

Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors Dinner

December 6, 2025

The President. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. What a great group this is.

Your team is doing very well, Bob. *[Laughter]* Good quarterback. Good coach. It always helps. Having a good coach and a good quarterback is a very good thing, historically.

I want to thank Secretary Marco Rubio—my friend and a very talented man who works very hard—and his wonderful wife Jeanette, for hosting us this evening as we—thank you, Jeanette; great job—as we celebrate the 2025 Kennedy Center's Honorees, and they are great honorees.

Sylvester Stallone. There he is. Look at him. He got stuck in traffic, but he made it. He wasn't going to miss this under any—we heard he was walking up. I said, "Okay, now we can start." You look great. Thank you both very much. Jennifer, thank you very much.

George Strait. Thank you, George. Right. King of country. That's great.

Gloria Gaynor. Gloria? Fantastic job. You look so well. Thank you very much, Gloria.

The legendary Michael Crawford. Thank you, Michael. Thank you, Michael. That's some job. Thank you very much, Mrs. Crawford, for being here with your two beautiful daughters. Really an honor to have you. I've—I don't want to say how many times I've seen you in "Phantom," but you know, when you have a great artist—it's true with paintings, it's true with music, it's true with dance—every time you see it, it gets better and you see things you've never seen before. But I've seen you many times, and there's never been anybody like you. Thank you very much, Michael. Congratulations.

And the truly legendary rock band, KISS. Thank you, fellas. Thank you. That's great. Thank you very much.

And this is really much—really, look at it, pure talent—a lot of talent as has ever been assembled under one roof. We've done something that they've never done before, and I'll be doing something that hasn't been done before: The President of the United States is hosting, at the request of a certain television network.

And I'm doing it because I feel it's very important that we all get out and do something. And if that can make a difference, that's tremendous. But we have such wonderful people, and I don't mind doing it.

But these are some of the greatest of all time. And congratulations to all of you. And thank you very much to Tiffany and Company. The—they've really done a beautiful job with the medals.

And I want to thank your beautiful families, every one of you. You brought large numbers of your families here, and we appreciate that. And they appreciate you, I can tell you.

A very special thanks as well to our terrific Kennedy Center Board of Trustees, along with Executive Director Ric Grenell. The Board of Trustees has been amazing. It's got to be the hottest board, or—I don't know, the Supreme Court is a pretty hot. *[Laughter]* I always say the Supreme Court, the U.S. Senate, the NFL owners committee. I think that's pretty good too. But I think the board of the Kennedy Center is turning out to be—we have so many people that want to get on. I have so many enemies now because they want to be on the board, and I'm sort of saying you can't have them—can't get any more.

But, Ric, you've been fantastic. And Ambassador Sergio Gor, who's now going to India. Good luck. We—we may never see you again. 1.5 billion people. Think of that. 1.5 billion. Can you handle that, Sergio? *[Laughter]* Huh? I think you can. You can handle anything.

But you're going to be dealing with a very special leader, as you know, a friend of mine, and you're going to do very well. He's very happy that you're going to be the Ambassador. So, good luck. You're going to be making your journey in 2 weeks. Good luck. I may never see him again. It's so sad. *[Laughter]*

Also, I want to thank Secretaries Howard Lutnick, Doug Burgum, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr, my daughter Tiffany and her wonderful husband Michael, and so many other distinguished guests. We have so many people here. Senators. We have other secretaries. And I'm just seeing some of you in the crowd. You are a good-looking crowd.

I also want to thank everyone here tonight who's so generously supported our effort to restore and revitalize the Kennedy Center. It was in rough shape. To a lesser extent, but the White House was in rough shape. You know, we're bringing the White House back room by room. And they sort of laugh when they say, well, the Lincoln Bedroom—we had to fix it up. It wasn't looking too good. But we fixed it up. Leaving it the way it was, but fixed up. It's in tippy-top shape. You know, I always used to say tippy—it's got to be tippy-top. But you had a lot of other Presidents that weren't into that. I am. I've always been into it.

