

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the First Lady

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Washington D.C.

11:14 A.M. EDT

MRS. OBAMA: Good morning! (Applause.) Thank you so much. It's great to see you. It's great to be back. (Applause.) You all can rest yourselves. You work hard enough. It is a real pleasure to be back here with you guys.

As Secretary Jewel mentioned, I was here four years ago when we first came into office. And one of the things that I wanted to do was to visit the agencies and learn more about what you all were doing, to shine a spotlight on the work that you all were doing; to make sure that the people of this country understand what it means to be part of Interior, the work you do; to make sure people understand what the federal government was doing; but most of all, to thank you for the work that you've done.

And now that we're starting this second term, what better way to begin than revisiting all of you. Because now, as I mentioned to Secretary Jewel, we have real,

meaningful partnerships. Over the last four years, we've done some incredible work together.

But I'm not going to talk long because I'm really here to say hello and to thank you, but I want to start by thanking Secretary Jewel not just for her very kind introduction, but agreeing to serve as the 51st Secretary of the Interior. (Applause.) Yes, indeed. And I know that she hasn't been here long, but she's already making an impression. We are so proud to have her. We hear glowing reports. She is an example of everything that this agency stands for, and we're grateful for her leadership.

And I'm looking forward to seeing all the wonderful things she's going to do to expand on the partnerships, to build on the efforts that have been going on. We are grateful to Ken Salazar. We will miss him. But in Secretary Jewel, we have a wonderful replacement, and we're just thrilled to have her.

I also want to recognize Willie for his tremendous service -- you're over there somewhere. (Laughter.) And I'd like to see that uniform with all the buttons and medals and all that stuff. You seem very mild-mannered; I didn't know you were a superhero under that suit. (Laughter.) But thank you so much for your tremendous service.

But most of all, I want to say thank you to all of you for everything you're doing every single day on behalf of this country. Thank you for putting us on the path to energy independence, which helps grow our businesses and create wonderful jobs. Thank you for building strong nation-to-nation relationships with tribes across Indian Country. Thank you for protecting our most precious natural resources, and preserving our parks and monuments for the next generation and generations to come.

And I just want to add that one of the neatest things that we get to do is to travel around to the national parks. And we've tried to make it a point to -- as the First Family to visit many of the parks when we're on vacation, or when we're driving through the country or a community. And I will just reiterate what this country already knows: We have some of the most outstanding national parks in the world. (Applause.) Absolutely.

And I would encourage everyone to travel to our parks this summer in particular. It's a wonderful way to spend time with your families. It's a great way to learn about the history of this country. The rangers are amazing. Their stories in and of themselves -- if you ever talk to a national park ranger, they're fascinating people. They're usually -- they've done something interesting, and then they wound up in a park. They're very neat people, and we've been honored to get a chance to get to know them.

But we do this because of our kids. It's so important for us to expose our kids to the many resources that are right here in this country. You don't have to travel abroad to see some of the most beautiful, gracious places that the world has to offer. And I want to thank you, because more than anything else, that's really what I think about when I think about what you all do.

I think about our next generation. I think about everything you're doing to ensure that all of our children have safe, clean, beautiful places to learn and grow and explore. Because when kids develop that appreciation and that connection early, what you all know is that it's lasting, it's enduring, it's something that they can have for their lifetime and hopefully can pass on to their own kids as well.

So what you all are doing here isn't just vital for our economy -- that's important to note. It's not just the key to preserving our environment. What you do here at Interior is absolutely critical for our children's health and wellbeing.

And as Secretary Jewell mentioned, and as many of you know, this is an issue, children's health, that is near and dear to my heart, not just as First Lady but as a mother. That's why I was so thrilled and am so thrilled to work with so many of you to launch Let's Move Outside to help our young people enjoy the great outdoors and to find that that's a very inexpensive, accessible way to get active and moving, and to do things as a family and to learn.

And I also am very proud to have worked with you to launch Let's Move in Indian Country. Through this initiative, together we are working to ensure that the American Indian and Alaska Native children get the nutritious food and physical activity that they need to grow up to be healthy and active individuals.

Because ultimately, we know that being active and enjoying the great outdoors isn't just good for our children's physical health. What you all know is that it's also good for their emotional health. It can affect their success in school, and ultimately their success in life. So what you all are doing here at Interior couldn't be more important -- couldn't be more important to me personally, but couldn't be more important to this entire nation.

But I also know that the work that you do isn't easy, especially right now during these times. I know that budget cuts mean that you all are juggling even more responsibilities with fewer resources. And I know that many of you are stretched thinner than ever before.

So that's one of the reasons why it's just as important for me to be here at the start of this term as it was to be here four years ago, because I want you to know how much Barack and I truly appreciate everything that you do. And I know you don't hear that. People don't even know you exist. (Laughter.) It's so true. I mean, federal workers are this invisible face. No one knows what they do, what it means, how much they benefit us.

So on behalf of myself and the President and the first family, I want to say thank you. Thank you, thank you. I want you know how proud we are of all that you do. We want you to know how grateful we are to your families, for the sacrifices that you make oftentimes to do what you do.

So hang in there. And know that what you do is extremely important. Hang in there. We need you. This country needs you. Our children need you.

So I want to end the same way that I started by just saying you guys are terrific. Don't get tired. You can get a little frustrated -- (laughter) -- but just keep doing what you do every single day, because it means the world to the millions of kids who may not have access to some of these places if it were not for the work that you do.

Just think about all the kids who will never get to see a mountain or a freshwater stream, or get to camp outside and see the stars. The resources that you provide are open to every child in this country, and because of the work that you do, they will have those resources for the rest of their lives.

So just know that it is critical and we are grateful. And with that, I'm going to stop talking, come down and shake some hands. You all take care. (Applause.)

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