

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 4, 2014

Merry Christmas, everybody! We saw this party going on out back and we thought we'd join you.

I want to thank Secretary Jewell for not only the introduction, but for all that you and everybody who's part of the Interior Department and the Park Service do to protect the magnificent outdoors for our children and for future generations. And I want to thank Jonathan Jarvis, Dan Wenk, and everybody at the National Park Service and the National Park Foundation for putting on this special event each and every holiday season.

I want everybody to give it up for our charming Christmas hosts tonight, Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson. We have so enjoyed the incredible performers, including the one and only Patti LaBelle. And finally, thanks to all of you, who are here and watching at home, for joining us to celebrate this wonderful holiday tradition.

Back in 1923, school kids here in Washington wrote a letter to the White House asking if they could put a Christmas tree on the South Lawn. And more than 90 years and a few different evergreens later—[laughter]—the National Christmas Tree still stands as a symbol of hope and holiday spirit, and we still gather as a country each year to light it.

We still have school kids involved too. But this year, they've given all the State and territory trees surrounding the National Christmas Tree their first digital upgrade. Young women from all 50 States used their computers, using their coding skills to control the colors and patterns of the lights on these trees. So thanks to those wonderful students, it is incredibly impressive. It's actually one of the few things that Tom Hanks cannot do. [Laughter]

But while lighting the tree has entered into the 21st century, the story that we remember this season dates back more than 2,000 years. It's the story of hope: the birth of a singular child into the simplest of circumstances, a child who would grow up to live a life of humility and kindness and compassion, who traveled with a message of empathy and understanding, who taught us to care for the poor and the marginalized and those who are different from ourselves. And more than two millennia later, the way he lived still compels us to do our best to build a more just and tolerant and decent world.

It's a story dear to my family as Christians. But its meaning is one embraced by all peoples across our country and around the world, regardless of how they pray or whether they pray at all, and that's to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be one another's keepers, to have faith in one another and in something better around the bend. Not just at Christmastime, but all the time.

And finally, this Christmas, we count our blessings and we give thanks to the men and women of our military, who help make those blessings possible. And as we hold our loved ones tight, let's remember the military families whose loved ones are far from home. They are our heroes, and they deserve our heartfelt gratitude and our wholehearted support.

So on behalf of Michelle, Malia, Sasha, mom-in-law, and our reindeer Bo and Sunny—[laughter]—I want to wish all of them and I want to wish all of you a very, very merry Christmas and a holiday filled with joy.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:12 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Daniel Wenk, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park; and actors Thomas J. Hanks and his wife Margarita Wilson Hanks, who cohosted the event. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

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

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Hanks, Margarita Wilson; Hanks, Thomas J.; Jarvis, Jonathan B.; Jewell, Sarah M.R. "Sally"; LaBelle, Patti; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Robinson, Marian; Wenk, Daniel.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Education : Technology and innovation, expansion efforts; Environment : Conservation :: Promotion efforts; Holidays and special observances : Christmas; Interior, Department of the : Secretary.

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