The Oval Office has reached a new level. The Cabinet Room—everyone wants to see the Cabinet Room, and it's so beautiful now. We took some of the paintings that were downstairs in vaults. They have big vaults. They have 2,000 paintings—over 2,000. We have great curators, seven of them, and they love the place. Some of them have been there for 40 years. And if they don't like you, you don't get the painting you want. *[Laughter]* You don't get the Declaration of Independence brought up into the Oval Office. A couple of other Presidents suffered without it because they said, "I'm not going to be able to do it." But they've been great.

But we have tremendous artwork being brought up and has been brought up from the vaults. It was sitting for 100 years, 150 years, downstairs, under the White House, and now we have it on walls throughout the building.

And those walls—before we put them up, we make sure those walls are in perfect shape. I say, "You've got to make sure these walls are up before you do anything." And we've done a lot of work. We've redone great marble floors that were beat to hell. We've done not good floors that were out of one-by-one boxes from certain stores that are not very good. They're not—they shouldn't be there. *[Laughter]* Those floors should not have been there.

We've replaced them with the most beautiful marble—statuary marble. They call it, in Italy, "statuario." A great white and black marble that forms in Greece and big parts of Italy. And Italy—during a time when Italy was extremely strong, and Greece—when Greece was Greece—and they had that, and we now have that in the White House, replacing one-by-one tiles that were not good.

But we've fixed the White House, and we've fixed the Kennedy Center. The Kennedy Center has some work to be done. We've worked very hard on it, actually. I spent a lot of time there with contractors. I mean, I go around—I have two jobs. I have a construction job, which gives me—*[laughter]* which is really, like, relaxation for me, because I've been doing it all my life. But we're fixing the Kennedy. I said, "You need a new roof." They say, "Sir, there's a lot of water coming down." You know, they didn't know. You need a new roof. It's been there for, like, 45, 50, years. And we're doing everything.

We're doing brandnew air conditioning. Carrier has been so incredible. They made a donation—a big donation on the ballroom. We were bidding out the ballroom, and Carrier came along, and they said, "Sir, we'd like to contribute the air conditioning for the ballroom." It was like \$17 million. That's a lot of air conditioning and heating. *[Laughter]*

And a great steel company came along and said, "Sir, we'd like to contribute the steel." That's a big steel. That's a big account.

And we had Caterpillar Tractor come along and said, "Sir, we'd like to contribute all of the tractors, all of the excavation equipment, and all of the lifts and generators and everything else you have in the ballroom, because it's a lot of very complex equipment that you wouldn't think of." So I want to thank Caterpillar and others. Others are going to be made public, but they've really been very gracious.

And we're having the same thing happen at the Kennedy Center. They view it as a very important thing. And we have marble experts, some of the greatest marble people in—anywhere in the world, and they're taking this marble that it was in such bad shape that everyone said: "We have to rip it down. We have to take it down." No, the marble is great. Big, beautiful slabs. You don't get them like that anymore. It's very hard. Giant—they call them the giant slabs. They don't make them.

But with tender, loving care—and I always say: Remember, if you take one one-hundredth of an inch off the top of the marble, you have brandnew marble. People don't know that. They see the marble, and they say, "Oh, the marble is stained," or "The marble is gone." I say, "No, no, if you go just a little bit—if you take just a little bit of that skin off, and you get it down—it's called grinding—you grind it down just a hundredth of an inch, you have a brandnew slab of marble, and you saved a little money, to put it mildly, like millions."

The marble job was going to cost \$59 million. They thought we had to take all the marble off the building and replace the marble with new marble. It was going to cost \$59- to—we had prices from \$59- to \$75 million. I think I'm going to spend a million bucks and have it made beautiful. And what you replace it with was not nearly as good as what we already have. So it's sort of—I don't know, I like to tell you those little construction, because we talk politics all the time, and I like politics too. *[Laughter]*

I said somebody—to somebody the other day, "Am I a better politician or construction real estate person?" And they didn't know how to answer that question. *[Laughter]* I'm not sure how to answer it either, if you want to know the truth.

