

tiful—for all those reasons, tonight we honor Sting.

One of four kids in his family in Concord, California, Tom Hanks once said his idea of a good time growing up was to take a bus to Sacramento. [Laughter] In the years since, Tom has flown a rocket to outer space, he's fallen in love with a mermaid, he's faced down Somali pirates, mooned the President of the United States. [Laughter] I'm glad he got that last one out of his system before this evening. [Laughter]

Tom's career began just like so many Hollywood legends: dressing in drag for a show called "Bosom Buddies"—[laughter]—kung-fu fighting the Fonz on "Happy Days." But he first won our hearts in comedy, with big hits like "Big" and "Splash." I did watch "Big" last night. It's—that's a great movie. I love that movie. [Laughter] Got kind of choked up at the end when—[laughter]. And as the years passed, he told us "there's no crying in baseball," "life is like a box of chocolates." He told "Houston, we have a problem." And as a cartoon cowboy, he showed us we can always keep our faith in a little boy.

But Tom isn't known simply for his characters, he's known for his character. For his tremendous support of our veterans, he's in the Army Ranger Hall of Fame. For his support of the space program, he has an asteroid named after him. Through Tom, we've seen our World War II heroes not simply in sepia tones somewhere in the distance, but as they truly were: gritty, emotional, flawed, human. Through Tom, we saw the courageous faces behind an AIDS epidemic often overshadowed by stigma and bigotry. Through Tom, again and again, we've seen our passion and our resolve and our love for each other. As his friend Steven Spielberg once said, "If Norman Rock-

well were alive today, he would paint a portrait of Tom."

And people have said that Tom is Hollywood's everyman, that he's this generation's Jimmy Stewart or Gary Cooper. But he's just Tom Hanks. And that's enough. That's more than enough. And for that, we honor him tonight—Mr. Tom Hanks.

So, Reverend Al Green, Patricia McBride, Lily Tomlin, Sting, Tom Hanks—charm, soul, spirit, spunk—they've helped us better understand ourselves and each other. And, as President Kennedy expressed, they've helped us center our purpose as a nation, and together reflect the quality of our society. For that, we cannot thank them enough. We are so glad to be able to celebrate these extraordinary people. Thank you for everything that you've given to us over the years and for what you're going to give us in the future.

Congratulations. God bless you all. Please join me in saluting one last time our extraordinary Kennedy Center Honorees for this evening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:09 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Michael Stevens, son of President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities Cochairman George C. Stevens, Jr.; Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, president and artistic director, Charlotte Ballet; Hilton Als, staff writer, the New Yorker magazine; Jane Wagner, wife of actor Lily Tomlin; Trudie Styler, wife, and Joe, Fuschia, Brigitte M., Jake, Eliot P., and Giacomo L. Sumner, children, of musician Gordon "Sting" Sumner; Jim, Larry, and Sandra Hanks, siblings of actor Thomas J. Hanks; and film director Steven A. Spielberg.

Remarks to Members of the Senior Executive Service December 9, 2014

Thank you very much. Everybody, have a seat, have a seat. Thank you very much. Thank you. Well, thank you for that introduction, Elliott, and your service. Thanks to all of my members of the Cabinet who are here today.

And welcome, everybody who is here as well as joining us online.

My message here is simple: Thank you. I'd like to come bearing raises and perks and—[laughter]. But I can't. [Laughter] But what I

can do is tell you how important you are not just to me, but to the country.

Many of you do what you do at extraordinary sacrifice. You could work at a lot of places. You made a decision at some point in your life to serve your country. Your country is stronger because you made that decision. You keep America running—our airports, our Embassies, our financial system. You take care of our troops and their families. You do it without fanfare. In fact, doing your job right often means nobody hears about you. [Laughter] They only report when something goes wrong or when there's a shutdown and suddenly somebody notices, "Oh, we need that, and nobody is doing it." [Laughter]

And in recent years, it's gotten more challenging for so many of you. You work under tough circumstances, whether it's sequestration, pay freeze, shutdown, and more importantly, a political climate where folks too often talk down government for cheap applause.

