

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2025

Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors Ceremony

December 7, 2025

The President. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

A very big hello and welcome to a very special evening, and one of the most important evenings in the American cultural realm. This is something—going to be very special, and the Kennedy Center is very special, and we're bringing this building back to life like nobody ever thought was even possible.

And tonight we're here to congratulate the Kennedy Center Honorees.

I must say, this is the first time that a President of the United States has ever hosted this phenomenal event. I don't know why I'm doing it. I don't know why. I'm going to try and act like Johnny Carson. How about Johnny? *[Laughter]* We miss Johnny, don't we?

But this is our Nation's highest recognition for lifetime achievement in the performing arts, and each of the incredible 2025 Kennedy Center honorees has earned the distinction many, many times over. They're really amazing, amazing people.

Last night we had an event, and I got to know the ones I didn't know. And this is some group. Probably, we've had no group like it.

They've given us immortal characters of the silver screen—truly immortal characters; unprecedented triumphs of the Broadway stage; and unforgettable music that has become part of the, really, soundtrack of our lives. Many of you know these songs that you're going to be hearing a lot of tonight. You're going to have a great time, because you just listen to music, and if Trump is no good, you'll say: "To hell with him. Just listen to the music." *[Laughter]* "I want to listen to the music. Get off the stage." *[Laughter]*

But they've raised our sights and lifted our spirits and touched our hearts and stirred our souls and forged towering legacies that are here, and billions and billions of people have watched them over the years. These are incredible people. They're among the greatest artists and actors, performers, musicians, singers, and songwriters ever to walk the face of the earth.

And I was telling—really, last night, I said very strongly, "You don't know how big you are." I said it to three of the five, and I meant it to all five. *[Laughter]* Personally, I love them all, and I know that America loves them also, and that's why this is such an exciting evening.

This is, they say, the most exciting evening of this kind in a long, long time in our country.

So please join the First Lady and me in really honoring people that are legendary in so many ways, the 2025 Kennedy Center Honorees, including the undisputed king of country, George Strait.

Perhaps the greatest underdog in the history of cinema, Sylvester Stallone.

One of the brightest lights ever to grace the stage of Broadway—and this is a very special man—Michael Crawford.

A disco icon, whose unwavering faith and irreversible—there's never been a voice like this one. That voice moved the world to dance and called us to survive. We're going to survive. Gloria Gaynor.

And finally, one of the greatest bands in the history of rock and roll, straight out of the beautiful borough of Queens, New York—I know it well—KISS.

And I have to say, Gene, Paul, Peter—you are giants to the music fans. They all wanted you. So many people, they said, "You've got to do KISS."

And we know that the late, great Ace Frehley is looking down and so happy—and he's represented tonight by his beautiful daughter. And by the way, this was a daughter that cried all night long last night, and that showed me one thing: She loved her father. Right? She loved her father. I usually see people who don't cry. They couldn't care less. *[Laughter]* Well, he was great.

But these honorees are not only exemplifying the best of America, they have become part of the fabric of America. And tonight, we pay tribute to all that have been here and done so many things. But this is special. This is all about them. Legends, all.

As Chairman of the board of the Kennedy Center, I also want to thank Speaker Mike Johnson, who's with us. He's done an incredible job. He's got a majority of three.

With a majority of three, we got approved the biggest bill in the history of our country. I call it the "Great Big Beautiful Bill." It was supposed to be 17 bills. We wrapped them into one. Everyone said we couldn't do it, but we got it done: tax cuts for all, regulation cuts for all, and so many things. It's really great. Thank you, Mike.

I also want to thank Ambassador Ric Grenell and everybody who made this unbelievable evening possible. Really unbelievable evening.

The Kennedy Center is back, and it's going to be bigger and better and more beautiful than ever before. You'll see that. You'll see it taking place before your very eyes. It's already started. And we raised over the last month over \$100 million. Can you believe it? They've never come close. So we're doing well. We're very proud of everything that's been accomplished.

If there is one thread that connects all of these amazing artists together, it is the word "persistence." I can say that with a lot of the members of our audience. I know so many of you, and you are persistent. Many of you are miserable, horrible people, but you are persistent. *[Laughter]* You never give up. Sometimes, I wish you'd give up, but you don't. *[Laughter]* A lot of truth.

But it's an unwavering commitment to absolute excellence in their craft. That's what they've done.

And all of them have overcome great odds and faced their share of setbacks—tremendous setbacks. Some of them have had legendary setbacks, setbacks that you have to read in the papers. When they—because of their level of fame, they have a problem, you read about it. But in the words of Rocky Balboa, they showed us that you keep moving forward. Just keep moving forward.

And he said it strongly in the movie, winning forward. It's all about winning, and you win forward, and that's how winning is done. And what Sly has introduced to us is incredible.

The winners are exactly what these really great legends are all about. Winning is everything to them. But you know, they also know how to go through hell, because so many of them have gone through such rough times, and they came out on top.

In Hollywood history, only an elite few—include—think of it—Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles—have ever been nominated for the Academy Award for both best actor and best original screenplay on the same film.

