

Remarks at PBS's "A Salute to the Troops: In Performance at the White House" November 6, 2014

Thank you, everybody. Please, have a seat, have a seat. Well, good evening everybody. On behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House.

Tonight, as we near Veterans Day, we are continuing our White House music series with a salute to American patriots: our extraordinary troops, our veterans, and their families. And to help us pay tribute to these remarkable, remarkable individuals, our men and women in uniform, we've got some musical legends, like Willie Nelson, John Fogerty. We've got Mary J. Blige in the house. We've got Romeo Santos. We have Common here. Hill Harper and Logan Lerman are here as well, and we're going to be joined by Daughtry, who's playing at a big USO show at Yokota Air Base in Japan.

And we've got some of the finest musicians in our military. We've got Sergeant Christiana Ball, U.S. Army, and Captain John Auer and Captain Matt Smith, United States Marine Corps.

So, between all of these folks, we've got a little bit of rock and roll, we've got a little bit of country, little bit of everything in between. And that's fitting because here in America, no matter where you're from, no matter what music you listen to, we're all united in our respect and admiration for our brave men and women who wear our country's uniform. So let's give it up to—let's give it up for the servicemembers, the veterans, the families. We are so grateful to have you here tonight.

One of my greatest privileges as Commander in Chief is the opportunity to spend time with all of you and your families. I've met young men who willingly chose to move toward grenades to save their friends. I've met heroes who ran into enemy fire and carry their comrades to safety. And I have seen their families and the stress and strains that they go through, but nevertheless, they couldn't be prouder to support those family members who serve.

We've seen, obviously, families of the fallen who keep the spirit of their loved ones alive, and their strength then inspires the rest of us.

And of course, we are inspired by our wounded warriors, whose injuries are no match for the sheer force of will that they display every single day. And some of them are joining us here from Walter Reed tonight. We are especially proud of them. So—[*applause*].

Just one story I want to tell, because I've gotten to know these folks pretty well. One of the wounded warriors here is Captain Luis Avila. I met Luis and his beautiful wife Claudia a few times, and their wonderful kids, and I want to just take a moment to share their story with you because I think it's representative of what it means to serve the United States of America, to be a true patriot.

Almost 3 years ago, just after Christmas, Luis was in his fifth deployment—this time in Afghanistan—when he was severely injured in an explosion. He lost his leg, fractured his spine, suffered two heart attacks and a traumatic brain injury. Two weeks after the explosion, he arrived in the United States in a coma and on life support. It was so dire that Claudia was forced to confront that agonizing question: Was it time for her to let him go, take him off life support?

But if you have a chance to meet Claudia, she's pretty strong and pretty stubborn. And she also had faith that Luis would recover. And, as she prayed during those desperate days, she began praying some of Luis's famous songs in the background: "Ode to Joy," military marches, and some Beatles. And then, he started twitching his facial muscles. And then, he opened his mouth. And then, he moved his tongue on command. And the whole time, Claudia was playing music day and night.

And then finally, Luis woke up. He couldn't see. He couldn't eat. He couldn't talk. But he'd heard those songs. And in the months and years that followed, he kept fighting back with the help of hundreds of hours of music therapy. And today, Luis can see again, he can eat again, he can speak again. He's even playing, as I understand, a little bit of golf. [*Laughter*]

And every night, he still goes to sleep with music playing.

So tonight we're honored to be joined by heroes like Luis and loving families like Claudia and their three boys, Luis Jr., Miguel, and José. And we honor them with the beauty of music, music that has the power to inspire us and fill us with pride and, yes, sometimes to help us heal. And once this concert is over, let's pledge to carry that spirit back to our own communities and to do our part, as Americans, to always

serve these men and women as well as they have served us.

But for now, let's have a little bit of fun. Please welcome the one and only Mr. Willie Nelson.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:36 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to musicians Lonnie R. "Common" Lynn, Jr., and Chris Daughtry; and actors Frank E. "Hill" Harper and Logan Lerman.

Remarks Prior to a Cabinet Meeting *November 7, 2014*

Well, this morning we learned that in October our businesses added 209,000 new jobs. The unemployment rate fell again. Our private sector has now added 10.6 million new jobs over the last 56 months, and this is the strongest job growth that we have seen since the 1990s.

And all this is a testament to the hard work and resilience of the American people. They have been steady and strong digging themselves out of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. And what we need now to do is to make sure that we build on this momentum, because we recognize that despite the solid growth, despite the drop in unemployment, there are still a lot of folks out there who are anxious about their futures, who are having trouble making ends meet at the end of the month or saving for their kids' college education or being able to make sure that they're able to retire with dignity and respect. And so everything that we do over the next 2 years is designed and geared towards ensuring that folks who work hard in this country are able to get ahead.

Now, obviously, we've had a significant midterm election. As I said at the press conference, my attitude has been and will continue to be that good ideas don't necessarily come from just one party. And I'm looking forward to seeing the leaders of both Democratic and Republican caucuses this afternoon to have a chance to share with them both what I think

we need to be doing to build on the economic momentum that we already have and make it even stronger, but I'm also going to be interested in listening to them in terms of areas where we think it's possible to work together, whether that is putting people back to work through stronger manufacturing here in the United States and selling more to countries around the world, one of the major topics that we're going to be discussing during my Asia trip next week; whether it's figuring out how we can build on some modest new investments that we've been making in early childhood education. We know that works. And there's strong bipartisan support around the country for some of those investments. Let's see if we can do more.

All these issues are ones in which there's a strong possibility of bipartisan cooperation, as long as we set politics aside for a moment and focus on the people who actually sent us here.

In the meantime, in these regular meetings that I'm having with my Cabinet, I've been emphasizing to them from day one and will reiterate in this meeting the fact that separate and apart from legislative activity, we have the capacity to continually improve how we deliver services to the American people. I think part of what's happened over a course of several decades is that people sometimes feel as if the Federal Government is distant, that it's not customer friendly, that there's too much bureaucracy.