But I actually get great relaxation out of fixing the White House and fixing the Kennedy Center. And it takes a little time, but not really, because it's time that some people want to rest. I don't really want to rest. I want to do things. And to me, it relaxes me. It's almost like—it's really almost better than resting.

And we're bringing these places—these places of great distinction, we're bringing them back. And the Kennedy Center is going to be incredible within 10 months. I mean, you're going to see. We've already done tremendous amounts of work, but within 10 months, you're going to see something that you'll really be amazed at.

You know, one of the things with the Kennedy Center, because this is really honoring that tonight, but the sound is great, and if you don't have good sound—Lincoln—I don't want to say anything bad about Lincoln Center, but they've had a lot of problems over the years with sound. A lot of you—some of you on that board, you're here tonight. They're a very distinguished board also.

But, as you know, they have—at Lincoln Center, they have a sound problem, and they've rebuilt one of their great buildings because the sound was always bad, and they can't get it right. They can't get it right. It's a very hard thing to do. There's a little luck to that. You know, you have to be a little bit lucky. And some of the greatest opera houses in the world, in Europe were built 200 years ago, 300 years ago, and they had no sound engineers in those days, but they did have a lot of marble and stone. And marble and stone make from—make, really, for great sound.

I see we have Gloria. We have KISS. We have George Strait. We have—think of it. We have the great Michael Crawford. And they know what I'm talking about probably better than anybody else in the whole world. But it's—sound is a big deal. And if you don't have it in a building, you pretty much never have it. They rebuild it. They spend millions and millions of dollars. They take it apart. They put up new walls, they put up new seats, they put up new everything, and they open it up, and it's a disaster.

And the one thing with Kennedy Center, they have great sound. They've always been known to have great sound. And we're putting up large slabs of marble in a couple of the great halls, and it's already—we did some testing. It's made it—as good as it is, it's made it even better. Marble can do that.

So we've reviews—we reviewed everything you have to review and reversed the decline of this cherished institution. And the Kennedy Center was really—boy, the money they spent over the years. They spent so much money, and you couldn't see where the money was spent. We're still trying to find out where did they spend all that money, but they didn't know what they were doing, and it's a shame.

And we almost lost that building. That building was very close, structurally and every other way. We've totally reversed it, and now it's going to be in great shape for another—literally, for 100 years. It's going to be in great shape. It's going to be in better shape than ever before.

So we've done a real job. We've secured historic funding for the Kennedy Center. And we got that in the "Great Big Beautiful Bill." That's the bill that everybody said was impossible to get passed. They said, "You can't do it. It's too big."

It was supposed to be 17 bills. I said, "Let's put it in one," because the Democrats are absolutely crazy. And I have some Democrat friends here, but they're crazy. *[Laughter]* And they might have approved a couple of them, but most of them, they wouldn't. I said, "If we put it all in one, there's something for everybody."

And we got it approved with a pretty small majority. We have the majority, but pretty small majority. We got it approved, and we got some support. We got a little support from some of the rational Democrats.

But one of the things we were able to do is help very much the Kennedy Center.

We got so many other things. Our largest tax cuts in history. No tax on—think of this—tips. For the—for the workers, no tax on tips. No tax on Social Security for our great seniors. No tax on overtime. Nobody thought that was possible. You're allowed, if you buy a car—these people don't know about buying cars, because you buy cars probably—you're not going out to borrow a lot of money—the group in this room. But you know what? Middle-income people, they never had this before. If you go out and borrow money, which almost everyone does, to buy a car, you're now allowed to deduct the interest for income tax purposes. Never happened before. It's a great thing.

We have so many things in the "Great Big Beautiful Bill," but one of the things we have is we're going to rebuild our city, Washington, DC. We now have one of the safest cities in the country. It was a horror show when I came here. A year and a half ago, this city was so

dangerous. A year ago, it was so dangerous. We've been there 10 months, and now we're setting records for safety. We've had virtually no crime. We had terrorism 2 weeks ago, week and a half ago. Horrible terrorism. But it sounds like we were doing so well that the terrorists felt they didn't want to see us do very well.