With the debut of "Rocky"—oh, that was something. And "Rambo" was pretty good too, I have to tell you. *[Laughter]* I liked "Rambo" a lot too—a third name joined those incredible ranks. I mean, think of it. Charlie Chaplin, pretty good. Orson Welles, pretty good. Orson Welles had all of his success at a very, very young age. By the time he was 24, it was hard for him to ever compete with what he did. You know that. But Sly has been successful for an entire lifetime, and he's got a lot of years left.

So we are going to begin tonight with Sylvester Stallone and some of the fantastic things that he's done.

And, Sly, you've been my friend for a long time. You've been a very special friend in so many different ways. When I needed help, I knew not to go to Sly, because I don't think he would have been there for me—*[laughter]*—but now he would. But after tonight, I think he will. *[Laughter]*

No, he's been—he came out with things. When I ran for office, he was right out there, and he said—I won't say what he said, because you wouldn't believe it. It were—the nicest things that he's ever said about anybody.

And we love you, Sly. And this is a big honor, and congratulations to you and Jennifer and the family. A fantastic family. A fantastic man.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

[At this point, the program continued. The President later resumed his remarks as follows.]

The President. This is fantastic, isn't it? It's just so incredible. Who would ever think? This is the greatest evening in the history of the Kennedy Center. Not even a contest. There's never been anything like it. *[Laughter]*

And the show is already getting rave reviews now. No—no, I will say that—I guarantee the fake news is going to give me horrible—"he was horrible as an MC. Don't ever let that happen again. Don't ever let it happen." *[Laughter]*

But I guarantee you one thing, we're going to get big ratings tonight. This place is hot. This place is hot.

And I just toured some of the construction. I love doing that. It's like resting for me. *[Laughter]* But you know, we're doing a lot of construction in the Kennedy Center. I just toured the lounge—SyberJet Lounge. It's gorgeous. All my friends are up there. They really didn't want to come back for a little while. They wanted to stay there.

And some of the other things that we've just built—brandnew, gorgeous. And I'll tell you what, the Trump-Kennedy Center—I mean—*[laughter]*—Kennedy Center. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. This is terribly embarrassing. *[Laughter]*

Well, we're really having a good time tonight. It's great, and it really is. It's an honor to see so many of my friends. So many people I know in this audience. Some good, some bad. *[Laughter]* Some I really love and respect. Some I truly hate. *[Laughter]* But they're having a good time.

And I want to——

Audience member. I love you!

The President. ——very—thank you, darling. And I love you too.

What I want to say, Sylvester Stallone and Michael Crawford, you're special. You're special. That was so incredible, wasn't it? Because tonight we're seeing pure talent on full display.

Nothing is rarer, nothing is more beautiful, nothing is more inspiring. On the stage and on the screen, nobody has ever done it better than the people you're watching and honoring tonight, and perhaps no one ever will. Can't get better.

You look at the two that we've already honored, you can't get better. There's nobody ever better. Maybe somebody can tie, but that's going to be tough also. You just can't get better.

For the next part of the evening, we're going to celebrate the spectacular careers of George Strait, Gloria Gaynor, and KISS.

And each of these terrific honorees has a story of success and triumph that could only have happened in the United States of America. Our country is back. This country is back.

You know, they tried getting Biden to do this. Four years in a row, they tried getting him. He said, "I don't think so." Would have been very interesting though, wouldn't it? [*Laughter*] I would have—I would have watched. [*Laughter*]

These incredible artists are also pioneers of some of the most uniquely American musical genres ever created, from country to disco to gospel to rock and roll. Paying tribute to these giants, we're joined by some of their most beloved fellow artists, titans like Vince Gill, Brooks and Dunn, and Garth Brooks.

And they're here. They're here. I don't know where they are. They probably don't like me very much. [*Laughter*] But all I know is they're big, right? We want bigness. We don't care if they like Trump. We want bigness, right? He said, "Yes." We've got the biggest.

We also have a few surprises in store, so stick around. There is really a lot happening at the Kennedy Center. I tell you what, you're going to be very impressed. The things that we're doing here are really amazing.

I want to thank everybody for working so hard. You are amazing, amazing people.

Ladies and gentlemen, enjoy the show. See you in a little while. Thank you.

[*The program continued. The President later resumed his remarks as follows.*]

The President. Well, I just want to say, this has been truly an incredible evening, with an unbelievable audience and, most importantly, our honorees. You can't do better. You just can't do better, so—[*applause*].

God bless the Kennedy Center, and God bless the United States of America.

Go home safely. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Have a good time. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:53 p.m. at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. In his remarks, he referred to musicians Gene Simmons, Paul Stanley, and Peter Criss, members of the band KISS; Monique Frehley, daughter of musician and KISS bandmember Ace Frehley, who died on October 16; U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Special Missions Richard A. Grenell, in his capacity as Executive Director of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; Jennifer Flavin Stallone, wife of actor Sylvester Stallone; and former President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.. The transcript was released by the Office of Communications on December 8. Portions of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Kennedy Center Honors.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Crawford, Michael; Criss, Peter; Frehley, Ace; Frehley, Monique; Gaynor, Gloria; Grenell, Richard A.; Johnson, J. Michael; Simmons, Gene; Stallone, Sylvester; Stanley, Paul; Strait, George; Trump, Melania.

Subjects: John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; Kennedy Center Honors; Speaker of the House of Representatives; U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Special Missions.

DCPD Number: DCPD202501175.