

to build a more just and tolerant and decent world.

It's a story dear to my family as Christians, but its meaning is one embraced by all peoples across our country and around the world, regardless of how they pray or whether they pray at all. And that's to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be one another's keepers, to have faith in one another and in something better around the bend. Not just at Christmastime, but all the time.

And finally, this Christmas, we count our blessings and we give thanks to the men and women of our military, who help make those blessings possible. And as we hold our loved ones tight, let's remember the military families whose loved ones are far from home. They are

our heroes, and they deserve our heartfelt gratitude and our wholehearted support.

So, on behalf of Michelle, Malia, Sasha, mom-in-law—[laughter]—and our reindeer Bo and Sunny—[laughter]—I want to wish all of them and I want to wish all of you a very, very merry Christmas and a holiday filled with joy.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:12 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Daniel Wenk, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park; and actors Thomas J. Hanks and his wife Margarita Wilson Hanks, who cohosted the event. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

Remarks on the Nomination of Ashton B. Carter To Be Secretary of Defense December 5, 2014

The President. Good morning, everybody. Please have a seat. It is wonderful to be able to announce not the creation, but at least the filling of one new job. [Laughter] But before we do, I wanted to make a somewhat broader statement about the economy. And Ash is willing to indulge me.

National Economy

Last month, America's businesses created more than 300,000 jobs. Now, this keeps a pace so far this year that we have not seen since the 1990s. So far this year, over the first 11 months of 2014, our economy has created 2.65 million jobs. That's more than in any entire year since the 1990s. Our businesses have now created 10.9 million jobs over the past 57 months in a row. And that's the longest streak of private sector job growth on record.

We also know that the pickup in the pace of job growth this year has been in industries with higher wages. And overall, wages are rising, a very welcome sign for millions of Americans. So we've got an opportunity to keep up this progress if Congress is willing to keep our Government open, avoid self-inflicted wounds, and

work together to invest in the things that support faster job growth in high-paying jobs. And that means exports, infrastructure, streamlining our Tax Code, immigration reform, giving minimum wage workers a raise.

And it's been a long road to recovery from the worst economic crisis in generations, and we still have a lot more work to do to make sure that hard-working Americans' wages are growing faster. But the United States continues to outpace most of the world. Over the last 4 years, we've put more people back to work than Europe, Japan, and all other industrialized advanced countries combined. And we're going to keep at it until every single American who is willing and able to work can find not just any job, but a job that pays a decent wage and allows them to support their families.

But it's worth us every once in a while reflecting on the fact that the American economy is making real progress. And if we can continue in this trajectory, if we can continue to grow robustly, and if we make sure that those companies who are seeing profits that are probably higher than any time in the last 60 years, that they're also making sure that their workers are sharing in that growth, then we can get a

virtuous cycle that's really going to make a difference and be a critical component of strengthening our national security, because national security starts with a strong economy here at home.

Secretary of Defense Nomination

Now, I know that some people think that I announce Cabinet positions on fake Twitter accounts. [Laughter] This is not the case.

A year ago, when Ash Carter completed his tenure as Deputy Secretary of Defense, Secretary Hagel took to the podium in Ash's farewell ceremony and looked out at the audience of our civilian and military leaders, and he said: "I've known Ash Carter for many years. All of us here today have benefited from Ash's hard work, his friendship, from his inspiration, and from his leadership." And Chuck then went on to express his gratitude to his partner for "what Ash has done for this country and will continue to do in many ways." Couldn't have said it better myself.

Today I'm pleased to announce my nominee to be our next Secretary of Defense, Mr. Ash Carter.

Now, with a record of service that has spanned more than 30 years—as a public servant, as an adviser, as a scholar—Ash is rightly regarded as one of our Nation's foremost national security leaders. As a top member of our Pentagon team for the first 5 years of my Presidency, including his 2 years as Deputy Secretary, he was at the table in the Situation Room; he was by my side navigating complex security challenges that we were confronting. I relied on his expertise, and I relied on his judgment. I think it's fair to say that, Ash, in your 1-year attempt at retirement from public service, you've failed miserably. [Laughter] But I am deeply grateful that you're willing to go back at it.

