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Governor Johanns. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Governor Johanns is an experienced public service—servant from America's agricultural heartland. As the son of Iowa dairy farmers, he grew up close to the land. He will bring to this position a lifetime of involvement in agriculture and a long record of a faithful friend to America's farmers and ranchers. He will lead an important agency with the executive skill he has learned as mayor and as a two-term Governor of Nebraska.

I've known Mike for a number of years, going back to my own service as a Governor. I know firsthand his deep commitment to a strong farm economy. He's been a leader on drought relief in Nebraska and throughout the Midwest. He's a strong proponent of alternative energy sources such as ethanol and biodiesel. He's traveled the world to promote American farm exports.

Governor Johanns is a man of action and of complete integrity. He knows how to bring people together to achieve results. He has been a superb leader for the people of Nebraska, and I'm grateful that he's agreed to take on this important new responsibility in my Cabinet.

Governor Johanns. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. I'm grateful as well to Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman for leading the Department of Agriculture these past 4 years. Secretary Veneman has earned the trust of farmers and ranchers across America, and the whole Nation has benefited from her service. Ann played a central role in passing the 2002 farm bill, which has been critical to the success of our farmers.

She's kept our Nation's commitment to fighting hunger and is overseeing major improvements in school nutrition programs. Ann led our efforts to prevent the spread of mad cow disease and worked hard to secure the food supply against the threat of bioterrorism. And she has helped set in motion an incredibly important effort to maintain the health of our forests and protect the lives and property from devastating wildfires.

I chose Ann Veneman for her great expertise, her sound judgment, and her bipartisan spirit, and she has displayed those qualities every day of her tenure. Ann has also carried out her duties while facing serious illness, and for that she's earned my increased admiration and the respect of her fellow citizens. I'm proud to know her, and I thank her for serving our country.

The policies we've pursued over the last 4 years have revived America's economies and have helped our farmers and ranchers earn greater income and to sell record amounts of food and fiber abroad. In a new term, we'll continue policies that are pro-growth, pro-jobs, and pro-farmer. We'll keep working to open new markets to American grain and beef and cotton and corn. We'll enforce trade laws to make sure other countries play by the rules. We will expand conservation programs to help farmers and to protect our soil and water and wildlife.

We will stand behind family farmers by keeping taxes low and ensuring the Federal death tax is repealed permanently. And when confirmed by the Senate, Mike Johanns will lead a Department of 113,000 dedicated public servants and be a champion of the farmers and ranchers who feed America and the world beyond.

I am grateful to Mike and to Stephanie, his wife, for their willingness to come to Washington. I look forward to welcoming Mike to my Cabinet.

Congratulations. I appreciate you.

Governor Johanns. Thank you very much.

The President. You bet, Mike.

[*At this point, Governor Johanns made brief remarks.*]

The President. Good job.

Governor Johanns. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:42 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Governor Johanns.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 2, 2004

Thank you all very much. Tonight we begin a joyous season, and the city of Washington is never more beautiful than during

the holidays. At Christmastime, we celebrate good tidings first announced 2,000 years ago and still a source of great joy in our world. Laura and I are always happy to join in the Pageant of Peace, and we thank you all for coming this evening.

I thank our special guests. I want to thank Santa for such good weather. [*Laughter*] I appreciate Peter, the chairman of the Pageant of Peace, and his wife, Nancy. I want to thank John Betchkal, the president of the Christmas Pageant of Peace. I want to thank the members of the board of the Christmas Pageant of Peace for your hard work in putting on this joyous festival. I want to thank Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton. I want to thank other members of my Cabinet who are here tonight. I appreciate the Members of Congress who are here.

I want to thank Fran Mainella, who is the Director of the Parks Service, and all the National Parks Service employees. I thank Dr. Schuller and all the entertainers. Thanks so very much for being here tonight.

The season of Advent is always the season of hope. We think of the patient hope of men and women across the centuries who listened to the words of the prophets and lived in joyful expectation. We think of the hope of Mary, who welcomed God's plan with great faith. We think of the hope of the wise men who set out on a long journey guided only by a slender promise traced in the stars. We are reminded of the hope that the grandest purposes of the Almighty can be found in the humblest places. And we embrace the hope that all the love and gifts that come to us in this life are the signs and symbols of even a greater love and gift that came on a holy night. The old carol speaks of a "thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." And every year at this time we feel the thrill of hope as we wait on Christmas Day.

This Christmas, as loved ones come together, some in our military are separated from family by the call of duty a long way from home. We have service men and women celebrating the holidays at bases from Europe to East Asia and on many fronts in the war on terror. Especially for those deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, the work is dangerous and the mission is urgent. American service men and women are bringing freedom to many and peace to future generations. Their sacrifices defend us all, and all Americans are grateful to them and to our military families.

Across our country, citizens are supporting our people in uniform with their prayers and many acts of kindness. Often the effort is led by children. In Chantilly, Virginia, Brownie Troop 5179, who are here tonight, by the way, collected donations of candy and sun screen, bug spray, and handmade cards to send to our soldiers overseas. They gathered more than 200 pounds of gifts and made sure the packages arrived on time for the holidays. I'm sure those thoughtful gifts were gladly received.

And I thank the Brownies for reminding the good people of our military how much they mean to America. And to show our appreciation to the Brownies of Chantilly, Virginia, and all those who volunteer in our blessed land, we have two representatives of the Troop to help Laura and me light our national Christmas tree.

And so, if Nichole and Clara will come forward, we will turn on the lights. Are you ready? Now will you join me in the countdown? Five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:56 p.m. on the Ellipse during the annual Christmas Pageant of Peace. In his remarks, he referred to John Betchkal, president, Christmas Pageant of Peace; Peter Nostrand, chairman, Christmas Pageant of Peace, and his wife, Nancy; Dr. Robert H. Schuller, minister, Reformed Church in America; and Nichole Mastracchio and Clara Pitts, members, Brownie Troop 5179, Chantilly, VA.

Proclamation 7851—National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month, 2004

December 2, 2004

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

As a Nation, we have made great strides in reducing the deadly cost of impaired driving, but driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs still shatters too many lives and