

## **Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree**

*December 6, 2012*

*The President.* Merry Christmas, everybody! Michelle told me to be brief because she wants to hear music. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Secretary Salazar, for that generous introduction and for your dedication to protecting our natural resources. I want to thank Neil Mulholland and the whole National Park Foundation and the National Park Service team for helping to put on this beautiful production.

Let's give a big hand to Neil Patrick Harris and this evening's performers for putting on a fantastic show. And I want to also thank all of you for joining us to celebrate this great American tradition.

As has been mentioned, we've been lighting the National Christmas Tree for 90 years now. In times of war and peace, triumph and tragedy, we've always come together to rejoice in the Christmas miracle. But our tree has been having a hard time recently; this is our third one in as many years. Our longstanding tree was lost in a storm, and then its replacement didn't take hold. It just goes to show, nobody's job is safe here in Washington. [*Laughter*] But I feel good about this one. It was planted just days before Hurricane Sandy, and it made it through the storm in one piece.

Now, we know that some of our neighbors to the north saw a more ruthless and destructive Sandy. And this holiday season is especially difficult for families who lost everything in the storm. But it's also a time for us to be grateful for the heroism and perseverance of ordinary men and women in the storm's path who have showed us that Americans will always be stronger than the challenges that we face. And as I did before Thanksgiving, I can't help but tell a story of their enduring holiday spirit.

This evening in Midland Beach, New York, on a street lined with houses and businesses devastated by the storm, a great big Christmas tree shines out of the darkness. Just a couple of weeks ago, as impacted families were still seeking some sense of getting back to normal, one local nursery donated the tree, another chipped in for the lights and a star, and 70-year-old Tom Killeen and his longtime buddies from the area planted it at the end of the street, overlooking the town beach. As Tom says, the tree has one message: "It's Christmas time, not disaster time."

And Tom's right. For centuries, the message of Christmas, of peace and goodwill to all, has guided millions of people around the world through good times, but also through bad times. This year is no different. It's a chance for all of us to open our hearts to the least fortunate among us. It's a chance to remember what Christ taught us: that it is truly more blessed to give than to receive and that the simplest gifts bring the greatest joy. And it's a chance to count our blessings and give thanks to those outstanding servicemembers who bravely defend them.

For Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs, may this holiday season remind us of the spirit of brotherhood and generosity that unites us as citizens. And may every tree from Midland Beach to this Ellipse and all across the country shine as a beacon of hope for all Americans.

So on behalf of Michelle, Malia, Sasha, Grandma, and Bo, I'd like to wish each and every one of you a very merry Christmas and a peaceful and joyful holiday season.

God bless you, and God bless America.

[*At this point, the choir sang Christmas carols.*]

*The President.* Well, everybody, I just want to say, can we give a huge round of applause to these outstanding performers? To our outstanding choir.

Neil, are we going out with a song?

*Actor Neil Patrick Harris.* Sure, let's sing one. You start it.

*The President.* No, no, no—[*laughter*]—I just wasn't sure. I know this program is taped so we can always edit this out. [*Laughter*] Was there something else that we were supposed to be singing? "Santa Claus is Coming to Town"—that's what I thought. Let's hit it!

*Mr. Harris.* It's a dandy tune.

*The President.* Let's hit it!

[*The music for "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" began to play, and a Santa Claus character walked onto stage.*]

*The President.* Oh! Here he is!

*Mr. Harris.* It's Santa.

*The President.* Santa!

[*"Santa Claus is Coming to Town" was sung.*]

*The President.* Merry Christmas, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:30 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; and Grant City, NY, resident Tom Killeen. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Christmas :: National Christmas Tree, lighting ceremony.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Harris, Neil Patrick; Killeen, Tom; Mulholland, Neil J.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Robinson, Marian; Salazar, Kenneth L.

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