

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.