story like Pauline's. They represent nearly 1.8 million homecare workers across the country, hard-working professionals, mostly women, who work around the clock so that folks who need help, including many of our family members, can live independently in their own home. Right now home care is one of the fastest growing industries in America, partly because we're getting older as a society. And as the baby boom generation heads into retirement, more and more Americans are going to need the services of these outstanding workers.

But here's the thing: As the homecare business has changed over the years, the law hasn't changed to keep up. So even though workers like Pauline do everything from bathing to cooking, they're still lumped in the same category as teenage babysitters when it comes to how much they make. That means employers are allowed to pay these workers less than minimum wage with no overtime. That's right, you can wake up at 5 in the morning, care for somebody every minute of the day, take the late bus home at night, and still make less than the minimum wage. And this means that many

homecare workers are forced to rely on things like food stamps just to make ends meet.

And that's just wrong. In this country, it's unexcusable. I can tell you firsthand that these men and women, they work their tails off, and they don't complain. And they deserve to be treated fairly. They deserve to be paid fairly for a service that many older Americans couldn't live without. And companies who do pay fair wages to these women shouldn't be put at a disadvantage.

Now, 4 years ago, a homecare worker named Evelyn Coke took her case all the way up to the Supreme Court. And Evelyn was working up to 70 hours a week with no overtime pay. But the Court ruled against her, saying that to change the law would require action from Congress or the Department of Labor. I'm sure many of you won't be surprised to know that Congress hasn't acted on this issue so far.

Today I will. Today we're guaranteeing homecare workers minimum wage and overtime pay protection. And that's thanks to the hard work of my Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis. We are going to make sure that over a million men and women in one of the fastest growing professions in the country don't slip

through the cracks. We're going to make sure that companies who do right by their workers aren't undercut by companies who don't. We're going to do what's fair, and we're going to do what's right.

Now, Evelyn Coke didn't live to see this day. But the truth is, Americans like Evelyn and Pauline and the rest of the workers who are here today, they're one of the reasons that I ran for President. They work hard. They play by the rules. In exchange, they just want to see that their hard work and their responsibility is rewarded. It's that simple. Americans all deserve a fair shake and a fair shot. And as long as I have the honor of serving as President, I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure that those very modest expectations are fulfilled. I'm going to make sure that they are treated right. I'm going to make sure that every American is treated fairly.

Thanks very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:13 p.m. in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Damian Beck, grandnephew of homecare worker Pauline Beck of Oakland, CA.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Deployment of United States Combat-Equipped Armed Forces *December 15, 2011*

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

I am providing this supplemental consolidated report, prepared by my Administration and consistent with the War Powers Resolution (Public Law 93-148), as part of my efforts to keep the Congress informed about deployments of U.S. Armed Forces equipped for combat.

MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST AL-QA'IDA, THE TALIBAN, AND ASSOCIATED FORCES AND IN SUPPORT OF RELATED U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM OBJECTIVES

Since October 7, 2001, the United States has conducted combat operations in Afghanistan against al-Qa'ida terrorists and their Taliban sup-

porters. In support of these and other overseas operations, the United States has deployed combat-equipped forces to a number of locations in the U.S. Central, Pacific, European, Southern, and Africa Command areas of operation. Previously such operations and deployments have been reported, consistent with Public Law 107-40 and the War Powers Resolution, and operations and deployments remain ongoing. These operations, which the United States has carried out with the assistance of numerous international partners, have been successful in seriously degrading al-Qa'ida's capabilities and brought an end to the Taliban's leadership of Afghanistan.

United States Armed Forces are also actively pursuing and engaging remaining al-Qa'ida