But we have right now the safest Capital. We have a safer Capital as anywhere in the world, and we had one of the most unsafe Capitals in the world. Thank you.

And I walk through the White House, and I'll see especially young women say, "Sir, thank you very much." And I know immediately what they're saying. They're not thanking me for the eight wars that we've stopped. They're not thanking me for even the tax cuts or any of the other things we've done. They're thanking me because they can actually walk to the White House. They feel safe now in the city, and they are.

And I want to thank our National Guard. They've been unbelievable. The National Guard has been great. And Kristi and Tom Homan and all the people that worked so hard on that.

And, as you probably noticed, we just went into New Orleans, and we went into Memphis, Tennessee. And we went in in a light way because we have a lot of opposition there with these people. They want to have crime. I mean, it's the craziest thing. Chicago.

But we've brought down crime and just giving it a little dose of what we do really well. But we'll, at some point, just go in and do it exactly the way we want. We won't have any crime, and we'll have very little crime in Chicago. Almost none. We'll stop it everywhere. We do stop it everywhere.

And some—we had a Governor, a very good Governor from Louisiana—Jeff Landry just called and he said: "Please do me a favor. Would you send the troops into New Orleans? It's really gotten bad." I said, "We'll do it." We just sent them in. And within about 3 days, everyone said it's like a different place. And he's a smart Governor. And some of the Governors, you'd be surprised at some of the ones that are calling.

But we're stopping crime. I never—I said we were going to—during the campaign, we're going to stop crime. Nobody knew we were going to stop it to this extent. Nobody knew we were going to have a border where in 6 months, not one person came into our country illegally. Think of that.

So we went from the worst border where millions and millions—25 million people over the course of the 4 years came into our country, many from prisons and gang members, drug dealers, mental institutions. They came into our country. We're getting them out. We have to get them out. Murderers. We have 11,888 murderers. Many of them are now either out or in jail, because they'll murder again. More than 50 percent of those people murdered more than one person. But we took a very strong stand, and people are really liking it.

And by the way, drugs coming into our country by sea, down 94 percent. Okay? Down 94 percent. And I'm trying to figure out who the other 6 percent is, because, frankly, I think they are the most—they've got to be the bravest people. Who are the 6 percent that are still trying to come in? But down 94 percent.

And we're going to start that same process on land, because we know every route, we know every house, we know where they live, we know everything about them. They killed 300,000 people last year, and that's like a war. That's like a terrible war. Not going to let it happen.

So we're doing a job that nobody else can do. But we're building this institution back to what it should be and the Nation's premier venue for the arts. And we're going to see that, because DC. is now a safe place. People want to be here. The restaurants are opening.

You know, if you go back a year, nobody wanted to go to restaurants. They lost 40 percent of their restaurants. They closed. They had no business. And the restaurants that were open were doing no business. And people felt safe—unsafe, even sitting, waiting for a meal. People would come in and do bad things. We don't have that anymore. And now restaurants are open. You can't even get into a restaurant now in Washington, DC. It's a beautiful thing to watch.

And we're showcasing our country, and we're always going to have it, because the Capital of the United States of America has to be a safe and beautiful place. And we're fixing it. We're fixing the roads. We're removing the graffiti on the most beautiful marble you've ever seen. We're removing granite. I like granite better on the outside, because it's real easy, but the marble is very porous.

During the Biden administration, they sprayed a lot of red paint on a lot of white marble, and you still see it. You know, they worked real hard to get it off, but it goes down deep. It's a disgrace what they were allowed to do. It was also a disgrace that they allowed millions of people into our country illegally and people that were not people that we want to have. They weren't people that could love our country. We want people coming into our country that can love our country.

So the generosity of so many outstanding donors—and Ric mentioned some of them, but we've had so many people that just are so generous. It's been really incredible.

And, as you know, this is America's 250th anniversary, so we have all of these people. And next year—but next year is right around the corner, and that's going to be big. Then we have the World Cup coming, and we have the Olympics coming.

