

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks and a Question-and Answer Session at Long Branch Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia

December 17, 2010

[Prior to his remarks, the President read aloud to the assembled students from two books.]

The President. Now, let me just say one more thing, and then maybe we can take a picture together. One of the things about Christmas obviously is getting presents and having stockings full and spending time with your family and eating good stuff. But part of the Christmas spirit is also making sure that we're kind to each other and we're thinking about people who aren't as lucky as we are.

And so I hope that all of you, even as you're having a lot of fun during the holidays, whether it's Christmas or Hanukkah, I want to make sure that all of you are also thinking about how can you guys be nicer to each other and think about people who have less than you do, because not everybody is as lucky as we are. There are a lot of kids out there who they may not be able to get a lot of presents for Christmas because their parents don't have a lot of money.

There are a lot of parents right now who are maybe away from their families. Some of them are in our military and they're fighting overseas, and so they can't be home for Christmas or the holidays. So I hope you guys think about them too, all right? And I want you all to remember that the spirit of Christmas is making sure that—not just that you're getting something from somebody, but that you're also giving back to other people. Does that make sense?

Students. Yes.

The President. Who wants to take a picture with me?

[At this point, the students took a picture with the President.]

The President. Okay, so—now, is today the last day of school before the holidays?

Students. No!

The President. The teachers are all, like, "no." *[Laughter]* When do you guys get out?

Students. On the 23d.

The President. Not until Wednesday, huh? All right. Well, listen, I hope you guys have so much fun during the holidays. And I'm so proud of you. You guys are all working hard in school and learning all kinds of stuff. It's really exciting to see you guys doing so well.

So—and I want to thank all the teachers and the faculty, the staff who are here, because I know that you guys put your heart and soul into doing this great work.

You guys have a couple questions for me before I go? I thought so.

What's your question?

President's Daughters

Q. I don't have a question, but my name is Malia.

The President. Your name is Malia too? Give me a high five for that. That's a great name. That's a great name.

All right, let's see. What's your name?

White House Holiday Decorations

Q. Sebastian.

The President. Hey, Sebastian.

Q. I don't have a question, but I do know Mrs. Obama gave us these ornaments so we could make them for your Christmas tree.

The President. Excellent. Well, thank you so much. We have all these volunteers come out to decorate the whole White House, and it's pretty spectacular. But one of those ornaments might have been yours. Way to go. Appreciate it.

What's your name?

Signing Autographs

Q. Can I have an autograph?

The President. Here's the thing. If I sign autographs, then I have to sign them for everybody.

Students. Yay! [*Laughter*]

The President. I'd be here a really long time. But here's what I did, though, is I signed my book. So it's in the library. And so that's for the whole school. All right?

How about you?

"Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters" by the President

Q. How did you get the—since you're so busy, how did you get to write that book since you're so busy?

The President. You know what happened was, I actually wrote it a couple of years ago, before I was sworn in as President, because I had written a couple books for adults, and then they said, well, would you be interested in writing a children's book and then you can give the money to charity? And I said I would, so I wrote the book, but then it takes a really long time because the art is so nice—the artists, they—it's like each page is like a painting. So it takes them a long time to make it. So that's why it's just coming out now. Yes.

All right. What else?

Letters to the President

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. I get 10,000 letters every day. That's a lot. That's a lot. Now, I want to be honest, I don't read every single piece of mail I get, because then obviously—well, I just couldn't get through all of it. So I have a whole staff that just reads my mail, and then they give me letters that they think are really especially terrific, and I read those.

All right.

[*The students pointed to something off camera.*]

The President. Oh, it's Lawrence.

What were you going to say?

Living in the White House

Q. How much fun is it just going around—running around the White House all day?

The President. You know, the truth is, I run around a lot in the White House, but most of the time I'm working. So it's not like I'm just running around having fun. But sometimes it's fun. Because the White House—how many people have visited the White House? So it's a pretty—it's a beautiful building, and there's a big yard in the back called the South Lawn. So a lot of times I walk Bo at night, and that's fun. Sometimes I run around with Bo, although I have to—sometimes I have to scoop up his poop.

Students. Eww!

The President. Because I don't want to just leave it in the lawn. So if you guys have a dog, you got to walk your dog too and clean up after him a little bit.

All right, guys, I've got to get going. Merry Christmas, everybody! Happy holidays!

Students. Merry Christmas!

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

[*There was a break while the President moved to another classroom.*]

The President. Well, hello, everybody!

Students. Hello!

The President. So I just wanted to come by and wish everybody a wonderful holiday, merry Christmas, happy New Year, happy Hanukkah, happy, happy all, everything.

And now, I thought this was the last day of school. I just found out you guys are actually in until Wednesday.

But I did just want to come by to say how proud I am of all of you. This is just a wonderful school. The staff, the teachers, do such a great job. And you guys, the students, are doing a great job. And I just left a children's book that I wrote called "Of Thee I Sing," so I left that as a Christmas present. I had a chance to read "The Night Before Christmas." So—but I suspect everybody here has read it.

Students. We saw you.

The President. Oh, you were watching. Well, that's amazing. Well, then all I want to do is come in here and say, guys, I'm proud of you. I hope you guys have a wonderful holiday. And keep working hard, keep paying attention, because your teachers know more than you do. At least for now. But if they do a really good job, then at some point you'll know more than them. All right?

But we couldn't be prouder. So from Michelle, Malia, Sasha, and from Bo, we want to wish you guys a wonderful holiday. All right? Bye-bye, everybody. Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:14 a.m.

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