

## Statement on the Observance of Kwanzaa

*December 26, 2012*

Michelle and I extend our warm thoughts and best wishes to all those celebrating Kwanzaa this holiday season. Today marks the first day of the week-long celebration of African American history and culture through the seven principles of Kwanzaa: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.

To many, Kwanzaa serves as a time of reflection: taking lessons learned from our past and looking forward to a more promising tomor-

row. It reminds us that though there is much to be thankful for, we must recommit ourselves to building a country where all Americans have the opportunity to achieve their dreams.

As families across America light the kinara today in the spirit of unity, our family extends our prayers and well wishes during this season.

NOTE: This statement was released by the Office of the Press Secretary as a statement by the President and the First Lady.

## Statement on the Resignation of Lisa P. Jackson as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency

*December 27, 2012*

Over the last 4 years, Lisa Jackson has shown an unwavering commitment to the health of our families and our children. Under her leadership, the EPA has taken sensible and important steps to protect the air we breathe and the water we drink, including implementing the first national standard for harmful mercury pollution, taking important action to combat climate change under the Clean Air Act,

and playing a key role in establishing historic fuel economy standards that will save the average American family thousands of dollars at the pump, while also slashing carbon pollution. Lisa has been an important part of my team, and I want to thank her for her service in my administration and her tireless efforts to benefit the American people. I wish her all the best wherever her future takes her.

## Statement on the Death of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf

*December 27, 2012*

With the passing of General Norman Schwarzkopf, we've lost an American original. From his decorated service in Vietnam to the historic liberation of Kuwait and his leadership of United States Central Command, General

Schwarzkopf stood tall for the country and Army he loved. Our prayers are with the Schwarzkopf family, who tonight can know that his legacy will endure in a nation that is more secure because of his patriotic service.

## Remarks on the National Economy

*December 28, 2012*

Good afternoon, everybody. For the past couple of months, I've been working with leaders of both parties to try and forge an agreement that would grow our economy and shrink the deficit, a balanced plan that would cut spending in a responsible way, but also ask the

wealthiest Americans to pay a little more and, above all, protect our middle class and everybody who is striving to get into the middle class.

I still want to get this done. It's the right thing to do for our families, for our businesses,

and for our entire economy. But the hour for immediate action is here. It is now.

We're now at the point where, in just 4 days, every American's tax rates are scheduled to go up by law. Every American's paycheck will get considerably smaller. And that would be the wrong thing to do for our economy, it would be bad for middle class families, and it would be bad for businesses that depend on family spending. Fortunately, Congress can prevent it from happening if they act right now.

I just had a good and constructive discussion here at the White House with Senate and House leadership about how to prevent this tax hike on the middle class, and I'm optimistic we may still be able to reach an agreement that can pass both houses in time. Senators Reid and McConnell are working on such an agreement as we speak.

*[At this point, a conversation could be heard off camera.]*

But if an agreement isn't reached in time between Senator Reid and Senator McConnell, then I will urge Senator Reid to bring to the floor a basic package for an up-or-down vote, one that protects the middle class from an income tax hike, extends the vital lifeline of unemployment insurance to 2 million Americans looking for a job, and lays the groundwork for future cooperation on more economic growth and deficit reduction.

*[The disruption continued.]*

Guys, I can hear you over here.

I believe such a proposal could pass both Houses with bipartisan majorities as long as those leaders allow it to actually come to a vote. If Members of the House or the Senate want to vote no, they can, but we should let everybody vote. That's the way this is supposed to work. If you can get a majority in the House and you can get a majority in the Senate, then we should be able to pass a bill.

So the American people are watching what we do here. Obviously, their patience is already thin. This is déjà vu all over again. America wonders why it is that in this town, for some

reason, you can't get stuff done in an organized timetable, why everything always has to wait until the last minute. Well, we're now at the last minute, and the American people are not going to have any patience for a politically self-inflicted wound to our economy. Not right now.