Ash, as some of you know, brings a unique blend of strategic perspective and technical know-how. As a student of history, he understands the United States—and I'm quoting him now—is "the single most [important] pro-

vider of security in the world," and he played a key role in devising our defense strategy to advance that security. He's also a physicist, which means that he's one of the few people who actually understand how many of our defense systems work. [Laughter] And that has also allowed him to serve with extraordinary breadth and also depth in a whole range of work that we've had to do.

In one way or another, Ash has served under 11 Secretaries of Defense. He's an innovator who helped create the program that has dismantled weapons of mass destruction around the world and reduced the threat of nuclear terrorism. He's a reformer who's never been afraid to cancel old or inefficient weapons programs. He knows the Department of Defense inside and out, all of which means that on day one, he's going to hit the ground running.

Ash is also known by our allies and our friends around the world. Having served both Republican and Democratic Secretaries, he's respected and trusted on both sides of the aisle. He's been a close partner with our military leaders. And he's admired by civilian leaders across the Department because he's a mentor to so many of them.

Now, there's one other quality of Ash's service that I think often gets overlooked, and that is his true regard, his love, for the men and women in uniform and their families, his relentless dedication to their safety and well-being. When he cut outdated, unneeded systems, he did it because he was trying to free up money for our troops to make sure that they had the weapons and the gear that they needed and the quality of life for themselves and their families that they deserve.

When our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan were struggling to defend against roadside bombs, he moved heaven and earth to rush them new body armor and vehicles. It's no exaggeration to say that there are countless Americans who are alive today in part because of Ash's efforts. When our forces sat down for Thanksgiving dinner far from home or as our wounded warriors recovered in the hospital or

* White House correction.

when our fallen heroes returned to Dover, Ash was there, often on his own time, without any publicity or fanfare. And I know that Ash will be there for them now as Secretary of Defense.

We face no shortage of challenges to our national security. Our combat mission in Afghanistan ends this month, and we have to transition to a new mission of advising and assisting Afghan forces and going after remnants of Al Qaida's core. We have to keep degrading, and ultimately destroying, ISIL in Iraq and Syria. We have to build counterterrorism partnerships and new platforms. We have to continue the fight against Ebola in West Africa. We have to continue to strengthen our alliances, including NATO and continue rebalancing our defense posture in the Asia-Pacific.

Going forward, our Armed Forces are, necessarily, going to need to be leaner, but as Commander in Chief, I'm going to make sure that we have a military that is second to none, that continues to be the greatest fighting force in the history of the world.

That means, though, we're going to have to bolster some new capabilities, our cyberdefenses, how we deal with our satellites and how we're adapting our military and investing in new capabilities to meet long-term threats. We're going to have to work with Congress on a more responsible approach to defense spending, including the reforms we need to make the Department more efficient. That's how we're going to preserve readiness. That's how we're going to keep faith with our forces and our families. That's how we're going to deliver world-class care to our wounded warriors.

And Ash is going to be critical to all these efforts. When we talked about this job, we talked about how we're going to have to make smart choices precisely because there are so many challenges out there. And we're going to have to squeeze everything we have out of the resources that we have in order to be as effective as possible. And I can't think of somebody who's more qualified to do that.

In his career, Ash has been confirmed by the Senate three times. If it were entirely up to my dear friend Carl Levin, who's sitting here, I suspect it would happen really quickly—

[laughter]—because that's the kind of guy Carl is, and Carl, I know, has had a chance to work with Ash in the past. My hope is, is that in the new Congress, we get similar speed and dispatch.

By the way, we will miss Carl Levin. I just wanted to mention that.

One last piece of critical information that may have tipped the scales in me wanting to promote Ash. Ash is a big Motown fan. [Laughter] And one of his favorites is a classic by the Four Tops, "Reach Out, I'll Be There." So, Ash, I'm reaching out to you. [Laughter] You have been there for us, our troops, our families, our Nation.

