

celebration. And we can't stay to party because I've got to go back to work. [Laughter] But I do want to make sure that we get a chance to shake hands with all of you briefly as we go by. And again, we just want to thank the Schmitters and make sure to tell dad we're proud of him too.

Military spouse Drew Schmitter. Okay.

Remarks at a Hanukkah Reception December 5, 2013

The President. Good evening, everybody. Welcome to the White House, and happy Hanukkah. I should say that normally we just have one Hanukkah reception, but this year, we're hosting two. We have so many friends to celebrate with, we had to do it twice. I welcomed a whole other group this afternoon. But I want you—don't tell them, this is actually my favorite group right here. [Laughter] It's our own little Hanukkah miracle: The party was only last—supposed to last for 1 hour, and it's lasted for 8. [Laughter]

I want to welcome so many friends and leaders from throughout the Jewish community. We are honored to be joined by one-third of our Supreme Court: Justice Ginsburg; Justice Kagan, who is here somewhere—there she is; and Justice Breyer is here. We've got some outstanding Members of Congress, members of my administration with us, including our new Director of Jewish Outreach, Matt Nosanchuk. Where's Matt? Matt's out here somewhere.

I also want to welcome representatives from the State of Israel who are joining us. I—some of you recall, I had just an extraordinary, magical visit to Israel earlier this year and was proud to reaffirm the alliance between our two great democracies. I also had the opportunity to go to an expo where I saw the best of Israeli technology. And there's been such a burst of innovation and creativity that's taking place, including, by the way, I saw a robot that served me *matzah*. [Laughter] We were thinking about having that robot here to serve *latkes*, but we couldn't get him—[laughter]—so maybe next year.

The President. Okay. Thank you. Enjoy, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:31 p.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Deborah Gitell, vice president of client strategy, Awestruck Marketing Group.

Obviously, on a note of seriousness, our—tonight our thoughts and prayers are with the Mandela family in South Africa. They're grieving the loss of a man, a moral giant who embodied the dignity and the courage and the hope and sought to bring about justice not only in South Africa, but, I think, to inspire millions around the world. And he did that: the idea that every single human being ought to be free and that oppression can end and justice can prevail.

Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Yes.

The President. That's what—[applause]. That was a Supreme Court Justice who said, "Yes." [Laughter] So I—that's what Nelson Mandela taught us, and it's that same spirit that brings us here tonight.

And over the last 8 days, Jews around the world have gathered with friends and family to light the menorah and retell the story that has been kept alive for more than 2,000 years. And it's a story of miracles, of a light that burned for 8 days when it should have only lasted for 1 and a people who surmounted overwhelming odds to reclaim their historic homeland so they could live their lives in peace and practice their religion in peace.

It's a story that has been repeated countless times throughout Jewish history. And as we light the candles tonight, we're reminded that we're still writing new chapters in that story today. In 1922, Abraham and Hayyah Ettinger donated this menorah to their congregation in a small town that's now the Czech Republic. And tragically, the Ettingers—and their prayer hall—were lost in the Holocaust.

Yet even in the face of tragedy, Jewish communities around the world kept alive a light that would not be extinguished: the hope that freedom would triumph over tyranny. And tonight we're honored that the menorah that once belonged to the Ettingers will be lit by two Holocaust survivors from the former Czechoslovakia: Margit Meissner and Martin Weiss. The triumph they represent and the triumph this menorah represents, the progress that it represents, the notion that we can join together here tonight reminds us that we can never take our blessings for granted and that we always need to keep working for peace and the freedom that we seek.

And that's why we continue to stand up for our values around the world. That's why we stand alongside and partner with those allies who share those values, including the State of Israel. Together with our Israeli friends, we're determined to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And we're testing whether it's possible through diplomacy to achieve that goal, understanding that we have to remain vigilant.

For the first time in a decade, we've halted the progress of Iran's nuclear program. And key parts of the program will be rolled back, even though the toughest of our sanctions remain in place. And that's good for the world, and that's good for Israel. Over the coming months, we're going to continue our diplomacy, with the goal of achieving a comprehensive solution that deals with the threat of Iran's nuclear weapons once and for all. And through it all, as always, our commitment to Israel and its security will remain iron clad and unshakeable.

Now, building a future of security and peace is not easy. But the story of Hanukkah, of survivors like Margit and Martin—leaders like Nelson Mandela—remind us that those who came before us overcame even greater obstacles than those that we face. So let's take strength from their struggles and from their sacrifice. Let's give thanks for miracles, large and small. Let's recommit ourselves to building a future that shines with hope and freedom and peace. I want to thank all of you for the contributions you've made to communities

across the country and the many friends who have been so supportive to Michelle and myself during these years.

