

the values that they care about don't seem as if they were vindicated, that automatically America has somehow rejected them or rejected their values or—I don't think they feel that way.

I think that they have, in part through osmosis, in part through dinnertime conversations, appreciated the fact that this is a big, complicated country, and democracy is messy, and it doesn't always work exactly the way you might want, it doesn't guarantee certain outcomes. But if you're engaged and you're involved, then there are a lot more good people than bad in this country, and there's a core decency to this country, and that they've got to be a part of lifting that up.

And I expect they will be. And in that sense, they are representative of this generation that makes me really optimistic.

I've been asked—I've had some off-the-record conversations with some journalists where they said, okay, you seem like you're okay, but really, really, what are you thinking? [*Laughter*] And I've said, no, I—what I'm saying really is what I think. I believe in this country. I believe in the American people. I believe that people are more good than bad. I believe tragic things happen, I think there's evil in the world, but I think that at the end of the day, if we work hard and if we're true to those things in us that feel true and feel right, that the world gets a little better each time.

That's what this Presidency has tried to be about. And I see that in the young people I've

worked with. I couldn't be prouder of them. And so this is not just a matter of “No Drama Obama.” [*Laughter*] This is what I really believe. It is true that behind closed doors I curse more than I do publicly. [*Laughter*] And sometimes, I get mad and frustrated like everybody else does. But at my core, I think we're going to be okay. We just have to fight for it. We have to work for it and not take it for granted. And I know that you will help us do that.

Thank you very much, press corps. Good luck.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 2:24 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Lynn Sweet, columnist and Washington bureau chief, Chicago Sun-Times; Prime Minister Dmitriy Anatolyevich Medvedev of Russia, in his former capacity as President of Russia; President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; David M. Friedman, President-elect Trump's prospective nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Israel; former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael G. Mullen; television personality Ellen L. DeGeneres; and Simone Biles, gymnast, and Michael F. Phelps II, swimmer, 2016 U.S. Olympic Team. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

## Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Detention Facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

January 19, 2017

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

For 15 years, the United States has detained hundreds of people at the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, a facility that never should have been opened in the first place. Rather than keeping us safer, the detention facility at Guantanamo undermines American national security. Terrorists use it for propaganda, its

operations drain our military resources during a time of budget cuts, and it harms our partnerships with allies and countries whose cooperation we need against today's evolving terrorist threat. By any measure, the costs of keeping it open far exceed the complications involved in closing it.

As President, I have tried to close Guantanamo. When I inherited this challenge, it was

widely recognized that the facility—which many around the world continue to condemn—needed to close. Unfortunately, what had previously been bipartisan support for closure suddenly became a partisan issue. Despite those politics, we have made progress. This Administration established a comprehensive, interagency review process to assess whether the transfer of a detainee is in the national security interest of the United States. Under this rigorous process, we have transferred 196 detainees from Guantanamo with arrangements designed to keep them from engaging in acts that pose a threat to the United States and our allies. Of the nearly 800 detainees at one time held at the facility, today only 41 remain.

The Department of Defense has also provided the Congress with a comprehensive plan to finally close Guantanamo once and for all. In addition to calling for us to continue to identify and effectuate secure transfer opportunities, it calls for the continued periodic review of the threat posed by individuals still detained, the use of all legal tools to deal with the remaining detainees still held under law of war detention, and the identification of a secure location in the United States to hold remaining detainees who are subject to military commissions or who we have determined must continue to be detained because they pose a continuing significant threat to the United States. I have included an update to that plan here.

The restrictions imposed by the Congress that prevent us from imprisoning detainees—even to prosecute and secure a life sentence—in the United States make no sense. No person has ever escaped one of our super-max or military prisons here, ever. There is simply no justification beyond politics for the Congress' insistence on

keeping the facility open. Members of Congress who obstruct efforts to close the facility, given the stakes involved for our security, have abdicated their responsibility to the American people. They have placed politics above the ongoing costs to taxpayers, our relationships with our allies, and the threat posed to U.S. national security by leaving open a facility that governments around the world condemn and which hinders rather than helps our fight against terrorism.

If this were easy, we would have closed Guantanamo years ago. But history will cast a harsh judgment on this aspect of our fight against terrorism and those of us who fail to bring it to a responsible end. Once again, I encourage the Congress to close the facility and permit more of our brave men and women in uniform serving at Guantanamo Bay to return to meeting the challenges of the 21st century around the globe. There remains bipartisan support for closing Guantanamo and we can do so in a responsible and secure way that also saves the American taxpayer money. Guantanamo is contrary to our values and undermines our standing in the world, and it is long past time to end this chapter in our history.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Paul D. Ryan, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Orrin G. Hatch, President pro tempore of the Senate. The Office of the Press Secretary released a report, "Obama Administration Efforts To Close the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility," with this letter. An original was not available for verification of the content of the letter.

## Message to the Nation on Serving as President January 19, 2017

*My fellow Americans,*

It's a long-standing tradition for the sitting president of the United States to leave a parting letter in the Oval Office for the American elected to take his or her place. It's a letter meant to share what

we know, what we've learned, and what small wisdom may help our successor bear the great responsibility that comes with the highest office in our land, and the leadership of the free world.

But before I leave my note for our 45th president, I wanted to say one final thank you