So my main message is, thank you. But part of my message today also is to recognize that we do have an issue that we've got to address, and that is, Americans don't trust government like we used to. Part of that is a very deliberate strategy of trying to undermine government. Part of it is political opportunism. But part of it is our need to constantly adapt to the demands of a 21st century.

That's why we need you, and that's why we need the best and brightest of coming generations to serve. And that's why those of us who believe that government can and must be a force for good; those of us that believe that together, we can keep our country safe and guarantee basic security and make sure everybody has a shot at success; those of us who believe, as President Lincoln did, that there are some things we should and must do on our own, but there are some things that we can and should do better together; those of us who believe in both individual initiative, but also the common good—we've got to work harder to make sure that government works.

We have to constantly ask ourselves, how can we serve Americans better? How can we yank this Government into the 21st century

and make it smarter and faster and more responsive? Because if all we're doing is hunkering down and trying to push back against complaints and criticisms—many of which are unfair—but we're not engaging in self-reflection and trying to figure out how every single day we can be doing our jobs a little bit better, then we're failing the American people, and we're failing an incredible tradition that helped to build this country that you are a part of.

So I've got a couple suggestions in this process; I want to know yours. But first, I want to just offer a few examples of people who ask themselves that question: How can I do it better every single day and, as a consequence, make this country stronger?

Case study number one: When the Ebola outbreak began, Gary Penner and the State Department's Medical Services team helped swiftly transport American aid workers with Ebola to the United States for lifesaving treatment. And then Gary traveled to our Embassies in Liberia and Sierra Leone and Guinea to brief all our personnel in the region on the steps they should take to stay safe. And at a time of stress and fear, Gary and his team helped keep people calm and prepared and healthy. And so Gary's been an integral part of a team that, as we speak, is in West Africa saving lives. And for that, we want to thank Gary.

Example number two: We worked with the international community to destroy Syria's declared chemical weapons, which have made the region and the world safer. And it was Kevin Tokarski's job to help get those stockpiles out of Syria and onto a ship so they could be taken away and destroyed. You probably never heard of Kevin's team at the Transportation Department. That's what happens when you do your job well. [Laughter] Fortunately for the world, they did their job well, and we thank you, Kevin, for not making news and getting those chemical weapons out.

Example number three: Although everybody here is doing remarkable work, let's face it, usually, what we do isn't rocket science—unless it is. [Laughter] So Julie Kramer White is helping America launch a new era of space exploration. Julie is NASA's Chief Engineer for

Orion, the new spacecraft that could carry humans farther into space than we've ever seen before. I'm sure you were all as proud as I was to see *Orion's* first successful flight test last Friday. America was already the first nation to land a rover on Mars; when an American is the first human to set foot there, we'll have Julie and her team to thank. And at that point, I'll be out of the Presidency, and I might hitch a ride. [Laughter] So thank you, Julie, for your great work.

I could go on indefinitely. Our senior leaders here and around the globe are the best of the best. I have to tell you, by the way, increasingly, we're attracting folks from the private sector to come and work with us and help brainstorm with us around issues, and it always amuses me when they have been around here for a while and they report back to me, "Wow, these people are really smart; they really work hard." [Laughter] "Yes, it shouldn't surprise you." But it's a testament to the fact that, too often, you don't get that notice. And with your help, we're working to give you a little more support to keep attracting the new talent that we're going to need for the future.