I also know that he's been there for his lovely wife Stephanie, sometimes by Skype because he's been traveling. [Laughter] But the sacrifices that Stephanie has been willing to make—this is a team effort, as it is true for our military families. And so we're very grateful to Stephanie. She joined Ash on a lot of those Thanksgiving trips to see our troops and at the bedside of wounded warriors. She knows the sacrifices they're going through.

Stephanie, we thank you for your service. We thank Will and Ava, who couldn't be here, but we know that they couldn't be prouder of their dad.

And with that, I want to let, hopefully, our soon-to-be new Secretary of Defense say a few words.

Secretary-designate Carter. Thank you, Mr. President. And, Mr. President, Mr. Vice President, it's an honor and a privilege for me to be nominated for the position of Secretary of Defense. General Scowcroft, my longtime mentor, thank you for being here. And thanks to another longtime mentor, Bill Perry, who can't be here today. And thanks to you, Chairman, and many other friends and colleagues, past and future, for coming out today.

I accepted the President's offer to be nominated for Secretary of Defense because of my regard for his leadership. I accepted it because of the seriousness of the strategic challenges we face, but also the bright opportunities that exist for America if we can come together to grab hold of them. And I accepted the offer

because of the deep respect and abiding love that Stephanie and I have for our men and women in uniform.

As we talked together in the past weeks, Mr. President, we discussed the challenges and the opportunities, and the need both to keep America safe and to make a better future for our children. If confirmed in this job, I pledge to you my most candid strategic advice. And I pledge also that you will receive equally candid military advice.

And finally, to the greatest fighting force the world has ever known, to you, I pledge to keep

faith with you and to serve our Nation with the same unflinching dedication that you demonstrate every day.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:24 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization. Secretary-designate Carter referred to former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft; former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry; and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With King Abdullah II of Jordan *December 5, 2014*

President Obama. Well, it's a great pleasure once again to welcome my friend, His Majesty King Abdullah, and the delegation from Jordan here to the Oval Office.

Jordan is one of our most effective and capable and steadfast partners in not only the Middle East, but around the world. And my personal friendship with His Majesty is something that I greatly appreciate. I always enjoy talking to him both for his honesty and his good counsel.

We had an extensive discussion about some of the challenge that we face in the region. At the top of the list obviously was our efforts to debilitate and ultimately destroy ISIL both in Iraq and in Syria. Jordan has been a rock-solid partner in that coalition to defeat ISIL. And the Jordanian military has been working side by side with U.S. and other militaries from around the world in making slow, but steady progress, providing assistance to Baghdad, providing assistance to the moderate opposition inside of Syria, and to begin rolling back some of the gains that ISIL has made.

We recognize it's a long-term and extremely complex challenge, but it's one that we feel optimistic we'll be able to succeed at. And I stressed my strong gratitude to His Majesty for all the efforts that his men and women in uniform have made.

We also had a chance to talk about the fact that this is not just a military campaign, this is

also diplomatic and a social and political effort, that it's a matter of winning over hearts and minds and isolating the extremists in the region. And I think Jordan is an important leader in that. And His Majesty shared with me some of the ideas about organizing within Islam to make sure that the overwhelming majority of peace-loving Muslims are able to, within their region and within their own communities, step by step isolate and ultimately eradicate this strain that has done so much damage in the region.

We had a chance to discuss some of the other regional issues that are of great importance. We share a concern about continuing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, and Jordan has been a strong partner in working with us to try to broker a genuine two-state solution and peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Obviously, in the aftermath of Gaza and some of the challenges in Jerusalem, the environment has not been conducive for the sort of peace initiatives that we'd like to see, but we are going to continue to share ideas, recognizing that ultimately, what's going to be good for the Israelis and the Palestinians is their capacity to live together side by side in peace and security and for Palestinians to have their own state.

We had a—I briefed His Majesty about our negotiations with Iran and indicated to him