



[Briefing Room](#)

[Your Weekly Address](#)

[Speeches & Remarks](#)

[Press Briefings](#)

[Statements & Releases](#)

[White House Schedule](#)

[Presidential Actions](#)

[Executive Orders](#)

[Presidential Memoranda](#)

[Proclamations](#)

[Legislation](#)

[Pending Legislation](#)

[Signed Legislation](#)

[Vetoed Legislation](#)

[Nominations & Appointments](#)

[Disclosures](#)

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 14, 2016

Remarks by the President at Evening Hanukkah Reception

7:40 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Hello, hello, hello! (Applause.) Hello Good evening, everybody! Welcome to the White House, and Happy Hanukkah! (Applause.) It so happens we're a little early this year. (Laughter.) But Michelle and I are going to be in Hawaii when Hanukkah begins, and we agreed that it's never too soon to enjoy some latkes and jelly donuts. (Laughter.) This is our second Hanukkah party today, but in the spirit of the holiday, the White House kitchen has not run out of oil. (Laughter.) Dad jokes for every occasion. (Laughter.)

I want to recognize some special guests that are with us today. There are a number of members of Congress here who obviously are so supportive of the values that are represented by this holiday and extraordinarily strong friends of Israel. We've got Justice Breyer and Justice Ginsburg in the house. (Applause.) We've got one of the country's finest jurists, who I happened to have nominated to the Supreme Court and who's going to continue to serve our country with distinction as the chief judge on the D.C. circuit, Merrick Garland is here. (Applause.)

Our wonderful and outstanding and tireless Secretary of the Treasury, Jack Lew, is here. (Applause.) As is our U.S. Trade Representative and former B-B-Y-O president, Mike Froman. (Applause.) And I want to give it up for our outstanding musical guests, Six-Thirteen, who just did a amazing performance for Michelle and I of a "Hamilton" remix talking about the Maccabees, and the President, and menorahs, and --

MRS. OBAMA: It was good.

THE PRESIDENT: If you ever have a chance to get the mix-tape, you should buy it. (Laughter.)

Now, this is the eighth year that Michelle and I have hosted this little gathering. And over the years, we've welcomed Jewish Supreme Court justices, Cabinet secretaries, members of Congress. We celebrated Alan Gross's return from captivity in Cuba. (Applause.) We got to celebrate a once-in-70,000-year event, Thanksgivviku -- (laughter) -- where we lit the "Menurkey." (Laughter.) That was a turkey-shaped menorah, in case you forgot. (Laughter.)

MRS. OBAMA: We got it.

THE PRESIDENT: So this is a White House tradition that we are proud to carry on. It gives us a lot of nakhas. (Laughter.) If I pronounced that right, then that was a Hanukkah miracle. (Laughter.)

Tonight, we come together for the final time to tell a familiar story -- so familiar that even we Gentiles know it. But as many times as we tell it, this 2,000-year-old tale never gets old. In every

generation, we take heart from the Maccabees' struggle against tyranny, their fight to live in peace and practice their religion in peace. We teach our children that even in our darkest moments, a stubborn flame of hope flickers and miracles are possible. (Applause.)

That spirit from two millennia ago inspired America's founders two centuries ago. They proclaimed a new nation where citizens could speak and assemble, and worship as they wished. George Washington himself was said to have been stirred by the lights of Hanukkah after seeing a soldier seek the warmth of a menorah in the snows of Valley Forge. And years later, Washington wrote that timeless letter we have on display today in the White House -- I hope you saw it when you walked in. Washington assured the Jews of Newport, Rhode Island, that the United States "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." (Applause.) He went on to write that all that is required of those "who live under [the nation's] protection" is that they be "good citizens."

It's easy, sometimes, to take these fundamental freedoms for granted. But they, too, are miraculous. They, too, have to be nurtured and safeguarded. And it's in defense of these ideals -- precisely because the Jewish people have known oppression -- that throughout our history, this community has been at the forefront of every fight for freedom. It's why Jews marched in Selma, why they mobilized after Stonewall, why synagogues have opened their doors to refugees, why Jewish leaders have spoken out against all forms of hatred.

And in my last months in office, I want to thank you for all your courage, and your conviction, and your outspokenness. (Applause.) The story of this community and the work you continue to do to repair the world forever reminds us to have faith that there are brighter days ahead. (Laughter.)

MRS. OBAMA: They're a little cynical. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, no, they're not cynical.

MRS. OBAMA: Little doubtful.

THE PRESIDENT: The menorah we light today is a testament such resilient optimism. It belonged to Rina and Joseph Walden, a young Polish couple who acquired it in the early 1900s. When the Second World War came, the Waldens fled to France and took shelter on a farm. And they hid their Jewishness, including their magnificent menorah, entrusting it to a courageous neighbor. But one Hanukkah, they retrieved their menorah and lit it behind locked doors and covered windows. That same week, the Nazis raided their neighbor's house and burned it to the ground. Of all the Walden family's treasures, only this menorah survived.

A few years later, the Waldens moved to Israel, where their son Raphael met a young woman named Zvia Peres -- the only daughter of one of Israel's founding fathers and greatest statesmen. And I had

the honor to go to Jerusalem earlier this year to bid farewell to my dear friend Shimon Peres and reaffirm the commitment of the United States to the State of Israel. We could not be more honored to have Shimon's son, Chemi, his grandson, Guy, and his granddaughter, Mika, here with us tonight. (Applause.)

The Walden-Peres family lit these lights when the State of Israel was new. They've blazed it in the months after the Yom Kippur War and the Camp David Accords. And tonight, Chemi and Mika will light this amazing heirloom in the White House. And as they do, we hope all of you draw strength from the divine spark in Shimon Peres, whose miraculous life taught us that "faith and moral vision can triumph over all adversity." I hope it inspires us to rededicate ourselves to upholding the freedoms we hold dear at home and around the world -- that we are able to see those who are not like us and recognize their dignity, not just those who are similar to us. I hope it inspires us to continue to work for peace, even when it is hard -- perhaps especially when it is hard. (Applause.)

And, as Washington wrote to the Jews of Newport more than 200 years ago, "May the father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, in our paths."

I'd now like to invite Rabbi Rachel Isaacs from Colby College and Temple Beth Israel in Waterville, Maine -- which I said sounds cold -- (laughter) -- to say a few words and lead us in blessings. But first, I have to get a box, because she's a little shorter than I am. (Laughter.)

(A prayer is offered.)

Well, we hope that you enjoy this celebration here at the White House. On behalf of Michelle and myself, we could not be more grateful for your friendship and your prayers. And we want to emphasize that although we will be leaving here on January 20th --

AUDIENCE: No!

THE PRESIDENT: -- we will meet you on the other side. (Laughter.) And we've still got a lot of work to do. We look forward to doing that work with you, because it's not something that we can do alone, and you've always been such an extraordinary group of friends that strengthen us in so many different ways.

I should also note that your singing was outstanding. (Laughter.) I think this was an exceptional group of voices here. (Laughter.)

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. (Applause.)

END

7:57 P.M. EST



[HOME](#)

[BRIEFING ROOM](#)

[ISSUES](#)

[THE ADMINISTRATION](#)

[PARTICIPATE](#)

[1600 PENN](#)

[En Español](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Copyright Information](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[USA.gov](#)