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United States Senate to move as quickly as possible on this important piece of legislation.

Second, Congress needs to temporarily reform the Tax Code to help homeowners refinance during this time of housing market stress. Under current law, if the value of your house declines and your bank forgives a portion of your mortgage, the Tax Code treats the amount forgiven as taxable income. When you're worried about making your payments, higher taxes are the last thing you need. The House agrees and recently passed this relief with bipartisan support. Yet the Senate has not responded. This simple reform could help many American homeowners in an hour of need, and the Senate should pass it as soon as possible.

Changing the Tax Code can also help State and local governments do their part to help homeowners. Under current law, cities and States can issue tax-exempt bonds to finance new mortgages for first-time home buyers. My administration has proposed allowing cities and States to issue these tax-exempt mortgage bonds for an additional purpose: to refinance existing loans. This temporary measure would make it easier for State housing authorities to help troubled borrowers, and Congress should approve it quickly.

Third, Congress needs to pass funding to support mortgage counseling. Nonprofit groups like NeighborWorks provides essential services to—by helping homeowners find affordable mortgage solutions and prevent foreclosures. My budget requests nearly $120 million for NeighborWorks and another 50 million for HUD's mortgage counseling programs. Congress has had these requests since February, yet it has not sent me a bill, and they need to get the funding to my desk.

Fourth, Congress needs to pass legislation to reform Government-sponsored enterprises like Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. These institutions provide liquidity in the mortgage market that benefits millions of homeowners, and it is vital they operate safely and operate soundly. So I've called on Congress to pass legislation that strengthens independent regulation of the GSEs and ensures they focus on their important housing mission. The GSE reform bill passed by the House earlier this year is a good start, but the Senate has not acted, and the United States Senate needs to pass this legislation soon.

The holidays are fast approaching, and unfortunately, this will be a time of anxiety for Americans worried about their mortgages and their homes. There's no perfect solution, but the homeowners deserve our help. And the steps I've outlined today are a sensible response to a serious challenge. I call on Congress to move forward quickly and join with me in delivering relief to homeowners in need so we can keep our economy healthy and the American Dream alive.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:23 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 6, 2007

Mr. Secretary, thank you for that kind introduction, and thank you all for joining us. Laura and I are pleased to welcome you on this joyous occasion. As the Secretary said, in a few moments, we will light the National Christmas Tree. And as he also said, this is a tradition that dates back to President Calvin Coolidge.

There's one person with us today who remembers that first annual Christmas tree lighting—and Santa, we are glad you're here. [*Laughter*] We know this is a busy time of year for you, and we're thrilled you're here. And we really appreciate you bringing Mrs. Claus. Both you and I married well. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the members of my Cabinet for joining us, Members of the Congress. I want to thank Vin Cipolla, Mary Bomar. I particularly want to thank the men and women who work for the National Park Service.

Pastor, thank you for your blessing. I believe these entertainers didn't disappoint anyone. We're proud you're here, and thank you for your beautiful music.

Christmas is a time of rejoicing and reflection. Each year at this time, we rejoice in the proclamation of good news, that in Bethlehem of Judea, a Savior was born. And we

rejoice in the Christmas promise of peace to men of good will. We also reflect on the mystery of Christmas, the story of the Almighty, who entered history in the most vulnerable form possible, hidden in the weakness of a newborn child. And we reflect on the call of our Creator, who by taking this form, reminds us of our duty to protect and care for the weak and the vulnerable among us.

During this Christmas season, millions of Americans will answer this call by reaching out a compassionate hand to help brothers and sisters in need. We are thankful for these good souls who show the good heart of our Nation. We're also thankful for the thousands of Americans who answer the call by serving our Nation in uniform. Many will spend this Christmas stationed in distant and dangerous lands, far from homes and from the families they love. They are never far from our thoughts, and they're always in our prayers. America honors their sacrifice and that of their families, who also serve our Nation. We're grateful for all they do to ensure that we live in the freedom our Creator intended for every man, woman, and child on the face of this Earth.

And now, as an expression of our hope for peace in this Christmas season, we're going to light the National Christmas Tree. And we have asked two young Americans to join us. Brianna Kinder helps others through her participation in the Montgomery County Police Activities League's Kids Care Club. And Damarcus Hawkins gives his time as part of the Discovery Creek Children's Museum service learning program.

And now if Brianna and Damarcus will join Laura, and if you will join me in a countdown—five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:55 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, who introduced the President; Vin Cipolla, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; and Rev. Roger P. Freeman, senior pastor, First Baptist Church, Clarksville, TN.

Proclamation 8210—Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, 2007

December 6, 2007

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Americans value deeply our ability to speak, assemble, and worship freely. As a Nation, we can help freedom-loving people everywhere build a world in which these rights are honored and respected. During Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, we celebrate the freedoms guaranteed to all Americans and protected in our Constitution's Bill of Rights.

Many of these fundamental freedoms are still denied to people in countries around the world. The United States continues to stand with those who work to build democracy and secure the blessings of liberty. Individuals are struggling to create free societies in Cuba, Belarus, and Syria. And the day will come when they, and the citizens of other lands such as North Korea, Iran, Zimbabwe, and Sudan, will no longer be restricted from practicing their faith, voicing their opinions, and enjoying the many blessings of freedom.

Freedom and dignity are God's gifts, and during Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week, we look forward with confidence to the eventual triumph of human rights for all mankind.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim December 10, 2007, as Human Rights Day; December 15, 2007, as Bill of Rights Day; and the week beginning December 10, 2007, as Human Rights Week. I call upon the people of the United States to mark these observances with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this sixth day of December, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

George W. Bush