

Remarks on Congressional Action on Tax Cut Legislation *December 17, 2011*

Hello, everybody. In the last few weeks, I set out a simple principle: Congress should not go home for vacation until it finds a way to avoid hitting 160 million Americans with a tax hike on January 1. Extending the payroll tax cut that shows up in people's paychecks every week is an idea that I proposed in September as part of the "American Jobs Act."

At a time when so many Americans are working harder and harder just to keep up, the extra \$1,000 or so that the average family would get from this tax cut makes a real difference when you're trying to buy groceries or pay the bills, make a mortgage or make a repair. And all kinds of independent economists agree: The number-one challenge facing businesses right now is a lack of demand from consumers, which is why more people spending money means companies that are more successful and more able to hire more workers.

Today Congress has finally agreed to extend this middle class tax cut into next year. And they've also agreed to another part of my jobs plan, extending unemployment insurance for millions of Americans who are out there trying as hard as they can to find a job. This is spending money that also benefits families and businesses and the entire economy. And it's a lifeline that would have been lost for more than 2½ million people in the first 2 months of next year if Congress had not acted.

So I'm very pleased to see the work that the Senate has done. While this agreement is for 2 months, it is my expectation—in fact, it would be inexcusable for Congress not to further extend this middle class tax cut for the rest of the

year. It should be a formality. And hopefully, it's done with as little drama as possible when they get back in January.

This really isn't hard. There are plenty of ways to pay for these proposals. This is a way to boost the economy that has been supported by these very same Democrats and Republicans in the past. It is something that economists believe will assure that the economy and the recovery is on a more stable footing than it otherwise would be. And my preference, and the preference of most Americans, is that we ask the wealthiest few Americans to pay their fair share and corporations to do without special taxpayer subsidies to cover some of the costs. But I think that it's important for us to get it done.

We've got a lot more work to do for the people who sent us here. But today I'm glad that both parties in Congress came together, and I want to thank them for ensuring that as we head into the holidays, folks at home don't have to worry about their taxes going up.

So I had a chance to talk to Senator Reid and Senator McConnell. I thanked them for their cooperation on this issue. I'm looking forward to the House moving forward and getting this done when they get back on Monday. And hopefully, we're going to be able to make sure that when everybody gets back next year, we extend this further all the way to the end of the year.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:30 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House.

Statement on the Death of Former President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic *December 18, 2011*

I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing today of Vaclav Havel, a playwright and prisoner of conscience who became President of Czechoslovakia and of the Czech Republic.

Having encountered many setbacks, Havel lived with a spirit of hope, which he defined as "the ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to

succeed.” His peaceful resistance shook the foundations of an empire, exposed the emptiness of a repressive ideology, and proved that moral leadership is more powerful than any weapon. He played a seminal role in the Velvet Revolution that won his people their freedom and inspired generations to reach for self-determination and dignity in all parts of the world. He also embodied the aspirations of half a continent that had been cut off by the Iron Curtain and helped unleash tides of history that led to a united and democratic Europe.

Like millions around the world, I was inspired by his words and leadership and was humbled to stand with the Czech people in a free and vibrant Hradcany Square as President. We extend our condolences to President Havel’s family and all those in the Czech Republic and around the world who remain inspired by his example. Vaclav Havel was a friend to America and to all who strive for freedom and dignity, and his words will echo through the ages.

Statement on Storm and Flood Damage in the Philippines *December 19, 2011*

On behalf of the American people, I wish to express my deep condolences for the tremendous loss of life and devastation caused by recent flooding in the Philippines. In the spirit of our long history of friendship and

cooperation with the Philippines, the United States stands ready to assist the Philippine people and Government should humanitarian assistance and recovery efforts be needed.

Remarks During White House Press Secretary James F. “Jay” Carney’s Briefing *December 20, 2011*

The President. Hello, everybody. Sorry to interrupt.

Press Secretary Carney. It’s all yours, sir.

The President. Thank you. Well, good afternoon, everybody. It is no secret that there hasn’t been an abundance of partisanship in Washington this year. And that’s why what happened on Saturday was such a big deal.

Nearly the entire Senate, including almost all of the Republicans, voted to prevent 160 million working Americans from receiving a tax increase on January 1. Nearly the entire Senate voted to make sure that nearly 2.5 million Americans who are out there looking for a job don’t lose their unemployment insurance in the first 2 months of next year. And just about everybody, Democrats and Republicans, committed to making sure that early next year we find a way to extend the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance through the end of 2012.

But now, even though Republicans and Democrats in the Senate were willing to compromise for the good of the country, a faction of Republicans in the House are refusing to even vote on the Senate bill, a bill that cuts taxes for 160 million Americans. And because of their refusal to cooperate, all those Americans could face a tax hike in just 11 days, and millions of Americans who are out there looking for work could find their unemployment insurance expired.

Now, let’s be clear: Right now the bipartisan compromise that was reached on Saturday is the only viable way to prevent a tax hike on January 1. It’s the only one. All of the leaders in Congress, Democrats and Republicans, say they are committed to making sure we extend the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance for the entire year. And by the way, this is something I called for months ago.

The issue is, is that the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate worked on a