

work together to ensure businesses and workers can better export by better enforcing our trade agreements. One department dedicated to helping our businesses sell their products to the 95 percent of global consumers who live beyond our shores. So, with this authority, we could help businesses grow, save businesses time, save taxpayer dollars.

And this is just one example of what we could do. The contrast between this and this sums up what we could do on the business side, but these kinds of inefficiencies exist across Government. And there's a real opportunity right now for us to fundamentally rethink, reform, and remake our Government so that it can meet the demands of our time, so that it's worthy of the American people, and so that it works.

This should not be a partisan issue. Congress needs to reinstate this authority that has in the past been given to Democratic and Republican presidents for decades. In the meantime, as long as folks are looking for work and small businesses are looking for customers, I'm going to keep doing everything I can with my current authority to help.

So, to take one example, as of today, I am elevating the Small Business Administration to a Cabinet-level agency. Karen Mills, who's here today and who's been doing an outstanding job leading that agency, is going to make sure that small-business owners have their own seat at the table in our Cabinet meetings.

In the coming weeks, we're also going to unveil a new website: Business USA. And this site will be a one-stop shop for small businesses and exporters, and it will consolidate information that right now is spread across all these various sites so that it's all in one place, and it's easy to search.

So, with or without Congress, I'm going to keep at it. But it would be a lot easier if Congress helped. [*Laughter*] This is an area that should receive bipartisan support, because making our Government more responsive and strategic and leaner, it shouldn't be a partisan issue.

We can do this better. We can provide taxpayers better value. So much of the argument out there all the time is up in 40,000 feet, these abstract arguments about who's conservative or who's liberal. Most Americans, and certainly most small-business owners, you guys are just trying to figure out, how do we make things work? How do we apply common sense? And that's what this is about.

So I'm going to keep fighting every day to rebuild this economy so that hard work pays off, responsibility is rewarded, and we've got a government that is helping to create the foundation for the incredible energy and entrepreneurship that all of you represent. And I'm going to keep fighting to make sure that middle class families regain the security that they've lost over the last decade. I've said before, this—I believe this is a make-or-break moment for families who are trying to get in the middle class, folks who are trying to maintain their security, folks who are trying to start businesses. There's enormous potential out there. The trend lines in our global economy are moving in our direction, towards innovation and openness and transparency.

But we've got to take advantage of it. And you need a strong ally in an effective, lean Government. That's what this authority can do.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:25 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Statement on the Release of Political Prisoners in Burma *January 13, 2012*

President Thein Sein's decision to release hundreds of prisoners of conscience is a substantial step forward for democratic reform.

Two months ago, I spoke with Aung San Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein about how America's engagement can help empower

democratic reform and improve relations between our countries. Shortly afterwards, Hillary Clinton became the first Secretary of State to travel to Burma in over half a century. In her meetings in Nay Pyi Taw and Rangoon, she discussed with President Thein Sein and other leaders the steps that would advance a new beginning between our countries. A key part of that discussion was the need to unconditionally release prisoners of conscience and allow them to participate fully in public and political life.

Since that visit, there have been a number of positive developments, including the announcement of elections to be held on April 1 and the decision to allow Aung San Suu Kyi and her party to participate. There has also been an important ceasefire agreement reached with the Karen National Union, which the United States welcomes. Today I applaud President Thein Sein's decision to release hundreds of prisoners of conscience, which is a crucial step in Burma's democratic transformation and national reconciliation process. I'm pleased that Aung San Suu Kyi has welcomed this step as she continues to pursue a dialogue with the Government. I urge the Government to ensure that these and all other former politi-

cal prisoners are allowed to participate fully and freely in the political process, particularly the upcoming by-elections, and to free all remaining prisoners of conscience.

In Indonesia, I spoke about the flickers of progress that were emerging in Burma. Today that light burns a bit brighter as prisoners are reunited with their families and people can see a democratic path forward. Much more remains to be done to meet the aspirations of the Burmese people, but the United States is committed to continuing our engagement with the Government in Nay Pyi Taw. I have directed Secretary Clinton and my administration to take additional steps to build confidence with the Government and people of Burma so that we seize this historic and hopeful opportunity. We will continue to support universal rights and engage the Government as it takes the additional steps necessary to advance freedom for prisoners of conscience, democratic governance, and national reconciliation.

NOTE: The statement referred to Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy in Burma.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Review of Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996

January 13, 2012

Dear _____:

Consistent with section 306(c)(2) of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-114) (the "Act"), I hereby determine and report to the Congress that suspension, for 6 months beyond February 1, 2012, of the right to bring an action under title III of the Act is necessary to the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Daniel K. Inouye, chairman, and W. Thad Cochran, vice chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations; John F. Kerry, chairman, and Richard G. Lugar, ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Harold D. Rogers, chairman, and Norman D. Dicks, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations; and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chairman, and Howard L. Berman, ranking member, House Committee on Foreign Affairs.