

*The First Lady.* The words that come to mind for me are “peace of mind.” And what the Affordable Care Act provides and can provide for so many families out there is peace of mind. This isn’t about politics, it’s about making sure that every family has the peace of mind to know that if a child gets sick or someone loses a job or someone has an illness that requires hundreds of thousands of dollars in coverage, that they’re going to have the safety net that they need to make sure that they don’t lose their home, that they aren’t spending the rest of their lives paying off medical fees.

And as Barack said, your stories are powerful. And it’s our job as mothers to make sure that our young people are informed about their “invincibility,” to make sure that other moms and families out there really understand what this law provides and that they can take advantage of it. This is the beauty of it. People have choices. They can go on to the website, they can talk to a navigator, they can learn for themselves what the law means and what it doesn’t mean. And that’s really, really what we want people to do, is educate yourselves. Get that education. Make the choice that’s best for your family, because the options are there.

So we are, again, very grateful to you all. And we urge everyone out there who has a story to share it. And we urge people to reach out. And if they’ve signed up their child, then sign up their friends. If you’ve got grandkids, make it a Christmas treat around the table to talk about a

little health care. [Laughter] Ring in the New Year with a—new coverage. [Laughter]

But we can really change the face of health care in this country. We can be a country that focuses on prevention. We can be a country where no one goes bankrupt because they get sick. And that is a worthwhile goal. So thank you all for being a part of this. Thanks so much.

*The President.* Thank you, guys.

*The First Lady’s Involvement in Health Care Reform*

Q. Mrs. Obama, why did you want to be involved in the health care push?

*The First Lady.* Because I’m a mom.

*The President.* Thank you, guys. Merry Christmas. Happy New Year.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:54 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Participating in the meeting were Virginia Beach, VA, resident Mary Todd Glascock; Chevy Chase, MD, resident Jeanne K. Wardford; Teaneck, NJ, resident Susan Heskins-Lazar; Arlington, VA, resident Janise Kyle; Mary Marker, volunteer, Enroll America and Organizing for Action; Neeta Datt, chapter leader, Organizing for Action in Montgomery County, MD; Felicia Willems, volunteer, MomsRising in Raleigh, NC; and Nicole Duritz, vice president of health education and outreach, AARP.

## Statement on Congressional Passage of Federal Budget Legislation December 18, 2013

I’m pleased that with tonight’s vote in the Senate, for the first time in years, both parties in both Houses of Congress have come together to pass a budget. It’s a budget that unwinds some of the damaging sequester cuts that have harmed students and seniors and acted as headwinds our businesses had to fight. It clears a path for critical investments in things like education and research that have always grown our economy and strengthened the middle class. And it will continue to reduce our deficits at a time when we’ve seen four of the fast-

est years of deficit reduction since the end of World War II.

All told, it’s a good first step away from the shortsighted, crisis-driven decisionmaking that has only served to act as a drag on our economy. It helps chart our economic course for the next 2 years, which means that the American people won’t be exposed to another painful and unwise Government shutdown. But there is much more work to do to ensure our economy works for every working American. For one, Congress should pass an extension of

unemployment insurance so more than a million Americans don't lose a vital lifeline as they fight to find a job. Today Senators Reed and Heller introduced a bipartisan solution that would prevent a lapse in benefits that would hurt these families and deal an unnecessary blow to our economy, and I urge Congress to act.

I thank Democratic and Republican leaders from the House and Senate who have

worked hard to get this budget done and look forward to the Congress sending me bills that fund our Government and refrain from fighting old ideological battles. And I hope this spirit of cooperation will continue into the new year, as we work to restore opportunity and broad-based growth for every American.

NOTE: The statement referred to H.J. Res. 59.

## Statement on Clemency

*December 19, 2013*

Three years ago, I signed the bipartisan Fair Sentencing Act, which dramatically narrowed the disparity between penalties for crack and powder cocaine offenses. This law began to right a decades-old injustice, but for thousands of inmates, it came too late. If they had been sentenced under the current law, many of them would have already served their time and paid their debt to society. Instead, because of a disparity in the law that is now recognized as unjust, they remain in prison, separated from their families and their communities, at a cost of millions of taxpayer dollars each year.

Today I am commuting the prison terms of eight men and women who were sentenced under an unfair system. Each of them has served more than 15 years in prison. In several cases, the sentencing judges expressed frustration that the law at the time did not allow them to issue punishments that more appropriately fit the crime.

Commuting the sentences of these eight Americans is an important step toward restoring fundamental ideals of justice and fairness. But it must not be the last. In the new year, lawmakers should act on the kinds of bipartisan sentencing reform measures already working their way through Congress. Together, we must ensure that our taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and that our justice system keeps its basic promise of equal treatment for all.

NOTE: The statement referred to Clarence Aaron of Mobile, AL; Stephanie Y. George of Pensacola, FL; Ezell Gilbert of Tampa, FL; Helen R. Alexander Gray of Ty Ty, GA; Jason Hernandez of McKinney, TX; Ricky E. Patterson of Fort Pierce, FL; Billy Ray Wheelock of Belton, TX; and Reynolds A. Wintersmith, Jr., of Rockford, IL.

## Statement on the Situation in South Sudan

*December 19, 2013*

In 2011, millions of South Sudanese voted to forge a new nation, founded on the promise of a more peaceful and prosperous future for all of South Sudan's people. In recent years, against great odds, South Sudan has made great progress toward breaking the cycle of violence that characterized much of its history.

Today, that future is at risk. South Sudan stands at the precipice. Recent fighting threat-

ens to plunge South Sudan back into the dark days of its past.

But it doesn't have to be that way. South Sudan has a choice. Its leaders can end the violence and work to resolve tensions peacefully and democratically. Fighting to settle political scores or to destabilize the Government must stop immediately. Inflammatory rhetoric and targeted violence must cease. All sides must listen to the wise counsel of their neighbors,