

Remarks on the Expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument on Midway Atoll

September 1, 2016

Well, let me start by saying that this is hallowed ground. As I said before, the Battle of Midway was a turning point in the battle for the Pacific and World War II. An incredible number of young men lost their lives here protecting our freedom. And for us to be able to visit this monument and remind ourselves of the sailors and airmen and everyone involved who were able to rebuff a Japanese force that vastly outnumbered them is a testament to their courage and their perseverance.

It is also spectacular as an ecosystem. And our ability to not just designate, but build on, this incredible natural beauty, which is home to 7,000 marine species, that sees millions of birds, many of them endangered, sea turtles, the Hawaiian monk seal, black coral—all sorts of species that in many other places we no longer see—for us to be able to extend that 550,000 miles in the way that we've done ensures not only that the Midway Atoll is protected, but that the entire ecosystem will continue to generate the kind of biodiversity. It allows us to study and research and understand our oceans better than we ever have before.

It's also critically important for us to examine the effects that climate change are taking here in the Pacific Ocean, the world's largest body of water. And as I said yesterday, there are countries that now are at risk and may have to move as a consequence of climate change.

There are enormous effects on the human presence in the ocean that creatures are having to adapt to and, in some cases, cannot adapt to.

And so, for us to be able to protect and preserve this national monument, to extend it and, most importantly, to interact with native Hawaiians and other stakeholders so that the way we protect and manage this facility is consistent with ancient traditions and the best science available, this is going to be a precious resource for generations to come. And it's an example of the kind of visionary conservation measures that, although I'm the one who ultimately signs it, reflects the work of a lot of people and a lot of organizations and a lot of participation.

So we've very, very proud of what they've done. And I look forward to knowing that 20 years from now, 40 years from now, 100 years from now, this is a place where people can still come to and see what a place like this looks like when it's not overcrowded or destroyed by human populations.

All right? Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:32 p.m. at Turtle Beach. In his remarks, he referred to Proclamation 9478, signed August 25, which expanded the existing Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Final Report of the Commission on Care

September 1, 2016

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

My Administration is committed to the ongoing transformation of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and I strongly support many of the recommendations and the underlying objectives offered by the Commission on Care (Commission) in its final report transmit-

ted on July 6, 2016. These recommendations underscore the fundamental challenges that face the VA health care system, and the reforms needed to provide America's veterans with the high quality health care they need and deserve—both now and in the future. We have made great strides in delivering improved care to our veterans over the past 8 years, and we

will continue to work tirelessly to uphold the solemn responsibility to ensure all our veterans are getting the care and benefits they have earned.

I concur with 15 of the 18 Commission recommendations, many of which are already being implemented as part of the ongoing MyVA transformation that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (Secretary) has put in place. These include areas such as enhancing clinical operations, establishing a more consistent policy for appealing clinical decisions, eliminating disparities in how health care is delivered to veterans from different backgrounds, modernizing IT systems, and establishing new processes for leadership development and performance management. These reforms are steps in the right direction and will help put VA on a trajectory to ensure veterans continue to receive timely and high quality care, while strengthening the VA health care system that millions of veterans depend on every day. I appreciate and applaud the Commission for their work.

Of particular note, I strongly support the Commission's principle that creating a high-performing, integrated health care system that encompasses both VA and private care is critical to serving the needs of veterans. In fact, my Administration outlined its approach to achieve this same goal in VA's *Plan to Consolidate Community Care*, submitted to the Congress in October 2015. While this approach must be implemented in a fiscally sustainable way, it builds on more than a decade of work with veterans, health care providers, and community partners, to streamline and enhance VA's capability to deliver services essential to veterans' health. VA's plan also recognizes the importance of strengthening VA's partnerships with other Federal health care providers, including the Department of Defense and Indian Health Service, as well as tribal health programs, academic teaching affiliates, and Federally Qualified Health Centers.

