

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 9, 2010

The President. Merry Christmas, everybody!

Audience members. Merry Christmas!

The President. Happy holidays. We are just thrilled to have all of you here.

Thank you, Secretary Salazar, for the kind introduction and for all that you're doing to protect our national parks and our public lands for the future of generations. I also want to recognize Neil Mulholland and everyone at the National Park Foundation and at the National Park Service who helped put this event together.

I want to thank Pastor Darrell Morton for that wonderful invocation, and of course, thanks to Common and all of tonight's performers for joining us here as we light the National Christmas Tree for the 88th time.

This is a very proud holiday tradition. Snow or shine, in good times and in periods of hardship, folks like you have gathered with Presidents to light our national tree. Now, it hasn't always gone off without a hitch. On one occasion, two sheep left the safety of the nativity scene and wandered into rush-hour traffic. [*Laughter*] That caused some commotion. [*Laughter*]

Often, the ceremony itself has reflected the pain and sacrifice of the times. There were years during the Second World War when no lights were hung in order to save electricity. In the days following Pearl Harbor, Winston Churchill joined President Roosevelt to wish our Nation a happy Christmas even in such perilous days.

But without fail, each year, we have gathered here; each year we've come together to celebrate a story that has endured for two millennia. It's a story that's dear to Michelle and me as Christians, but it's a message that's universal: a child was born far from home to spread a simple message of love and redemption to every human being around the world.

It's a message that says no matter who we are or where we are from, no matter the pain we endure or the wrongs we face, we are called to love one another as brothers and as sisters.

And so during a time in which we try our hardest to live with a spirit of charity and good will, we remember our brothers and sisters who have lost a job or are struggling to make ends meet. We pray for the men and women in uniform serving in Afghanistan and Iraq and in faraway places who can't be home this holiday season. And we thank their families, who will mark this Christmas with an empty seat at the dinner table.

On behalf of Malia, Sasha, Michelle, Marian—who's our grandmother-in-chief— [*laughter*—and Bo—don't forget Bo—I wish all of you a merry Christmas and a blessed holiday season.

And now I'm going to invite the entire Obama crew up here to help me light this Christmas tree.

All right, everybody, we're going to count from five—five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:18 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Neil J. Mulholland, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; Darrell D. Morton, pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and entertainer Lonnie R. "Common" Lynn, Jr. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Christmas, national Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Lynn, Lonnie R. "Common," Jr.; Morton, Darrell D.; Mulholland, Neil J.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Robinson, Marian; Salazar, Kenneth L.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Christmas and winter holidays; Interior, Department of the : Park Service, National :: Secretary; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment.

DCPD Number: DCPD201001056.