And you know, I got the Olympics and I got the World Cup. I cannot take credit for getting 250 years. That was just—we sort of lucked out. *[Laughter]* I tried to do that, but it didn't work. We lucked out.

But 250 is going to be incredible. In fact, we're having—on June 14, we're having a fight. All of the greatest champions in the world, the UFC fight. They're building an arena in front of the White House, if you can believe it. Then the—like 6,000 seats, and then they're going to build it for the fight.

They're going to have the greatest champions of the world coming, and they're going to have over 100,000 people out. They're putting screens all over certain parts of Washington so everyone can see it. I don't think there'll be anything like it. It will be on a Sunday night, June 14.

Flag Day happens to be my birthday, but I didn't do it for that reason. Just—*[laughter]*—it, actually—"Sir, we like the June 14 date." I said, "You know, that's my birthday." They didn't know it, but they picked it. But it's—I'll take a little heat on that, but it's not that.

But I will tell you, that's going to be some—everyone is asking me for tickets for the UFC. That is going to be great. They're going to have the greatest champions in the world all fighting that night. The great Dana White does a great job, and he wanted to do it, and the White House will be the background of the fight. There'll never be anything like this. There has never been and there never will be anything like that.

But a few hours ago, I had the tremendous privilege of presenting the 2025 Kennedy Center Honorees with their medallions, their beautiful medallions from Tiffany, right in the Oval Office. And we thought we'd do it here, we thought we'd do it at different places, and maybe pick the one that we like the best.

And we said, no, that hit so well, in the Oval Office—right, Michael? "The Oval Office," he said it, "I've never seen anything like this." There's something about the Oval Office that's special.

It's really just special. Even in its poorer State, it was still the Oval Office, and we appreciate it, and we have great respect. So many things happened in the Oval Office.

And they got to see the beautiful Cabinet Room, which we've brought back to life like it should be. Beautiful—it's a beautiful room, and it's really a beautiful room once again. Actually, more beautiful than it ever was. It was never like this.

But the American people are proud of our country, and we're proud of our beautiful White House, and we're proud of our beautiful Kennedy Center. And now you have it at the top, top of the line.

The lives they've led, these wonderful people that are here tonight, the legacies that they've forged have become integral part of Americans' priceless cultural heritage. All of the people that we honor tonight are such beautiful words. I mean, you're priceless. It's a cultural heritage that you've created, each of you in a very different way, most of you in a very different form, catering to different people, frankly. But you add it up, and it's a hundred percent of our population.

Each of them has given us treasures that will be passed down to every future generation. And I don't think you even appreciate what you've done. I don't think you really appreciate your greatness.

Decades, and even centuries from now, people will still watch and admire the films of Sylvester Stallone. There's nobody else can do those films. Nobody can do it.

You know, when he starred in "Rocky," he had no money at all, and he had nothing. He had a car that barely couldn't—you know, he left New York, I think a place called Brooklyn. Right, Sly? Brooklyn? Good place. A lot of good people come out of Brooklyn.

But he got that car to just get him there, and he stayed in his car, and he slept, and he wrote this script called "Rocky," along with about 20,000 other people. Everybody writes a boxing script, right? But, for some reason, they loved it. And Sly didn't have 10 cents. Had nothing. And they offered him, like, a lot of money. They offered him, I think, a half a million, some number that he never even thought was even possible.

And he said: "No, I don't want it. I want to make sure that you're casting the right person to play the role." And they said, "Well, we have stars." And they brought in stars, but the stars didn't have good bodies. *[Laughter]* They were flabby. They were not really boxers. And Sly would look at some of these guys, big names. He was intimidated in one way, but in the other way, he said, "That guy can't play the role." And we won't say the names of the people, but they're really top actors.

And for some reason, here's a guy that had no contacts, no anything, but they loved—this one studio in particular loved this script, and they were going crazy over it. And they brought in the top people, and Sly said, "Let me see you box." And he's—have a guy, and "Hmm, hmm."

