

Federal prison population go down and the crime rate go down at the same time, which indicates the degree to which it's possible for us to think smarter about who we're incarcerating, how long we're incarcerating, how are we dealing with nonviolent offenders, how are we dealing with drug offenses, diversion programs, drug courts. We can do a better job of—and save money in the process by initiating some of these reforms. And I've been really pleased to see that we've had Republicans and Democrats in Congress who are interested in these issues as well.

The one thing I will say—and this is going to be the last thing I say—[laughter]—is that I— one of the great things about this job is you get to know the American people. I mean, you meet folks from every walk of life and every region of the country and every race and every faith. And what I don't think is always captured in our political debates is, the vast majority of people are just trying to do the right thing, and people are basically good and have good intentions. Sometimes, our institutions and our systems don't work as well as they should. Sometimes, you've got a police department that has gotten into bad habits over a period of time and hasn't maybe surfaced some hidden biases that we all carry around. But if you offer practical solutions, I think people want to fix these problems. It's not—this isn't a situation where people feel good seeing somebody choked and dying. I think that troubles everybody. So there's an opportunity of all of us to come together and to take a practical approach to these problems.

And I guess that's my general theme for the end of the year, which is, we've gone through difficult times. It is your job, press corps, to re-

port on all the mistakes that are made and all the bad things that happen and the crises that look like they're popping. And I understand that. But through persistent effort and faith in the American people, things get better. The economy has gotten better. Our ability to generate clean energy has gotten better. We know more about how to educate our kids. We solved problems. Ebola is a real crisis; you get a mistake in the first case because it's not something that's been seen before—we fix it. You have some unaccompanied children who spike at a border, and it may not get fixed in the time frame of the news cycle, but it gets fixed.

And part of what I hope, as we reflect on the new year, this should generate is some confidence. America knows how to solve problems. And when we work together, we can't be stopped.

And now I'm going to go on vacation. *Mele Kalikimaka*, everybody. [Laughter] *Mahalo*. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:53 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to White House Press Secretary Joshua R. Earnest; Supreme Commander Kim Jong Un of North Korea; actors Seth Rogen and James Franco, who starred in the Sony Pictures film "The Interview"; David Muir, weekend anchor, ABC News' "World News" program; Stephanie F. Stacy, district judge, Lancaster County, NE; and Eric Garner, who died during an attempted arrest by New York City police officers on July 17. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization; and S. 744.

Statement on Signing the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015

December 19, 2014

Today I have signed into law H.R. 3979, the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015. I have signed this annual

defense authorization legislation because it will provide vital benefits for military personnel and their families, as well as critical contingency authorities needed to counter the Is-

lamic State of Iraq and the Levant and to respond to emerging needs in the face of evolving terrorist threats and emergent crises worldwide.

Earlier this month, the Department of Defense transferred the last remaining third-country nationals held in U.S. custody in Afghanistan, ending U.S. detention operations in Afghanistan. Yet, halfway around the world, the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, remains open for the 13th consecutive year, costing the American people hundreds of millions of dollars each year and undermining America's standing in the world. As I have said many times, the continued operation of this detention facility weakens our national security by draining resources, damaging our relationships with key allies and partners, and emboldening violent extremists. Closing the detention facility is a national imperative.

I have repeatedly called upon the Congress to work with my administration to close the detention facility at Guantanamo once and for all. Individuals from across the political spectrum have recognized that the facility should be closed. But instead of removing unwarranted and burdensome restrictions that curtail the executive branch's options for managing the detainee population, this bill continues them. Section 1032 renews the bar against using appropriated funds to construct or modify any facility in the United States, its territories, or possessions to house any Guantanamo detainee in the custody or under the control of the Department of Defense unless authorized by the Congress. Section 1033 likewise renews the bar against using appropriated funds to transfer Guantanamo detainees into the United States for any purpose.

The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, contains similar provisions as well as those relating to existing restrictions on the transfer of detainees abroad. I have consistently opposed these restrictions and will continue to work with the Congress to remove them. More than 80 percent of detainees at one time held at the detention facility have now been transferred. The executive branch must have the flexibility, with regard to those detainees who remain, to determine when and where to prosecute them, based on the facts and circumstances of each case and our national security interests, and when and where to transfer them consistent with our national security and our humane treatment policy. Under certain circumstances, the provisions concerning detainee transfers in both bills would violate constitutional separation of powers principles. In the event that the restrictions on the transfer of detainees operate in a manner that violates constitutional separation of powers principles, my administration will implement them in a manner that avoids the constitutional conflict.

The Guantanamo detention facility's continued operation undermines our national security. We must close it. I call on Members from both sides of the aisle to work with us to bring this chapter of American history to a close.

NOTE: H.R. 3979, approved December 19, was assigned Public Law No. 113-291. The statement referred to H.R. 83, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, which was approved December 16 and assigned Public Law No. 113-235.

Statement on Signing the United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2014 December 19, 2014

Today I have signed into law S. 2673, the United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2014, an Act that underscores the United States unshakeable commitment to Israel's security and its future. This bipartisan piece of legislation reflects the importance placed by my administration on strengthening and deep-

ening U.S.-Israel bilateral cooperation and ties. It reinforces critical defense and security programs, which have reached an unprecedented level under my administration. It also lays the groundwork for increased trade and cooperation across a range of cutting-edge fields, including energy, water, agriculture, and