

Statement on Senator Mel Martinez's Decision Not to Seek Reelection December 2, 2008

Throughout his distinguished career, Senator Mel Martinez has been a wonderful public servant. Mel's life story is a testament to the power of the American Dream. Since immigrating to the United States from Cuba at the age of 15 as a part of Operation Pedro Pan, he has taken on big challenges and built a record of achievement.

By becoming our country's first Cuban American Cabinet member as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and the first Cuban American United States Sen-

ator, he has been a source of inspiration to people all across our country. As general chairman of the Republican National Committee, he worked to strengthen our party and expand outreach to new audiences. In addition, he has been a passionate voice for freedom in his native country.

Laura and I thank Mel for his leadership and friendship over the past 8 years, and we wish him and Kitty the best as he finishes his career in the Senate and afterward.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree December 4, 2008

Thank you. Mr. Secretary, thank you for the introduction, and thank you for the warm welcome. Laura and I are pleased to welcome all of you here for one of Washington's great traditions, the lighting of the National Christmas Tree.

Santa, thank you for finally showing up. [Laughter] I know you've come a long way. After all, you do live in the North Pole. You may have heard that Laura and I are going to have plenty of time next year. [Laughter] So we look forward to returning the favor. The problem is we're going to be short on an airplane. [Laughter] Have you got an extra sleigh? [Laughter]

I welcome the members of my Cabinet, the administration, and their families; Members of Congress and their families; Vin Cipolla; Mary Bomar, the Director of the National Park Service; Peggy O'Dell, Regional Director, National Capital Region of the National Park Service. All the National Park Service employees, we thank you for your dedication and work.

Laura and I are thrilled to be here with our dear friend, Reverend Luis Leon. All the entertainers, thank you for being here. You were fabulous tonight. We appreciate your performance. We especially welcome the folks from Enterprise, Alabama. And we thank the school choir for showing the determination and grit of some really fine people.

We want to thank all the volunteers who designed and created the ornaments for our State trees.

Today we celebrate the 85th anniversary of the National Christmas Tree lighting. In times of calm and in times of challenge, Americans have gathered for this ceremony. The simple story we remember during the season speaks to every generation. It is the story of a humble birth in a quiet town, and the story of one life that changed millions more. For two millennia, the story of Christmas has brought joy to families, comfort to communities, and hope to hearts around the world.