So, first, we're creating a new initiative called the White House Leadership Development Program for Future Senior Career Executives. Talented civil servants are going to have a chance to rotate through different agencies on high-priority assignments, and then they'll bring back their new expertise to their home agency. We want great ideas to have the chance to spread. We want people to get new experiences that reenergize them, reinvigorate them. We want those ideas to cross-pollinate across agencies. We want the next generation of leaders to have the experience of solving problems and building relationships across the Government. Because one thing that we have to acknowledge is that our Government often statutorily was organized for the needs of the 1930s or forties or sixties, and too often, we get stovepiped at a time when we need people with different skillsets and different agencies to be working together. So this is a terrific opportunity for folks to create networks across Government.

Second, we want to do more to recruit, develop, and retain exceptional civil servants, and nobody knows how to do that better than you. So we're creating a White House Advisory Group on Senior Executive Service Reform, and it's going to include leaders from large and small agencies as well as rising leaders. We want to hear from them too. And we also want to make sure you're hearing from your employees. Every year, they give feedback through the Federal employee survey, but too few of you see it. So, starting today, all of you are going to have access to a website where we've assembled that feedback in a way that's clear and easy to read. It's called unlocktalent.gov. It's worth checking out.

One of the things that we know in the private sector about continuous improvement is, you've got to have the folks right there on the front lines able to make suggestions and know that they're heard and to not simply be rewarded for doing an outstanding job, but to see their ideas implemented in ways that really make a difference. Because most of the time, people get involved in government because they want to make a difference. And there's no greater satisfaction than when you see something that you identified as a better way of doing things implemented.

Third, in recognition of those who go above and beyond every day, we're creating an award to recognize outstanding service. I'm surprised this hasn't been done before, but we're going to start. When an American needs something from their Government, whether an education grant or a passport or help turning a great idea into a small business, they're interacting with many of you. You can make enormous differences in the lives of individual Americans every single day.

We are going to honor the people who do this job best. Because ultimately, that's what it's about, making sure our Government serves the American people. And I'm going to keep doing everything I can to support you and your teams. I want you to know that I've got your back, because I know that for many of you, this job is more than just a paycheck, it's a chance to serve the country that you love. That's why

some of the best civil servants never quite leave the job. Even after they retire, or could retire, they keep on serving.

Which brings me to two public servants that many of you know. When Elton Lester began his career at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department was still pretty new. He was the only person of color in the General Counsel's office. And today, thanks in part to Elton's efforts, HUD's workforce has grown more diverse. And now Elton helps oversee every one of HUD's insured housing and assisted housing programs even though, after more than 40 years in public service, he could retire. He could be getting a check every month and not working. And that's dedication: that he's still showing up, because he knows his stuff and he wants to make a difference.

Dwight Ink was a member of the civil service under seven Presidents, briefed President Eisenhower, led the recovery effort after the 1964 Alaskan earthquake. I confess I didn't know there was an earthquake in Alaska in 1964. *[Laughter]* I was 3 at the time. *[Laughter]*

When he was 70, he retired—kind of. He stayed active on the issue he's most passionate about, and that's strengthening the civil service; helped lead public administration organizations; wrote articles about how to make Government better. Today, Dwight is 92. He's still at it. He and his wife Dona are here with us here today. I'd ask all of you to join me in giving Dwight and all the retired civil servants here a big round of applause. *[Applause]* There's Dwight back there.

So there's—that's the kind of spirit of service that built America. That's the commitment that keeps America strong. And now it's up to us to build upon the work that generations of public servants have done to make our Nation stronger and more prosperous. And every day, I am proud to be your partner.

This is going to continue to be a tough environment. There's not going to be a lot of new money flowing. There is going to continue to be ideological battles about—for those who think that the market is king and there's no room for any kind of regulatory efforts to make

our air and water cleaner or to make our workers be in a safer work environment, to assure that every child, not just some, get opportunity. It's going to continue to be easy copy for the press to focus on the 1 thing that goes wrong instead of the 99 things that go right. That's not going to change.

But what I tell my team in the White House every single day and I want to tell all of you, and some of you know this, and some of you have lived it—Dwight certainly has: There is no greater opportunity to help more people, to make a bigger difference—in some cases to help millions, in some cases to help billions around the world—than to be in the positions that we are privileged to be in right now.

