

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. in the National Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Biden; and Sens. Charles E. Schumer, chairman, and Lamar Alexander, ranking mem-

ber, Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, in their capacity as members of the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies. The related proclamation is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks at the Commander in Chief Ball January 21, 2013

The President. Let me begin by just saying you all dress up pretty nice. I hope everybody is having a wonderful time. Now, those of you who are in uniform, you look outstanding. Your dates do look better though. I just want to point this out. [Laughter]

Now, I'm not going to give a long speech. What I really want to do is come down and express the extraordinary gratitude not just of me as your Commander in Chief, but more importantly, the thanks of all the American people.

I want to start by thanking some of our outstanding leaders who are here: our hosts, our senior enlisted advisers from all five branches of our military. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Marty Dempsey, who promised to sing sometime tonight, so you should hold him to it. [Laughter] The Vice Chairman, Sandy Winnefeld, and all our outstanding members of the Joint Chiefs. Our Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Vietnam veteran, Ric Shinseki, who is here.

And we're honored to be joined by some truly extraordinary Americans, our wounded warriors, who inspire us with their incredible strength and resolve. Our enlisted men and women and junior officers: the backbone of our military. Our amazing military families, including the families of the fallen—our Gold Star families—we will stand with you always.

The members of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen in the house. And the recipients of our Nation's highest military decoration—the Medal of Honor—we are honored by your presence.

Today we experienced the majesty of our democracy, a ritual only possible in a form of government that is of and by and for the people, a day made possible because there are pa-

triotri like each and every one of you who defend our freedom every single day.

So this little party is just another way to say something we can never say enough: thank you. Thank you for volunteering. Thank you for stepping up. Thank you for keeping us strong. Thank you for always making us proud. I have no greater honor than being your Commander in Chief.

It's because of you that, with honor, we were able to end the war in Iraq, because of you that we delivered justice to Usama bin Laden, because of you that it's even possible to give Afghans a chance to determine their own destiny. We are going forward, and we'll keep our military the finest fighting force that the world has ever known.

Now, tonight we're also joined by some of our servicemembers in Afghanistan. They can't see us, but we can see them on this monitor.

Who we got there? General, are you there? Abe?

Major General Robert B. "Abe" Abrams, USA. Sir, good evening. Mr. President, congratulations on your Inauguration. It is Major General Abrams, commanding general of the 3d Infantry Division and Regional Command-South. We're honored to be able to join you there this evening.

Sir, I'm joined tonight by some fantastic airmen and noncommissioned officers and soldiers serving here in Kandahar.

Sergeant First Class Orlando Jackson, USA. Congratulations, Mr. President. Sergeant First Class Orlando Jackson from Lake Charles, Louisiana, 3d Infantry Division, Falcon Brigade, Task Force Light Horse. I just wanted to congratulate you on a job well done.

Master Sergeant Robert Skowronski, USAF. Mr. President, Master Sergeant Robert Skow-

ronski, superintendent, 807th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Squadron, hailing from Detroit, Michigan. I want to say, go Tigers!

Sergeant First Class David Wood, USA. Good evening, Mr. President. My name is Sergeant First Class David Wood. I'm out of Monument, Colorado, 3d Infantry Division, Falcon Brigade, Task Force Light Horse. Thank you very much for having us here at your party. Congratulations.

Master Sergeant James Godlewski, USAF. Good evening, Mr. President. Master Sergeant James Godlewski. I'm the operations superintendent, the 807th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Squadron and the world's greatest Air Force. I want to say congratulations on tonight. And you guys have a blessed evening.

Maj. Gen. Abrams. Mr. President, we're honored to be able to join you tonight. And we've got one more thing for all of you there: Rock of the Marne!

The President. [Laughter] Well, listen, to all of you who are there, we know it's tough being away from your families. We know the incredible sacrifices and challenges that you meet every single day. But I can tell you that you've got a room full of patriots here. And although I've got to admit that they're a little spiffed up right now—[laughter]—their heart and soul, their dedication, their sense of duty is at one with every single one of the folks who are in Kandahar right now.

And I want you to know that when I was standing on the steps of the Capitol today, looking out over close to a million people, the single biggest cheer that I always get—and today was no different at my Inauguration—was when I spoke about the extraordinary men and women in uniform that preserve our freedom and keep our country strong. So know that every single day we are thinking of you.

We're going to make sure that you've got the equipment, the strategy, the mission that allows you to succeed and keep our country safe. Know that we are going to be looking after and thinking about your families every single day and that when you get back home, you're going to be greeted by a grateful nation and that you will be on our minds tonight and every single night until our mission in Afghanistan is completed.

Can everybody please give our comrades-in-arms a huge round of applause? And please, all of you give our very best to your families back home, because I know it's just as tough, if not tougher, for them to see you in harm's way and away from the family. God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

Now, there's one last thing I've got to do. I've got a date with me here. She inspires me every day. She makes me a better man and a better President. The fact that she is so devoted to taking care of our troops and our military families is just one more sign of her extraordinary love and grace and strength. I'm just lucky to have her.

I said today at the lunch over at the Congress that some may dispute the quality of our President, but nobody disputes the quality of our First Lady.

Ladies and gentlemen, my better half and my dance partner, Michelle Obama.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:48 p.m. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to SMMC Michael P. Barrett, USMC; SMA Raymond F. Chandler III, USA; MCPOCG Michael P. Leavitt, USCG; CMSAF James A. Roy, USAF; MCPON Michael D. Stevens, USN; and former Tuskegee Airmen Homer Hogues, Clayton Lawrence, Ezra Hill, and Grant Williams.