

to the Ford's Theatre gala, and this is by far the best.

We want to thank our choir and our orchestra and all the fabulous performers for taking time out of your busy schedules to help—to support this really important part of Washington. And Gatlin is probably saying, of course, I said that for the crowd last year. [*Laughter*] But no, it really was fantastic. And it's such an uplifting performance and a reminder of what a great President Abraham Lincoln was.

I do want to thank Paul Tetreault for being a really fabulous director of the Ford's Theatre. And I want to thank the gala cochairs and all the people who support the Ford's Theatre. I know you're ex-

cited about the opening of the renovated Ford's Theatre in February 2009. Laura and I are excited too. Just send the pictures down to Crawford. [*Laughter*]

Thanks for a fabulous evening, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7 p.m. at the National Theatre. In his remarks, he referred to actor Hal Holbrook; musician Larry Gatlin; and Paul R. Tetreault, producing director, Ford's Theatre. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 2.

## Remarks on Presenting Posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor to Private First Class Ross A. McGinnis

*June 2, 2008*

Good morning. Welcome to the White House. A week ago, on Memorial Day, the flag of the United States flew in halfstaff in tribute to those who fell in service to our country. Today we pay special homage to one of those heroes: Private First Class Ross Andrew McGinnis of the United States Army. Private McGinnis died in a combat zone in Iraq on December the 4th, 2006, and for his heroism that day, he now receives the Medal of Honor.

In a few moments, the Military Aide will read the citation, and the Medal will be accepted by Ross's mom and dad, Romayne and Tom. It's a privilege to have with us as well, Becky and Katie, Ross's sisters.

I also want to thank the other distinguished guests who have joined us: Mr. Vice President; Secretary Jim Peake of Veterans Affairs; Secretary Pete Geren of the Army; Secretary Michael Wynne of the Air Force; General Jim "Hoss" Cartwright, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. I appre-

ciate other members of the administration for joining us.

I want to thank Members of the United States Congress who have joined us today: Steve Buyer, John Peterson, Louie Gohmert. Thank you all for coming. I appreciate the chaplain for the prayer. We welcome friends and family members of Ross, as well as members of the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, including Charlie Company, that's with us today.

We're also joined by Private McGinnis's vehicle crew, the very men who witnessed his incredible bravery. We welcome Sergeant First Class Cedric Thomas, Staff Sergeant Ian Newland, Sergeant Lyle Buehler, and Specialist Sean Lawson.

A special welcome to the prior recipients of the Medal of Honor, whose presence here is—means a lot to the McGinnis family. Thank you for coming.

The Medal of Honor is the Nation's highest military distinction. It's given for

valor beyond anything that duty could require or a superior could command. By long tradition, it's presented by the President. For any President, doing so is a high privilege.

Before he entered our country's history, Ross McGinnis came of age in the town of Knox, Pennsylvania. Back home, they remember a slender boy with a big heart and a carefree spirit. He was a regular guy. He loved playing basketball. He loved working on cars—cars. He wasn't too wild about schoolwork. [Laughter] He had a lot of friends and a great sense of humor. In high school and in the Army, Ross became known for his ability to do impersonations. A buddy from boot camp said that Ross was the only man there who could make the drill sergeant laugh. [Laughter]

Most of all, those who knew Ross McGinnis recall him as a dependable friend and a really good guy. If Ross was your buddy and you needed help to—or you got in trouble, he'd stick with you and be the one you could count on. One of his friends told a reporter that Ross was the type who would do anything for anybody.

That element of his character was to make all the difference when Ross McGinnis became a soldier in the Army. One afternoon 18 months ago, Private McGinnis was part of a Humvee patrol in a neighborhood of Baghdad. From his position in the gun turret, he noticed a grenade thrown directly at his vehicle. In an instant, the grenade dropped through the gunner's hatch. He shouted a warning to the four men inside. Confined in that tiny space, the soldiers had no chance of escaping the explosion. Private McGinnis could have easily jumped from the Humvee and saved himself. Instead, he dropped inside, put himself against the grenade, and absorbed the blast with his own body.

