

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

for the honor of serving as your 44th. Because all that I've learned in my time in office, I've learned from you. You made me a better President, and you made me a better man.

Throughout these eight years, you have been the source of goodness, resilience, and hope from which I've pulled strength. I've seen neighbors and communities take care of each other during the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes. I have mourned with grieving families searching for answers—and found grace in a Charleston church.

I've taken heart from the hope of young graduates and our newest military officers. I've seen our scientists help a paralyzed man regain his sense of touch, and wounded warriors once given up for dead walk again. I've seen Americans whose lives have been saved because they finally have access to medical care, and families whose lives have been changed because their marriages are recognized as equal to our own. I've seen the youngest of children remind us through their actions and through their generosity of our obligations to care for refugees, or work for peace, and, above all, to look out for each other.

I've seen you, the American people, in all your decency, determination, good humor, and kindness. And in your daily acts of citizenship, I've seen our future unfolding.

All of us, regardless of party, should throw ourselves into that work—the joyous work of citizenship. Not just when there's an election, not just when our own narrow interest is at stake, but over the full span of a lifetime.

I'll be right there with you every step of the way.

And when the arc of progress seems slow, remember: America is not the project of any one person. The single most powerful word in our democracy is the word “We.” “We the People.” “We shall overcome.”

Yes, we can.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary as an e-mail message from the President distributed to the White House e-mail list and posted on the White House blog. The message referred to President-elect Donald J. Trump; and Dunbar, PA, resident Nathan Copeland, a patient at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center in Pittsburgh, PA.