

whole lot easier if we get some help from Congress. And this is a great example, a great model of what can happen.

America has come through some tough times together, and it's going to take more time than any of us would like to get to a place where all of us have fully recovered from the worst recession in our lives. There will continue to be hurdles and there will continue to be some headwinds that we can't fully control. But there are plenty of things that we can control, and there's plenty of solutions within our reach. There are steps that we can take right now to speed up this recovery, to help create jobs, to restore some of the financial security that families have lost. It's within our control to do the right thing and do it now.

So my message to Congress is thank you and congratulations on authorizing Ex-Im Bank to continue on its extraordinary mission. We've got more work to do. I hope this ends up being a model for the kind of progress that we can make in the months to come and the years to come. So with that, it is my great pleasure to sign this bill into law.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Gary G. Miller. He also mistakenly referred to Rep. Carolyn McCarthy as "Congresswoman Mahoney." H.R. 2072, signed May 30, was assigned Public Law No. 112-122.

## Remarks at a Reception Celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month May 30, 2012

Thank you. Well, welcome to the White House, everybody. I hope you're having fun. *[Applause]* Excellent.

I want to recognize Ambassador Michael Oren and thank him for his work representing our great friend, the State of Israel. I want to recognize and thank all the Members of Congress and the members of my administration who are here today. I want to thank our musical guests, Rak Shalom. I was just meeting with all of them back there, they said they did quite a few numbers. And they were outstanding. I know.

This year, we celebrate Jewish Heritage Month—Jewish American Heritage Month—and we're also commemorating an important anniversary. A hundred and fifty years ago, General Ulysses Grant issued an order known as General Orders No. 11 that would have expelled Jews "as a class" from what was then known as the military Department of the Tennessee. It was wrong. Even if it was 1862, even if official acts of anti-Semitism were all too common around the world, it was wrong and indicative of an ugly strain of thought.

But what happened next could have only taken place in America. Groups of American Jews protested General Grant's decision. A

Jewish merchant from Kentucky traveled here, to the White House, and met with President Lincoln in person. After their meeting, President Lincoln revoked the order, one more reason why we like President Lincoln. *[Laughter]*

And to General Grant's credit, he recognized that he had made a serious mistake. So, later in his life, he apologized for this order, and as President, he went out of his way to appoint Jews to public office and to condemn the persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe.

Today we have a few documents on display; maybe some of you saw them when you walked in. There are two letters of protest from Jewish organizations to President Lincoln. There is President Lincoln's handwritten reply saying that he had taken action. And there is a receipt for the donation that President Grant made to the Adas Israel synagogue here in Washington, when he attended a service there in 1876.

So together, these papers tell a story, a fundamentally American story. Like so many groups, Jews have had to fight for their piece of the American dream. But this country holds a special promise: that if we stand up for the traditions we believe in and in the values that we share, then our wrongs can be made right, our

Union can be made more perfect, and our world can be repaired.

Today, it's our turn, our generation's turn, and you guys, your generation's turn. You're younger than us. [*Laughter*] We got some later generations here in the front. We're the ones who have to stand up for our shared values. Here at home, we have to rebuild an America where everybody gets a fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share and everybody is playing by the same rules.

Beyond our borders, we have to stand alongside our friends who share our commitment to freedom and democracy and universal rights, and that includes, of course, our unwavering commitment to the State of Israel and its security and the pursuit of a just and lasting peace.

It's no secret that we've got a lot of work to do, but as your traditions teach us, while we are not obligated to finish the work, neither are we free to desist from that work.

So today we don't just celebrate all that American Jews have done for our country, we also look toward the future. And as we do, I know that those of you in this room, but folks all across this country will continue to help perfect our Union, and for that, I am extraordinarily grateful.

God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:17 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The related proclamation of May 2 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

## Remarks on the Unveiling of the Official Portraits of Former President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush *May 31, 2012*

Well, good afternoon, everybody. Thank you, Fred, for that introduction. To President George H.W. Bush and Barbara, to all the members of the Bush family who are here, it is a great privilege to have you here today. And to President and Mrs. Bush, welcome back to the house that you called home for 8 years.

The White House is many things at once: It's a working office; it's a living museum; it's an enduring symbol of our democracy. But at the end of the day, when the visitors go home and the lights go down, a few of us are blessed with the tremendous honor to actually live here.

I think it's fair to say that every President is acutely aware that we are just temporary residents. We're renters here. We're charged with the upkeep until our lease runs out. But we also leave a piece of ourselves in this place. And today, with the unveiling of the portraits next to me, President and Mrs. Bush will take their place alongside men and women who built this country and those who worked to perfect it.

It's been said that no one can ever truly understand what it's like being President until they sit behind that desk and feel the weight

and responsibility for the first time. And that is true. After 3½ years in office, and much more gray hair, I have a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the Presidents who came before me, including my immediate predecessor, President Bush.

In this job, no decision that reaches your desk is easy. No choice you make is without costs. No matter how hard you try, you're not going to make everybody happy. I think that's something President Bush and I both learned pretty quickly. [*Laughter*]

And that's why, from time to time, those of us who have had the privilege to hold this office find ourselves turning to the only people on Earth who know the feeling. We may have our differences politically, but the Presidency transcends those differences. We all love this country. We all want America to succeed. We all believe that when it comes to moving this country forward, we have an obligation to pull together. And we all follow the humble, heroic example of our first President, George Washington, who knew that a true test of patriotism is the willingness to freely and graciously pass the reins of power on to somebody else.