And with that, I want to welcome Rabbi Joshua Sherwin, a lieutenant in the United States Navy, to say a blessing.

Rabbi Joshua Sherwin. Thank you, Mr. President. As Hanukkah formally ends this evening, it is appropriate for us to gather to remind ourselves and the world the true meaning of this holiday. In that spirit, at this wonderful gathering, we now kindle the menorah and recite two blessings as we kindle these lights: the *she-asa nissim*, thanking God for the miraculous capability to bring light to the darkest corners of the world and for the leaders who are dedicated to strengthening religious freedom in our days just as the Maccabees did in ancient ones.

The second *bracha*: We'll all join together in the *shehecheyanu*, the simple yet powerful prayer of thanks giving for the blessing of life, for the gift of light, and for the privilege of celebrating this Hanukkah together. I invite you to join me.

[At this point, a Hebrew prayer was sung. A second prayer was then recited, and the menorah was lit. A final blessing was sung. Music then began to play.]

The President. They came in a little late, but that's okay. [Laughter] There is only one last piece of business that I need to do. This was prepared for us. Some of you may be aware that Thanksgiving and the first day of Hanukkah converge only every 70,000 years. [Laughter] So presumably, this is the first and the last time that this may be used. [Laughter] This was prepared for us. This is called a "menurkey." [Laughter]

And I just wanted to make sure that those of you who were not familiar with the menurkey—[laughter]—that we had our own here in the White House. [Laughter] Enjoy the reception, everybody. Thank you so much. God bless you. God bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:03 p.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House. In his

remarks, he referred to former President Nelson R. Mandela of South Africa, who died on

December 5; and Bethesda, MD, residents Margit Meissner and Martin Weiss.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree *December 6, 2013*

Merry Christmas, everybody! Well, this show is always a great way to get in the holiday spirit. Every year, I rehearse my own little act, just in case. But it seems like, yet again, they couldn't find space to squeeze me into the program. [*Laughter*] You are lucky I'm not singing.

First of all, let me thank Secretary Jewell and welcome her to her first Christmas tree lighting. She is doing a great job for our national parks. She used to run one of America's biggest outdoor recreation companies, and now she's charged with protecting the great outdoors for all of us. So we appreciate her, and we want to thank Neil Mulholland and the whole National Park Foundation and National Park Service team for helping to put this beautiful production together.

Let's also give it up for Jane Lynch and all the great performers who are doing an incredible job putting us in a festive mood tonight. And to all Americans who are here today and watching at home, we are so glad to be part of this wonderful holiday tradition.

For 91 years, the national Christmas tree has stood as a beacon of light and of promise during the holiday season. During times of peace and prosperity, challenge and change, Americans have gathered around our national tree to kick off the holiday season and give thanks for everything that makes this time of year so magical: spending time with friends and family and spreading tidings of peace and good will here at home and around the world.

And this year, we give a special measure of gratitude for Nelson Mandela, a man who championed that generosity of spirit. In his life, he blessed us with tremendous grace and unbelievable courage. And we are all privileged to live in a world touched by his goodness.

Each Christmas, we celebrate the birth of a child who came into the world with only a stable's roof to shelter Him. But through a life of

humility and the ultimate sacrifice, a life guided by faith and kindness towards others, Christ assumed a mighty voice, teaching us lessons of compassion and charity that have lasted more than two millennia. He ministered to the poor. He embraced the outcast. He healed the sick. And in Him we see a living example of scripture that we ought to love others not only through our words, but also through our deeds.

It's a message both timeless and universal: No matter what god you pray to or if you pray to none at all, we all have a responsibility to ourselves and to each other to make a difference that is real and lasting. We are our brother's keeper. We are our sister's keeper.

And so in this season of generosity, let's reach out to those who need help the most. In this season of reflection, let's make sure that our incredibly brave servicemembers and their families know how much we appreciate their sacrifice. And there are several military families and service men and women here tonight. We are so grateful to you for all that you do.

In this season of hope, let us come together as one people, one family, to ensure that we're doing everything we can to keep America the land of endless opportunity and boundless optimism for which we're so thankful.

So on behalf of Malia, Sasha, Marian, the First Lady Michelle, plus Bo and Sunny, I want to wish everybody a Merry Christmas and a joyful holiday season. God bless you. God bless our troops. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:16 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Neil J. Mulholland, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; actor Jane Lynch; and former President Nelson R. Mandela of South Africa, who died on December 5. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.