Remarks on Presenting the National Medal of Science and the National Medal of Technology and Innovation and an Exchange With Reporters

October 24, 2023

The President. Well, welcome. And please have a seat. This is a happy occasion. We need some more happy occasions. Thank you. Thank you all for being here. And welcome to the White House, your house.

In 1921, Marie Curie visited the White House with President Warren Harding, and [he; White House correction] presented him [her; White House correction] with a precious gift: 1 gram of radium carefully stored and purchased with funds raised by thousands of American women to help continue her research that would transform everything from x rays to cancer treatment to nuclear energy.

Twenty-four years after that visit, a girl was born in Syria. She dreamt of being Madame Curie, moving to Paris, and becoming a scientist. Then a family member [friend; White House correction] with real wisdom told her—[*laughter*]—that: "If you want to dream big, dream about going to America. That's where great science happens."

We're determined to return great science to America by—we used to invest 2 percent of our GDP in—of—in science and technology. Now we invest .7 percent of our GDP.

And—but anyway, she did come to America, and her name is Dr. Akil. She's here today. Doctor, where are you? There you are. Right on the end. I'm looking—stand. Stand up so everybody can see you. Thank you.

A groundbreaking scientist studying neurobiology and emotions. We could use that badly. [*Laughter*] Anyway, she joined 20 other Americans receiving our Nation's highest honors in science and technology.

The National Medal of Science is given for outstanding contributions to the knowledge—to knowledge in the sciences, and the National Medal of Technology and Innovation for outstanding contributions to the promotion of technology for the improvement of the economic, environmental, and social well-being of the United States.

With this year's recipients, "outstanding" may be an understatement. They're extraordinary. Delivering clean drinking water and fuel-efficient heat sources to low-income countries. Growing crops that can withstand extreme weather. Deepening our knowledge of blood vessels, nerve cells [neurons; White House correction], and molecules. Pointing the way toward new treatments for diseases like cancer, Parkinson's, and addiction.

Transforming how we live, work, and communicate by being able—by helping create advanced manufacturing and expand access to the internet. Protecting our democracy by developing new technologies to protect the right to vote. Making our world more accessible by creating a next-generation wheelchair technology. Expanding—expanding—our understanding of everything from the depths of the human eye to the depths of the universe.

And they have paved the way for a generation of other scientists and innovators to pursue their own discoveries, to unlock our Nation's full potential.

To all the honorees: Thank you, thank you, thank you for your courage, for your perseverance, and maybe most importantly for your integrity.

And thank you as well to the family members and loved ones here today. I want all the family members to stand. Come on. [*Applause*] Thank you. I'm being a little facetious, but you know what it must have been like growing up saying, "It's time for dinner." And they'd say, "What?" [*Laughter*] Anyway, thank you.

I've long said America can be defined by a single word. I was in the Tibetan Plateau with Xi Jinping. I've spent a great deal of time with him one on one, back when I was Vice President and since then. And he looked at me, and he said—we just had simultaneous interpreters. And he said, "Can you define America for me?" And I said: "I can. One word, and I mean this sincerely: possibilities. Possibilities."

The fact that several of today's honorees immigrated from other countries is proof of the assertion that everything is possible. You know, there will be more technological change in the next 10 years, maybe in the next 5 years, than in the last 50 years. There's a—in large part to the minds sitting in front of us. And I want America to lead—to lead—that change.

Because of the greatness of a country is measured not only by the size of its economy or the strength of its military. It's—the strength of the Nation is also measured by its boldness of its science, the quality of its research, and the progress it helps bring forth for not only the country but whole the world.

In this administration, America will be the place where great science happens. You know, starting on day one, in the middle of the pandemic, we vaccinated a nation: the greatest operational effort ever undertaken by this country—operational. And we did it with a strategy based on science, not on politics. Now scientists are exploring whether the mRNA technology that brought us safe and effective COVID vaccines can be used against cancer.

I brought together some of our Nation's top minds in my Council of Advisers on Science and Technology. And I elevated the Office of Science and Technology Policy to a Cabinet-level position. It's helping to lead major initiatives on everything from artificial intelligence to ARPA–H to Advanced Research Projects Agency and Health—for Health that are going to drive breakthroughs in how we direct [detect; White House correction] and treat cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and other diseases.

And this year, we're investing $200 billion in research and development. In addition, I signed into law the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, two of the most significant investments America has ever made to supercharge research, innovation, and job creation. Already, private companies have announced over $600 billion in investments in industries from clean energy to advanced manufacturing right here in America.

Right now NASA is leading a mission on Mars. On our phones, we can see images of the red planet that before we could only dream of seeing. We are further into space than ever before, and the answer to the most fundamental question about how the universe began is not far away.

All of this and so much more has happened because America is leading the way and because the people in this room and the labs across the country are leading. It matters. It matters.

I want to close with this. Last year, I went to President Kennedy's library and museum in Boston to deliver a speech about what I referred to as the Cancer Moonshot that my wife Jill and I reignited after we got to the White House. You know, I've said before: If there's one thing I wish as President I could do, it would be ending cancer as we know it, for two reasons.

One, America began to lose faith in its ability to do anything. The one thing that would prove to Americans that we can do anything is ending cancer. There's more important things—are more—as consequential—but ending cancer.

We've never set our mind to a project we haven't accomplished if we do it together. For those who have lost, like many of us in this room, and for the ones we can save, I don't just hope we can do it, I know we can do it.

I was in that library with Kennedy's daughter Caroline, a dear friend. She presented me with her father's framed speech answering the question of why he was sending Americans to the Moon—America to the Moon.

And here's what he said in the letter. He said—President Kennedy said it was, quote, "because the challenge is one we are unwilling—we are willing to accept and one we are unwilling to postpone and one which we intend to win."

That's the American attitude. "Unwilling to postpone." We are unwilling to postpone, and we've been postponing a lot of things too long. That's all of you here today. You've been unwilling to postpone. That's America at our best.

We just have to remember who in God's name we are. We're the United States of America. There is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity if we set our mind to it and do it together.

So thank you very much.

And with that, I'd like to invite the Military Aide to come up and read the citations before I present the medals.

Thank you all for being here. Thank you.

[*At this point, Lt. Cmdr. Adam M. Shields, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citations and the President presented the medals, assisted by Lt. Col. Daniel K. DeRusha, USAF, Air Force Aide to the President*.]

The President. You all are so damn impressive. [*Laughter*] No, I really mean it. Think of how you're literally changing the world for the better.

Thank you, everybody. And congratulations, again, to our outstanding laureates and their families.

And remember what America is all about—you do—possibilities. Possibilities. That's who we are. Anything is possible if we put our mind to it. And with you all, you've got incredible minds.

Thank you for what you've done so far. You've saved people's lives. You've changed the way we look at the world, and you made it better. I don't know that anybody could ask for anything more.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. And God bless you all.

[The President left the podium. Before exiting the room, he answered a reporter's question as follows.]

Humanitarian Assistance for Gaza

Q. Mr. President, is humanitarian aid getting into Gaza fast enough?

The President. Not fast enough.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:26 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Medal recipient Huda Akil, research professor, Michigan Neuroscience Institute, and Gardner C. Quarton Distinguished University Professor of Neurosciences in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Michigan; President Xi Jinping of China; and U.S. Ambassador to

Australia Caroline B. Kennedy. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the reading of the medal citations.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National Medal of Science, presentation; Addresses and Remarks : National Medal of Technology and Innovation, presentation; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Washington, DC.

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