

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,

commit to dialogue, and take immediate steps to urge calm and support reconciliation. South Sudan's leaders must recognize that compromise with one's political enemy is difficult, but recovering from unchecked violence and unleashed hatred will prove much harder.

Too much blood has been spilled and too many lives have been lost to allow South Su-

dan's moment of hope and opportunity to slip from its grasp. Now is the time for South Sudan's leaders to show courage and leadership, to reaffirm their commitment to peace, to unity, and to a better future for their people. The United States will remain a steady partner of the South Sudanese people as they seek the security and prosperity they deserve.

## Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Deployment of United States Armed Forces Personnel to South Sudan

December 19, 2013

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

On December 18, 2013, approximately 45 U.S. Armed Forces personnel deployed to South Sudan to support the security of U.S. personnel and our Embassy. Although equipped for combat, this force was deployed for the purpose of protecting U.S. citizens and property. This force will remain in South Sudan until the security situation becomes such that it is no longer needed.

This action has been directed consistent with my responsibility to protect U.S. citizens both at home and abroad, and in furtherance of U.S. national security and foreign policy interests, pursuant to my constitutional authority

to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with the War Powers Resolution (Public Law 93-148). I appreciate the support of the Congress in these actions.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to John A. Boehner, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Patrick J. Leahy, President pro tempore of the Senate.

## The President's News Conference

December 20, 2013

*The President.* Good afternoon, everybody. I know you are all eager to skip town and spend some time with your families. Not surprisingly, I am too. But you know what they say: It's the most wonderful press conference of the year—[laughter]—right now. [Laughter] I am eager to take your questions, but first, I just want to say a few words about our economy.

In 2013, our businesses created another 2 million jobs, adding up to more than 8 million in just over the past 45 months. This morning we learned that over the summer, our economy grew at its strongest pace in nearly 2 years. The unemployment rate has steadily fallen to its lowest point in 5 years. Our Tax Code is

fairer, and our fiscal situation is firmer, with deficits that are now less than half of what they were when I took office.

For the first time in nearly two decades, we now produce more oil here at home than we buy from the rest of the world, and our all-of-the-above strategy for new American energy means lower energy costs. The Affordable Care Act has helped keep health care costs growing at their slowest rate in 50 years. Combined, that means bigger paychecks for middle class families and bigger savings for businesses looking to invest and hire here in America.

And for all the challenges we've had and all the challenges that we've been working on