

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2025*

**Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Citizens Medal**  
*January 2, 2025*

*The President.* Hello, hello, hello. Please have a seat.

Happy New Year.

*Audience members.* Happy New Year!

*The President.* And welcome to your house—the White House, the "people's house."

You know, it's been said before the most important title in America is not "President," but "citizen." It's "We the People." These are the words that are the rock upon which this Nation has been built. Not hyperbole.

It's fitting that we gather here in the East Room next to the portrait of Teddy Roosevelt. A reformer, a soldier, a Governor, a President, he promoted the cause of active citizenship. Despite his rugged individualism, he believed in forging common ground.

To paraphrase him, he once said, and I quote: "Grave perils are yet to be encountered in the stormy course of the Republic. But there is no reason—no reason—we should fear them or doubt our capacity to overcome them if we each endeavor to live so as to deserve the high praise of being called a good American citizen."

That's who you all are: good American citizens.

That's the story of our Nation, carried forward by heart, hard work, and the American people. For those who were before our founding—were here before our founding to those born generations later or who immigrated here seeking the blessings of America.

It's the story of yet another great President we miss, I miss: Jimmy Carter. May we all strive to measure up to his highest standard of active citizenship in our time and to the highest standard set by women and men we celebrate here today.

You know, for the final time as President, I have the privilege of bestowing the Presidential Citizens Medal, one of our Nation's highest honors, on an extraordinary—and I mean extraordinary—group of Americans.

The Citizens Medal recognizes, quote, "citizens of the United States of America who have performed exemplary deeds of service for their country and to their fellow citizens."

Over 50 years, Presidents of both parties have awarded this medal to Americans who've met that high calling—diplomats and doctors, conservationists [conservationists; White House correction], community organizers, philanthropists, faith leaders.

You know, I've been honored to present law enforcement officers who defended our Capitol on January 6 and the State and local election officials and elected leaders who defended the free and fair election of nineteen—of 2020.

Today, we celebrate a new group of Americans who've dedicated their careers to serving our democracy in other—in other—essential ways. Some of you I've known and worked for a long time, none longer than Ted Kaufman. [*Laughter*] Others, I've admired your character from afar. You're all—and I mean this sincerely—you're all incredible—incredible.

You're activists who turned pain into purpose, forced open the doors of equality and justice. Attorneys who changed not just the laws, but society and brought America closer to our highest

stated ideals. You are elected officials who have served in difficult times with honor, decency and ensure our democracy delivers. Storytellers who have shone light in darkness and educators—educators—who have kindled new flames of imagination. You are veterans, veterans who have revolutionized trauma care, won recognition for women, and built new foundations for peace.

Together, you embody—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart—the essential truth: We're a great nation—we're a great nation—because we're a good people—a good people.

And I've said it before: Our democracy begins and will be preserved in the habits of our heart, in our character, in our optimism that tested yet endures, in our courage that digs deep—real deep—when we need it as a nation, in our empathy that fuels our common project of our willingness to see each other not as enemies, but as fellow Americans.

I think it's pretty damn simple. Our democracy begins and ends with the duties of citizenship. That's our work for the ages, and it's what all of you—and I mean this—all of you embody.

It's now my honor to award the Presidential Citizens Medal. We're going to ask the Military Aide to read each recipient's name as I welcome them to the stage and they receive their medal.

Thank you for being here. And thank you to all the families, because all these awards that are being given today are in no small part because of all the support you gave them. Thank you, thank you.

*[At this point, Maj. Michael R. Jones, USMC, Marine Corps Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the medals, assisted by Lt. Col. Rudy Bowen, USSF, Space Force Aide to the President. The President then spoke as follows.]*

*The President.* Can I say one more thing?

*Audience member.* Yes. *[Laughter]*

*The President.* We've got a lot of very important Senators in this room and friends of mine, including that guy right there. Stand up, Ed. Come on. Come on—*[inaudible]*. Just stand up. No, I'm not—then you stand up, man. *[Laughter]*

And I want to—you want to know who to blame because I'm President? Jim, stand up. *[Laughter]* South Carolina.

All the Members of the House and the Senate, stand up.

And the guy who—who should be standing here, should—should have been standing here, who is—not only has a brave heart, but physically one of the bravest people I've ever known in my life, John Kerry. John, stand up.

Look, I want to thank you all again and to your families for your service to the Nation.

And by the way, it's not hyperbole to suggest that you, the families, have had such an incredible impact on all that they've done all that the country has done. We know it's not one single person that does it. No woman or man can go out and do the things they do without the support of their family.

So thank you, thank you, thank you.

And congratulations. Let's remember: Our work continues. We've got a lot more work to do. Keep this going.

We have to—as my—every time I'd walk out of my Grandpop Finnegan's house—Tommy's heard me say this a hundred times—he'd yell, "Joey, keep the faith." And my grandmother, "No, Joey, spread it." *[Laughter]* Let's go spread the faith, okay?

God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Enjoy the reception. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:27 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to medal recipient former Sen. Edward E. Kaufman; Sen. Edward J. Markey; Rep. James E. Clyburn; former Secretary of State John F. Kerry; and medal recipient Thomas J. Vallely, director of the Myanmar and Vietnam Programs at the Harvard's Kennedy School's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation and chairman of the governing board of Fulbright University Vietnam. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the reading of the citations. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 3.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Presidential Citizens Medal.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

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