The economy is growing, but sustaining that trend is going to require elected officials to do their jobs. The housing market is recovering, but that could be impacted if folks are seeing smaller paychecks. The unemployment rate is the lowest it's been since 2008, but already, you're seeing businesses and consumers starting to hold back because of the dysfunction that they see in Washington.

Economists, business leaders all think that we're poised to grow in 2013, as long as politics in Washington don't get in the way of America's progress.

So we've got to get this done. I just want to repeat: We had a constructive meeting today. Senators Reid and McConnell are discussing a potential agreement, where we can get a bipartisan bill out of the Senate, over to the House, and done in a timely fashion so that we've met the December 31 deadline. But given how things have been working in this town, we always have to wait and see until it actually happens. The one thing that the American people should not have to wait and see is some sort of action.

So if we don't see an agreement between the two leaders in the Senate, I expect a bill to go on the floor—and I've asked Senator Reid to do this—put a bill on the floor that makes sure that taxes on middle class families don't go up, that unemployment insurance is still available for 2 million people, and that lays the groundwork, then, for additional deficit reduction and economic growth steps that we can take in the new year.

But let's not miss this deadline. That's the bare minimum that we should be able to get done, and it shouldn't be that hard since Democrats and Republicans both say they don't want to see taxes go up on middle class families.

And I just have to repeat: Outside of Washington, nobody understands how it is that this

seems to be a repeat pattern over and over again. Ordinary folks, they do their jobs. They meet deadlines. They sit down, and they discuss things, and then, things happen. If there are disagreements, they sort through the disagreements. The notion that our elected leadership can't do the same thing is mind-boggling to them. And it needs to stop.

So I'm modestly optimistic that an agreement can be achieved. Nobody is going to get

100 percent of what they want, but let's make sure that middle class families and the American economy—and in fact, the world economy—aren't adversely impacted because people can't do their jobs.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:52 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House.

## The President's Weekly Address

*December 29, 2012*

Hi, everybody. For the past couple of months, I've been working with people in both parties, with the help of business leaders and ordinary Americans, to come together around a plan to grow the economy and shrink our deficits. It's a balanced plan, one that would protect the middle class, cut spending in a responsible way, and ask the wealthiest Americans to pay a little more. And I'll keep working with anybody who's serious about getting a comprehensive plan like this done because it's the right thing to do for our economic growth.

But we're now at the point where, in just a couple of days, the law says that every American's tax rates are going up. Every American's paycheck will get a lot smaller. And that would be the wrong thing to do for our economy. It would hurt middle class families, and it would hurt the businesses that depend on your spending.

And Congress can prevent it from happening, if they act now. Leaders in Congress are working on a way to prevent this tax hike on the middle class, and I believe we may be able to reach an agreement that can pass both Houses in time.

But if an agreement isn't reached on time, then I'll urge the Senate to hold an up-or-down vote on a basic package that protects the middle class from an income tax hike, extends vital unemployment insurance for Americans looking for a job, and lays the groundwork for future progress on more economic growth and

deficit reduction. I believe such a proposal could pass both Houses with bipartisan majorities, as long as these leaders allow it to come to a vote. If they still want to vote no and let tax hikes hit the middle class, that's their prerogative. But they should let everybody else vote as well. That's the way this is supposed to work.

We just can't afford a politically self-inflicted wound to our economy. The economy is growing, but keeping it that way means that the folks you sent to Washington have to do their jobs. The housing market is healing, but that could stall if folks are seeing smaller paychecks. The unemployment rate is the lowest it's been since 2008, but already, families and businesses are starting to hold back because of the dysfunction they see in Washington.

You meet your deadlines; you meet your responsibilities every single day. The folks you sent here to serve should do the same. We cannot let Washington politics get in the way of America's progress. We've got to do what it takes to protect the middle class, grow this economy, and move our country forward.

Thanks, everybody.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4 p.m. on December 28 in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House for broadcast on December 29. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 28, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on December 29.