

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2025

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom

January 4, 2025

The President. Please, everyone, be seated.

Well, good afternoon and happy New Year.

Audience members. Happy New Year.

The President. As we gather in this room on January 2025, imagine March of 1865. President Lincoln had just delivered his Inaugural Address at the Capitol. And he returned to the White House for a reception here in the East Room.

There were many well wishers, but he spotted someone whose opinion he greatly valued. President Lincoln asked him what he thought of the speech he had just delivered to the Nation by a divided Civil War. The man replied, "It was a sacred effort." "It was a sacred effort." That man was Frederick Douglass.

Here we are, nearly 160 years later, in the room where Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass stood to unify the Nation. I'm joined by our incredible First Lady, Jill. We're joined by incredible Vice President Kamala Harris, and Second Gentleman Doug. Doug is a hell of a lawyer, by the way. *[Laughter]* Finally going to get to practice again, huh? *[Laughter]*

And for the final time as President, I have the honor of bestowing the Medal of Freedom on—our Nation's highest civilian honor on a group of extraordinary—truly extraordinary people who gave their sacred effort—their sacred effort to shape the culture and the cause of America.

So let me just say to each of you, thank you, thank you, thank you for all you've done to help this country. You all—you all literally embody the Nation's creed, "E pluribus unum"—"out of many, one."

Collect in a *[A collective of; White House correction]* people of different backgrounds, beliefs, and talents, from the different generations and different genders, using their remarkable gifts and unwavering passion to strengthen our resolve as one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

It matters. It really does matter.

As cultural icons, defined statesmans—excuse me—dignified statesmen, humanitarians, rock stars, sports stars, you feed the hungry, you give hope to those who are hurting, and you craft the signs and sounds of our movements and our memories.

You know, it's amazing—your innovation, your—you inspire. You bring healing and joy to so many lives who otherwise wouldn't be touched.

You answer the call to serve and led others to do the same thing. And you defend the values of America even when they're under attack, which they have been as of late. Together, you leave an incredible mark—and I mean this sincerely—this group up here—you leave an incredible mark on our country, with insight and influence that can be felt around the globe, in major cities and remote areas alike, binding us closer as a people and showing us that—what's possible as a nation—there's nothing beyond our capacity—while representing your families, your communities, your ancestors with pride and appreciation at the same time.

I'd also like to take a moment to recognize those honorees who are no longer with us—

[*At this point, a child in the audience spoke.*]

—including the young man speaking. [*Laughter*]

By the way, kids rule in this house. Okay? [*Laughter*] Don't worry about it. And you all think I'm kidding. I'm not. [*Laughter*]

Ash Carter, Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer, George Romney, Bobby Kennedy—heroes of the highest order. And Bobby Kennedy is one of my true political heroes. I love and I miss him dearly.

I thank their families—all their families. You know, as—we carry on the sacred effort of courage and conviction that you all began.

So today I want to congratulate you on all you've accomplished. And I'm grateful for the work you'll inspire for generations to follow to stay engaged, to never give up, to always keep the faith.

And, in that spirit, from the "people's house," where Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass and generation of patriots before us have stood watch over the Republic, I ask the Military Aide to begin the reading of the citations for this year's Medal of Freedom honorees.

[*Lt. Col. Rudy Bowen, USSF, Space Force 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 then resumed his remarks as follows.*]

Not a bad group, huh? [*Laughter*]

Folks, thank you all again. Thank you and to your families for your service and theirs to the Nation.

Congratulations. But let's remember: Our sacred effort continues. We have to keep going. As my mother would say, we've got to keep the faith.

Audience member. Amen!

The President. God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Please enjoy the reception. God love you all.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:23 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 7 and also included the reading of the citations.

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