

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,