[The President imitated an actor boxing poorly.]

[Laughter] He said, "He can't play the role." He had a lot of flab around the upper chest area. It's supposed to be solid like a rock.

And then they brought in another one, another one, another one. And finally, they looked at Sly. They said: "Oh, man, you're in good shape. You think you could play the role?" He says, "Yes, I'll play the role. I'm not going to let somebody else play it." And he was actually willing. He thought they'd have somebody. But he said: "That's not a boxer. That's not a fighter." These are good movie stars. Keep their shirt on, but they're good movie stars. *[Laughter]* But they're not fighters, right? And he took that role, and the rest is history. The rest is history.

But think of it. How many people would turn down, you know, a tremendous—enough money—he probably thought he could live for the rest of his life. He probably could have, if he had to. But who would turn down that kind of money? And he did it. He didn't want to have anything to do with it. He wanted it to be right. And who would then think of it is— isn't just about the largest-grossing movie? It's, like, there's never been anything like it, "Rocky"—the whole "Rocky" series. It's been incredible.

And then he had a little thing called "Rambo." I loved Rambo, Sly. *[Laughter]* I'll tell you, I loved "Rambo." I got to watch "Rambo" one time. I said, "I wonder what this is all about." I went to a movie theater a long time ago, when I used to go to movie theaters. I'd like to go again. I loved them. I love the popcorn. *[Laughter]* And it was "Rambo." I knew nothing about it, but I liked Sly, so I said, "Let's go see it." After about 4 minutes, I said, "This movie is great." "Rambo"—I think "Rambo" gave "Rocky" a little run too, if you want to know the truth. *[Laughter]* Loved it. We loved all of them. But really, a legend.

And each of the people that are being honored, they're treasures that really will be passed down to future generations. Decades and centuries from now, people are going to be looking at your work. They're going to be seeing every one of you. Your work is so incredible. And they'll be thrilling to the performances of Sly and the performances—it's all on tape—of the great Michael Crawford in "Phantom." It's all on tape.

You know, thank goodness for tape, because if you couldn't see him—if you—would miss that, if you wouldn't see Michael Crawford, the way he moved—the voice was magnificent, but the way he moved. And the hands, the whole thing, it's just—there'll never be anything like it. But we have it on tape from every different angle. So guess what? You're lucky.

There are a lot of great people that never—they've never been preserved that way, but you've been preserved. And people are going to be looking, people are going to be watching that and comparing in other plays and in other forms and other venues. They're going to be looking and comparing others to you. And I don't think they're ever going to find anybody like you, Michael. Okay? I know something about that business. I don't think they'll find anybody like you. The look, the movement, the whole deal. And then the voice, right? The voice. That beautiful voice.

And they'll still know the unforgettable songs of George and Gloria and Paul, Gene, Peter, and the late, great Ace Frehley, who's represented by his daughter. And she was crying like so—she was crying. And all that meant to me is one thing: She loved her father. Right? She loved her father. And the guys loved him.

You know, that band has stuck together for a long time. I've known a lot of bands, and they don't last too long. They're gone, much to the detriment of themselves, actually. But these guys get along, and I was watching. I love to watch people, and I was watching them, and they really respect each other, and they like each other. I just congratulate you. What a job you've done. What a great job. Thank you all.

I've known Gene for a long time, and I've known the others for shorter periods of time, but they're real talent, and tonight they're really appreciated. The world has seen it, and the world is now watching. They're watching. The whole world is watching this. So, thank you very much.

On the film sets, Broadway stages, and in sold-out arenas around the globe, these exceptional individuals have spent their lives making the most of their incredible God-given talents. They have talent. They have talent.

The great Gary Player. He hits shots. He's 90 years old. He still plays good. Shot a 70 with me the other day. He's 90. We're playing pretty far back, too. He's incredible. You think Biden could do that? I don't think so. *[Laughter]* Can't lift the club.

