

multiplier. We will stay vigilant, especially in the Middle East.

As we look beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the end of long-term nation-building with large military footprints, we'll be able to ensure our security with smaller conventional ground forces. We'll continue to get rid of outdated cold war-era systems so that we can invest in the capabilities that we need for the future, including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, counterterrorism, countering weapons of mass destruction, and the ability to operate in environments where adversaries try to deny us access.

So yes, our military will be leaner, but the world must know the United States is going to maintain our military superiority with Armed Forces that are agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats.

We're also going to keep faith with those who serve by making sure our troops have the equipment and capabilities they need to succeed and by prioritizing efforts that focus on wounded warriors, mental health, and the well-being of our military families. And as our newest veterans rejoin civilian life, we'll keep working to give our veterans the care, the benefit—the benefits, and job opportunities that they deserve and that they have earned.

Finally, although today is about our defense strategy, I want to close with a word about the defense budget that will flow from this strategy. The details will be announced in the coming weeks. Some will no doubt say that the spending reductions are too big; others will say that they're too small. It will be easy to take issue with a particular change in a particular program. But I'd encourage all of us to remember what President Eisenhower once said, that "each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain

balance in and among national programs." After a decade of war, and as we rebuild the source of our strength at home and abroad, it's time to restore that balance.

I think it's important for all Americans to remember, over the past 10 years, since 9/11, our defense budget grew at an extraordinary pace. Over the next 10 years, the growth in the defense budget will slow, but the fact of the matter is this: It will still grow, because we have global responsibilities that demand our leadership. In fact, the defense budget will still be larger than it was toward the end of the Bush administration. And I firmly believe, and I think the American people understand, that we can keep our military strong and our Nation secure with a defense budget that continues to be larger than roughly the next 10 countries combined.

So again, I want to thank Secretary Panetta, Chairman Dempsey, all the defense leaders who are on this stage, and some who are absent, for their leadership and their partnership throughout this process. Our men and women in uniform give their very best to America every single day, and in return they deserve the very best from America. And I thank all of you for the commitment to the goal that we all share: keeping America strong and secure in the 21st century and keeping our Armed Forces the very best in the world.

And with that, I will turn this discussion over to Leon and to Marty, who can explain more and take your questions.

So thank you very much. I understand this is the first time a President's done this. It's a pretty nice room. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the Pentagon Briefing Room.

## Remarks at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau January 6, 2012

Thank you. Well, it is wonderful to see all of you. I thought I would just drop by to help your new Director move in. *[Laugh-*

*ter]* He's been a little busy. So I thought maybe some boxes, a little plant. *[Laughter]*

I also just wanted to say hello to all of you who have just been doing extraordinary work in standing up what I think is going to be one of the most important agencies for people that there is. And I know that all of you have devoted enormous amounts of time and energy, and many of you are here making significant sacrifices with your families to make sure that this agency gets up and running really well. And so I just wanted to say thank you to all of you.

Let me begin by saying a few words about the latest economic news. This morning we learned that American businesses added another 212,000 jobs last month. All together, more private sector jobs were created in 2011 than any year since 2005. And there are a lot of people that are still hurting out there. After losing more than 8 million jobs in the recession, obviously, we have a lot more work to do. But it is important for the American people to recognize that we've now added 3.2 million new private sector jobs over the last 22 months, nearly 2 million new jobs last year alone. So, after shedding jobs for more than a decade, our manufacturing sector is also adding jobs 2 years in a row now. So we're making progress. We're moving in the right direction.

And one of the reasons for this is the tax cut for working Americans that we put in place last year. And when Congress returns, they should extend the middle class tax cut for all of this year to make sure that we keep this recovery going. It's the right thing to do. There should not be delay. There should not be a lot of drama. We should get it done.

And the American people, I think, rightly understand that there are still a lot of struggles that people are going through out there. A lot of families are still having a tough time. A lot of small businesses are still having a tough time. But we're starting to rebound. We're moving in the right direction. We have made real progress. Now is not the time to stop. So I would urge Congress to make sure that they stay on top of their jobs, to make sure that everybody else is able to enjoy, hopefully, an even more robust recovery in 2012.

So the economy is moving in the right direction. We're creating jobs on a consistent basis.

We're not going to let up, not until everybody who wants to find a good job can find one. But we have a responsibility to do even more than just try to recover from this devastating recession and financial crisis. We have a responsibility to make sure that the economy that we're rebuilding is one where middle class families feel like they can get ahead again. A lot of the problems that we're dealing with are problems that existed even before the recession, even before the financial crisis. For a decade or more, middle class families felt like they were treading water, that they were losing ground.

And what we want to do is make sure not just that we're getting back to the status quo, we want to make sure that we're dealing with those underlining problems. Getting to a point where middle class families feel like they can get ahead again, where hard work pays off again, where everybody gets a fair shot and everybody does their fair share and everybody is playing by the same set of rules.

And that's where all of you come in. Every one of you here has a critical role to play in making sure that everybody plays by the same rules. To make sure that the big banks on Wall Street play by the same rules as community banks on Main Street. To make sure that the rules of the road are enforced and that a few bad actors in the financial sector can't break the law, can't cheat working families, can't threaten our entire economy all over again.

That's your mission: to make sure that the American people have somebody in their corner, that American consumers have somebody who's got their back. And you finally got a great Director who is tailor-made to lead this agency in Richard Cordray.

You've also got an extraordinary team that is lined up behind me here, who did a great job in getting this agency up and running and are going to continue to show extraordinary leadership in all the various issues that you're going to be addressing. And I also want to give a special shout-out to the woman who dreamt up this agency and spent so much time turning it into a reality, our friend Elizabeth Warren.