At the same time, it is critical that we preserve and continue to improve the VA health care system and ensure that VA has the ability to serve veterans. Research shows that in many areas, such as mental health, VA delivers care

that is often better than that delivered in the private sector. VA also provides unique, highly specialized care for many medical conditions, such as spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries, which are simply not available to the same extent outside of VA. In addition, VA provides a comprehensive approach to wellness that includes the treatment of physical injuries and mental health. This multidisciplinary approach allows providers to address the full spectrum of veteran needs beyond medical care, including other VA benefits and services.

For these reasons, I concur with the Commission's vision for creating integrated care networks that more tightly coordinate VA and non-VA care, but urge the Congress to act on this recommendation by enacting VA's *Plan to Consolidate Community Care*. The alternative approach outlined in VA's plan would achieve the goals of the Commission to create a veteran-centric approach to care that appropriately balances issues of access, quality, and cost-effectiveness. It would more clearly ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of the VA health care system, preserve VA's role as the primary coordinator of care for veterans, and safeguard its ability to carry out its other research, education, and emergency preparedness missions that are critical to our Nation's well-being. And it would ensure that veterans have access to the care they need—whether at the VA or out in the community—without forcing untenable resource tradeoffs that would limit the ability of VA to carry out other parts of its mission on behalf of veterans.

We must also ensure that VA has the ability to operate this integrated health care system in a rational, efficient, and dynamic way that best serves the interests of both veterans and taxpayers. For that reason, I have concerns with the Commission's proposed governance structure for the VA health care system. The proposal would undermine the authority of the Secretary and the Under Secretary for Health, weaken the integration of the VA health care system with the other services and programs provided by the VA, and make it harder—not easier—for VA to implement transformative change. Moreover, the Department of Justice

has advised that the proposed recommendation would violate the Appointments Clause of the Constitution. I do, however, support portions of the recommendation that would establish a term appointment for the Under Secretary for Health, to ensure that position is removed from the turmoil and turnover of the political cycle.

For those recommendations I agree with and whose objectives are not yet achieved, I am directing the VA to develop plans to complete their implementation. Additionally, in recognition of the role of the MyVA initiative in transforming the VA as military service evolves, I have directed the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to incorporate the principles of the MyVA initiative into VA strategic planning, leadership training, and performance monitoring. In those areas where legislation is re-

quired, my Administration will work closely with the Secretary to transmit to the Congress the relevant legislative proposals, which I recommend be enacted without delay.

Improving veterans' health care remains a critical issue of national importance, and my Administration will work with veterans and military families, the Congress, Veterans Service Organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure all our veterans are getting the care and benefits they need when they need them.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Paul D. Ryan, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., President of the Senate.

Statement on the Death of President Islom Karimov of Uzbekistan *September 2, 2016*

At this challenging time of President Islom Karimov's passing, the United States reaffirms its support for the people of Uzbekistan. This week, I congratulated President Karimov and the people of Uzbekistan on their country's 25

years of independence. As Uzbekistan begins a new chapter in its history, the United States remains committed to partnership with Uzbekistan, to its sovereignty, security, and to a future based on the rights of all its citizens.

The President's Weekly Address *September 3, 2016*

Hi, everybody. Before you fire up the barbecue for the long weekend, I want to talk a little bit about the reason we get to celebrate Labor Day, and that's the labor movement that helped to build this country and our middle class.

For generations, every time the economy has changed, hard-working Americans marched and organized and joined unions to demand not simply a bigger paycheck for themselves, but better conditions and more security for the folks working next to them too. Their efforts are why we can enjoy things like the 40-hour workweek, overtime pay, and a minimum wage. Their efforts are why we can depend on health insur-

ance, Social Security, Medicare, and retirement plans.

All of that progress is stamped with the union label. All of that progress was fueled with a simple belief: that our economy works better when it works for everybody.

That's the spirit that's made the progress of these past 7½ years possible. We've rescued our economy from another depression, cut our unemployment rate in half, and unleashed the longest string total job growth on record. And we've focused on making sure that the gains of a growing economy don't just flow to a few at the top, but to everybody.

That's why we took action to help millions of workers finally collect the overtime pay they've