But Gary was demonstrating shots, and one guy was having a very hard time, couldn't get out of a sand trap. Gary is known as the greatest sand player, number one ever. He got down in the U.S. Opens—two U.S. Opens back to back. He got down 69 out of 71 times. I would say that's good. Even if you don't know anything about golf, you'd have to say that's good. But he got down, and this poor man I was with, who's—he was blessed with talent, but not golf talent—*[laughter]*—and he cannot get out of a trap. It was sad to watch.

And Gary says, "You don't understand. Just"—and he dropped five balls. Ping. Ping. Ping. Ping, ping. Every ball right next to the hole.

This guy—"Ooh." And he tried it. He hit the ball a foot. He hit the next one over the green like by 50 yards. The whole thing was a disaster. He said, "Well, here's the problem: I've got talent, and you don't." *[Laughter]*

And that's what that's true about you. You have talent. These five groups and people, they have great talent. And if you don't have talent, to be honest with you, there's not a damn thing you can do. *[Laughter]* You can get a little better, but if you don't have talent, there's not a damn thing you can do about it. All you can do is try and find something else where you do have talent. *[Laughter]*

But I just want to thank that, you know, you shared these gifts, because you're really sharing a great gift with the world. And maybe tonight, more so than any time in your career, you've shared tonight—because tonight, the whole world is focused on you.

I want to celebrate all of this together. And tomorrow, we pay tribute to them magnificently, and they're going to see something really special. And it's so great to have this at the Kennedy Center.

I want to thank, as you know, FIFA for the award they gave me but, more importantly, for choosing the Kennedy Center. That was—we had over a billion people watching the—they were choosing the teams, which team is playing the next team, and you can imagine the thrill.

But Gianni, who's the commissioner—he's a fantastic guy. We're—I guess you have to say he's, like, the biggest guy in sports, Bob. He's big. He's got—he's saying we have 58 Super Bowls. I don't know if that's true, but let's say we have a few of them. But they have a lot of—a lot of matches, and it's all taking place here.

You know, don't forget: When I—made that deal during my first term, and then I made the deal for the Olympics. And I said, "Man, it's so bad because they were made 6 years away." So I said, "I won't be President." And then I got screwed, and I said—*[laughter]*—I said, "Let's do it again." And I did it again. We did great the second time. Unbelievable. We won by a lot.

But the third time—we won by 10 million votes, but it was a COVID year. A lot of things happened. And you know, crooked—a very crooked election, a lot of crooked people.

But I said, "We got to do it again." That's why we never give up. These people have never given up. They don't give up. Bob Kraft never gave up. Did you ever give up, Bob? I don't think so. Bob Kraft—have you ever given up, Bob? Look at him. He had a lousy team last year. He didn't know what that do. And now he ends up—he's leading the NFL again. I'm sure your other owners are extremely happy for you, though, Bob. Right? *[Laughter]* They're thrilled. They're just thrilled.

But no, they—people don't give up. The real winners—need the talent, but don't ever give up.

But as chairman of the Kennedy Center, as President of the United States, and as a true fan of each of these incredible celebrities but great performers, much more than a celebrity—you're

much more than a celebrity—it gives me tremendous pleasure to congratulate them once again and say thank you for your incredible career. Thank you for gracing us with this wisdom and this genius that you have. It's what it is. Every one of them.

And the First Lady, who you saw yesterday and you're going to see again tomorrow—we're going to be having a good time—she congratulates everybody. She's focused on Christmas decorations at the White House, where she's done a great job. And actually, the press has treated us very good.

The first year, the trees were white and beautiful, and the media said, "Why white?" [Laughter] So I said, "Listen, do something that's more notice"—so, the next year we did green, and they said: "Why aren't you doing white? We like the white better." [Laughter] The next year we did red. We got killed with the red. [Laughter] But—so we went through 4 years of that stuff. Nobody does it better.

And this year it's just so good that they actually said the White House looks phenomenal, when you add up all of the other things that we've done to it.