Just to be a little more specific, millions of working Americans use financial products like

credit cards and student loans and mortgages. And that's a good thing. These products have a tremendous potential to make people's lives better—to buy products, to earn an education, to afford a home, to raise a family. And we all use them. But when they're sold in an irresponsible fashion they can also make life brutally hard on people. They can turn the dreams of a family into a nightmare. Things like hidden fees and traps on credit cards and student loans cost working American billions of dollars. Things like subprime loans and skyrocketing interest that you can't escape can not only bring families to their knees, but the entire economy to its knees.

And Richard just mentioned the example of this elderly couple that we met when we were in Ohio yesterday. These are folks—the gentleman was a marine who served in Korea. They had been married for 42 years. He had worked all his life; they had poured their savings into this home.

Because of a code violation—obviously, they're on a fixed income, they don't have a lot of money—they thought, well, maybe we can get a loan to make some modest repairs. And what initially was promised as an \$8,000 line of credit to make these repairs, ended up being an \$80,000 debt with no repairs that threatened them going into foreclosure.

And those kinds of stories are replicated all across the country. And it not only hurts those individuals, it hurts the entire economy. That shouldn't happen, not in America. And that's why we're here. We're here to put an end to stories like these.

And already, your work is making a difference. The “Know Before You Owe” campaign you've been working on for months is doing three big things. It's making home loan applications more transparent so that families will know what they owe on their mortgages. It's making it easier for students to compare financial aid packages and know what they owe each month when they graduate. I could have used that. *[Laughter]* It's making—in fact, I've got a law school classmate here who, she probably went through the same thing I did. *[Laughter]* It's making credit card agreements shorter and

simpler, so that credit card holders will know what they owe and what they're getting into. And I know that folks all across America have been sending in their stories to help shape these new initiatives.

This is not something where it's just a Washington top-down process. You are gathering the experiences of individual families, seeing how they got hurt, how they might have gotten cheated. And that's helping to define how you enforce these rules. And that's vitally important.

And now that Richard is your Director, you can finally exercise the full power that this agency has been given to protect consumers under the law. Now that he's here, irresponsible debt collectors and payday lenders and independent mortgage servicers and loan providers, they're all bound by the same rules as everybody else. No longer are consumers left alone to face the risk of unfair or deceptive or abusive practices, not anymore.

So we can make sure that folks don't lose their homes or their life savings just because somebody saw them as an easy target. We can make sure that students don't start out in life saddled with debt that they can never pay back just because of a lousy deal. We can safeguard families and seniors and veterans from toxic financial products. We can help give everybody the clear and transparent information that they need to make informed financial decisions and have companies compete for their business in an open and honest way.

That's Richard's commitment. That's my commitment. That's the commitment of everybody standing on this stage. And that's your commitment. That's why this agency is so important.

So I want to thank all of you for choosing to serve your country in these challenging times. Your mission is extraordinarily important. It's vital to the strength of our economy. It's really important to the security of working families. And I know that it might be personal for some of you. You may know a friend or a family member whose life was turned upside down because of some of these unsavory practices that this agency is designed to root out, and

maybe you were then determined to prevent that from happening to somebody else. Now you can. And we're not going to let those folks down all across the country.

When I meet Americans all across the country or I read letters that I get every night, they really don't ask for much. They're not looking for a handout; they're not looking for special treatment. They just want a fair shake; they just want a fair deal. And we have a chance to give it to them.

So let's do everything that we can to make sure that middle class families can regain some of the security that they've lost over the last de-

cade. Let's help to protect what they've worked so hard for and give them the chance to hand it down to their kids. I know you guys are ready to go to work. I am too. I couldn't be prouder of you.

So congratulations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:02 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Elizabeth H. Warren, former Assistant to the President and Special Adviser to the Secretary of the Treasury on the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau; and Cleveland, OH, residents William and Endia Eason.

## Statement on the Observance of the Coptic Orthodox Christmas *January 6, 2012*

Michelle and I wish Coptic Orthodox Christians in the United States and around the world a blessed and joyous Christmas. On this special day, we give thanks for the extraordinary contributions that Coptic Christians have made to the United States. I want to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to work for the protection of Christian and other religious minorities around the world. As events in

Egypt and elsewhere have illustrated, and as history repeatedly reminds us, freedom of religion, the protection of people of all faiths, and the ability to worship as you choose are critical to a peaceful, inclusive, and thriving society. In this Christmas season, we join our Coptic brothers and sisters around the globe in prayers for peace.

## The President's Weekly Address *January 7, 2012*

Happy New Year, everybody.

This week, I traveled to Cleveland, Ohio, to talk with folks about the biggest challenge we face as a country: rebuilding our economy so that, once again, hard work pays off, responsibility is rewarded, and anyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, can make it if they try. That's the economy America deserves. That's the economy I'm fighting every day to build.

Now, to get there, the most important thing we need to do is to get more Americans back to work. And over the past 3 years, we've made steady progress. We just learned that our economy added 212,000 private sector jobs in December. After losing more than 8 million jobs in the recession, we've added more than 3 mil-

lion private sector jobs over the past 22 months. And we're starting 2012 with manufacturing on the rise and the American auto industry on the mend.

We're heading in the right direction, and we're not going to let up. On Wednesday, the White House will host a forum called Insourcing American Jobs. We'll hear from business leaders who are bringing jobs back home and see how we can help other businesses follow their lead.

Because this is a make-or-break moment for the middle class and all those working to get there. We've got to keep at it. We've got to keep creating jobs. And we've got to keep rebuilding our economy so that everyone gets a fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and