And for the short time that we're on this Earth, I always tell my daughters there are two things you need to learn. One is you need to learn how to love and make connections with people, to show empathy and be able to stand in somebody else's shoes and understand what it is to be a friend or a spouse or a parent. And the other thing is being useful, just being of use: knowing that when you wake up every day, you have the chance to maybe make sure that somebody who didn't have a job last week has a job; to make sure that somebody who is driving to work gets there safely because the road is safe; to make sure that somebody who didn't have health care now has it and, as a consequence, are able to catch that disease before it kills them; to make sure that some child somewhere that doesn't have much of a chance suddenly gets that chance, and their whole world, their whole life suddenly unfolds differently because of what you did.

What an incredible privilege that is. What better way to spend your careers than what you do right now. I want you to wake up every day knowing that the President of the United States appreciates you for making that difference.

Thank you. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:47 a.m. at the Washington Hilton hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Acquisition and Procurement Elliott B.

Branch; Gary D. Penner, Medical Director of the Office of Medical Services, Department of State; Kevin M. Tokarski, Associate Administrator for Strategic Sealift, Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration; Elton J. Lester, Depu-

ty General Counsel for Housing Programs, Department of Housing and Urban Development; and Dwight A. Ink, president emeritus, National Academy of Public Administration, and former president, Institute of Public Administration.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Hall Meeting at Casa Azafrán in Nashville, Tennessee December 9, 2014

The President. Thank you, everybody. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you very much. Everybody, please have a seat, have a seat.

Well, hello, Nashville.

Audience member. Hola. [Laughter]

The President. Hola. *Cómo estás?*

Audience member. Bien, bien.

The President. Bien. Thank you, Renata, for the wonderful introduction. I've brought some friends with me who I think you may know: your Congressmen, Jim Cooper; as well as Congressman Steve Cohen from Memphis is here. And I want to thank—is your mayor still here? Where did he go? There he is right there, doing a great job. The—and his wonderful daughter, we've got to brag about her, she's a junior at Barnard. We decided just to embarrass her. When you're the father of daughters, your job is to embarrass them, and I'm trying to give an assist here. [Laughter]

I want to thank Casa Azafrán for hosting us and for being home to so many organizations that do important work welcoming immigrants to the community. And that's why I've come here today. I won't make a long speech, because I want to have a dialogue, but I wanted to give some remarks at the top.

As Renata mentioned, some people might think Nashville was an odd place to talk immigration. It's not what comes to mind when people think about gateways to America. But as all of you know, Nashville's got one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the country. "New Nashvillians"—they're from Somalia, Nepal, Laos, Mexico, Bangladesh. And Nashville happens to be the home of the largest

Kurdish community in the United States as well.

"They" are "us." They work as teachers in our schools, doctors in our hospitals, police officers in our neighborhoods. They start small businesses at a faster rate than many native-born Americans. They create jobs making this city more prosperous and a more innovative place. And of course, they make the food better. [Laughter] I know that Tennessee barbecue is pretty popular, but Korean barbecue is pretty good too. [Laughter]

And the point is, welcoming immigrants into your community benefits all of us. And I was talking to your mayor, Karl Dean, on the way over here, and he understands this. He's been a great partner when it comes to preparing immigrants to become citizens.

A couple of weeks ago, I created a Task Force on New Americans that's going to help do this kind of work all across the country. But, as we all know, our immigration system has been broken for a long time. Families who come here the right way can get stuck in line for years. Business owners who treat their workers right sometimes are undercut by competition from folks who are not just hiring undocumented workers, but then underpaying them or not paying them minimum wage or not giving them the benefits that they have earned. Nobody likes the idea of somebody reaping the rewards of living in America without its responsibilities as well. And there are all kinds of folks who want to gladly embrace those responsibilities, but they have no way to come out of the shadows and get right with the law.