You know, I tell people, for the first 4 years, I was the hunted, so I didn't have a lot of time to fix up the floors, to redo the Lincoln bathroom. I took a little heat. It was the worst job. It was done in—many years ago. It was done during, actually, the Truman administration with very cheap green tile. That was in Lincoln. And now we have it done in beautiful, beautiful paradiso marble. It's all book-matched and so beautiful. But—and people said, "Oh, he's—why is he wasting time?" That's not wasting time. That's saving our heritage. You know, many, many things like that, it's saving the heritage of this country. And it's so important.

But I'm just going to leave you with the fact that this is a very brilliant and very important group of people that are in this room tonight. A lot of people wanted to be here. And we—the ballroom is very small, Marco. I mean, this is like—[laughter]—you know what this is? About one-tenth—I—this is section A of what's being built. [Laughter] You—this is like a little corner. But it is beautiful.

And I have to say this: Marco Rubio is a great Secretary of State. And I think he's going to go down as—you know, look, we've had some good ones. We've had some bad ones, too. Real bad ones. We've had some real dummies and some real brilliant, great ones. I think Marco, if we keep going like this, he's going to go down as the greatest Secretary of State in the history of our country. So, Marco, thank you very much. Thank you very much.

And I just want to thank everybody. It's a very special journey that we're on. It's a beautiful journey. And we're beautifying our country. We're strengthening our country. We're respected again as a country. We're so respected now like never before.

And whether it's Europe, Japan—I mean, every one of them, they have tremendous respect. They used to laugh at us not long ago. A year and a half ago, they were laughing at us, and they're not laughing anymore. They respect us like they've never done before.

Thank you very much, everybody, for being here. It's a great honor to have you. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:53 p.m. in the Benjamin Franklin Ballroom at the Harry S. Truman Building. In his remarks, he referred to Robert K. Kraft, founder, chairman, and chief executive officer, Kraft Group, in his capacity as owner of the National Football League's New England Patriots; Drake Maye, quarterback, and Mike Vrabel, head coach, New England Patriots; Jennifer Flavin Stallone, wife of actor Sylvester Stallone; musicians George Strait and Gloria Gaynor; Natasha MacAller Crawford, wife, and Emma and Lucy Crawford, daughters, of actor Michael Crawford; musicians Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, and Peter Criss, members of the band

KISS; Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India; Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi L. Noem; White House Border Czar Thomas D. Homan; Dana F. White, chief executive officer, Ultimate Fighting Championship; Monique Frehley, daughter of musician and KISS bandmember Ace Frehley, who died on October 16; former President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.; and Giovanni V. Infantino, president, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). He also referred to his son-in-law Michael Boulos. The transcript was released by the Office of Communications on December 8.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Kennedy Center Honors dinner.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Boulos, Michael; Burgum, Douglas J.; Carr, Brendan; Crawford, Emma; Crawford, Lucy; Crawford, Michael; Crawford, Natasha MacAller; Criss, Peter; Frehley, Ace; Frehley, Monique; Gaynor, Gloria; Gor, Sergio; Grenell, Richard A.; Homan, Thomas D.; Infantino, Giovanni V.; Kraft, Robert K.; Landry, Jeffrey M.; Lutnick, Howard W.; Maye, Drake; Noem, Kristi L.; Player, Gary; Rubio, Marco A.; Simmons, Gene; Stallone, Jennifer Flavin; Stallone, Sylvester; Stanley, Paul; Strait, George; Trump, Melania; Trump, Tiffany A.; Vrabel, Mike; White, Dana F.

Subjects: America's 250th birthday celebration; Border security; California, 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles; District of Columbia, beautification efforts; District of Columbia, law enforcement improvement efforts; District of Columbia, shooting of National Guard servicemembers near White House; Federal Communications Commission; Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup; Illegal immigration; India, U.S. Ambassador; John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; Kennedy Center Honors dinner; Louisiana, Governor; Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Secretary of Commerce; Secretary of Homeland Security; Secretary of State; Secretary of the Interior; Suspected drug-trafficking vessels, U.S. airstrikes in Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific; Tax Code reform; U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Special Missions; Ultimate Fighting Championship; White House Border Czar; White House renovation projects.

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