By that split second decision, Private McGinnis lost his own life, and he saved his comrades. One of them was Platoon Sergeant Cedric Thomas, who said this: "He had time to jump out of the truck.

He chose not to. He's a hero. He was just an awesome guy." For his actions, Private McGinnis received the Silver Star, a posthumous promotion in rank, and a swift nomination for the Medal of Honor. But it wasn't acclaim or credit that motivated him. Ross's dad has said: "I know medals never crossed his mind. He was always about friendships and relationships. He just took that to the ultimate this time."

When Ross McGinnis was in kindergarten, the teacher asked him to draw a picture of what he wanted to be when he grew up. He drew a soldier. Today our Nation recognizing—recognizes him as a soldier and more than that because he did far more than his duty. In the words of one of our commanding generals, "Four men are alive because this soldier embodied our Army values and gave his life."

The day will come when the mission he served has been completed and the fighting's over and freedom and security have prevailed. America will never forget those who came forward to bear the battle. America will always honor the name of this brave soldier who gave all for his country and was taken to rest at age 19.

No one outside this man's family can know the true weight of their loss. But in words spoken long ago, we are told how to measure the kind of devotion that Ross McGinnis showed on his last day: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Gospel also gives this assurance: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." May the deep respect of our whole Nation be a comfort to the family of this fallen soldier. May God always watch over the country he served and keep us ever grateful for the life of Ross Andrew McGinnis.

And now I'd like to invite Mr. and Mrs. McGinnis to please come forward for the presentation, and the Military Aide will read the citation for the Medal of Honor.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:50 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Douglas L. Carver, USA, Chief of Army Chaplains.

Following the President's remarks, Lt. Cmdr. Daniel Walsh, USCG, Coast Guard Aide to the President, read the citation.

## Remarks During a Meeting on the National Economy June 2, 2008

*The President.* Thank you all for coming. I want to thank Dr. Lindsey and Bob Carroll and John and Marty. Thank you all for talking about the benefits and wisdom of keeping taxes low. I do want to remind people what life was like in the years 2001 and 2003. The country was having some pretty tough economic times in 2001. Larry, you might remember that period.

*Lawrence B. Lindsey.* I do, painfully.

*The President.* Yes, we had a period of—we had a couple of meetings in Austin, Texas, prior to me getting sworn in as the President, and people from industry were saying, “You’re going to inherit a really tough period.” I mean, the—clearly the economy was slowing, and so we had to strategize on how to deal with it.

And Larry and others in—agreed that the best way to deal with economic uncertainty is to let people have more of their own money. Because we believe that the economy benefits when there’s more money in circulation, in the hands of the people who actually earned it. I know that’s probably not as sophisticated a concept as some of you all up here have articulated, but it’s a concept that worked.

And then when you couple the economic slowdown with an attack on our Nation and our firm response to that attack, it created more economic uncertainty. And that’s why the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 were necessary. And the facts are that we had 52 months of uninterrupted job growth, the longest in the history of the United States.

And I know you believe, and I firmly believe, that those tax cuts were part of that engine for that economic vitality. And the economy is not doing as well as we’d like to do—like it to do today. But there’s no question that the tax cuts provided economic vitality.

And the—and now the question is, what will the Congress do? Given the facts that tax cuts have worked, what will be the congressional response? Our response is, let’s make those tax cuts permanent. Let’s make sure that there is certainty during uncertain times in our economy. Imagine if you’re trying to plan—plan your life, plan the future for your small business—and you don’t know whether or not Congress is going to keep your taxes low. It makes your environment more uncertain.

You hear a lot of talk out of Congress about, you know, the economic slowdown. And we understand there’s an economic slowdown, and we’re concerned about the economic slowdown. And—but one of the things that they can do to help make sure that this economy is a—recovers like we believe it will—is to cut—make the tax cuts permanent.

Now, our fellow citizens have got to understand that those tax cuts aren’t permanent. In other words, if Congress allows them to expire, here are the consequences. Now, first of all, taxes go up by an average of \$280 billion a year. And I promise you, there’s going to be a \$280 billion expansion of government to couple that—those tax increases. And the fundamental question is, who would you rather have spending your