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By NATASHA T. METZLER Associated Press Writer

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WASHINGTON

President Barack Obama welcomed thousands of children and families to the White House Easter Egg Roll Monday, calling it "one of the greatest White House traditions."

Obama and his wife, Michelle, appeared with on a balcony overlooking the South Lawn where thousands of children and families took a break from participating in the festivities to listen and cheer enthusiastically for the first family. The president's daughters, Sasha and Malia Obama, were also there, along with his mother-in-law Marian Robinson.

Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, stood on the driveway beneath the balcony.

Obama initially could only wave to the crowd, thanks to nonworking microphones. He looked around for help, and finally the sound system started working just as Malia leaned into the microphone and asked "is it on?" The president called her his technical adviser.

During the technical delay, Mrs. Obama waved enthusiastically to the crowd and the president pretended to whisper in the giant ears of a person wearing a bunny costume, drawing laughter from those on the lawn.

Obama greeted the crowd, extolling the event as one that "reminds us that this is the people's house."

Mrs. Obama reminded the participants of the event's theme, "Let's go play."

"Our goal today is just to have fun," she said. "We want to focus on activity, healthy eating. We've got yoga, we've got dancing, we've got storytelling, we've got Easter Egg decorating, and we've got basketball, soccer as well."

"We want everybody to think about moving their bodies," she added.

Shortly after kicking off the event, the first family walked to the storytime stage to read to a group of children. Entering the area, Obama shook hands with many of the children in the front row.

Music star Fergie sang the U.S. National Anthem before the president greeted the crowd.

The White House allotted tickets for the event to gay and lesbian parents as part of the administration's effort to reach out to diverse communities. Representatives from Family Equality Council, Human Rights Campaign, **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** and other groups confirmed earlier that they were invited and encouraged to have their members participate.

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**Highlights: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**