

drive. That's why we were in the ditch. [*Laughter*] And as soon as they get into power, they will throw that car right back in reverse. There's a reason why when you want to go forward, you put it into "D," and when you go backwards, it goes into "R." [*Laughter*] They—that's not a coincidence. They will drive it right back into the ditch, and they'll have those special interests riding shotgun in that process.

There is a lot at stake in this election. And everybody here who believed in what we were doing in 2008 and who believed in what we were doing in 2006 and understood that we were moving in the wrong direction for the previous 8 years, this is the time that counts. It is easy to support candidates and go to events when everybody is really popular. It was easy showing up to the Inauguration, even if it was cold. [*Laughter*] Right? I'm polling at 70 percent, and Beyonce and Bono are singing. [*Laughter*] Yes, well, I mean—but I believe that the reason you got involved at the outset was not because we had cool posters, not because it was the trendy thing to do, not just because my predecessor had become unpopular, but because at some level, we understood that the American Dream had served each of us very well and that we had to make sure the next generation was served just as well.

And that required us making some hard decisions. And that required us making some sacrifices. And that required us buckling down and taking responsibility for solving problems that had plagued us for decades. And that's what

change is. This is what change looks like. In a big, messy democracy like ours, a country that's huge and diverse, you know, it's not smooth. But it's worthwhile.

And so over the next 6 weeks, but over the next 2 years, over the next 6 years, over the next decade, whatever it is, I want all of you to remind yourselves why you got involved and why you care deeply, and not lose heart, but gird yourself for a battle that's worth fighting. Take pride in the fact that, yes, what we're trying to do here is finally take responsibility and move this country in a better direction and change our politics. And that's not going to be easy. But it can be done.

And for those of you who don't think it can be done, I just will remind you that it was just a few years back where I was a State senator in Illinois named Barack Hussein Obama, and I stand now addressing you as the President of the United States. Don't tell me it can't be done.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:04 p.m. at the Pyramid Club. In his remarks, he referred to Mark L. Alderman, member, Cozen O'Connor law firm; Kenneth M. Jarin, partner, Ballard Spahr, LLP; Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato; Warren E. Buffett, chief executive officer and chairman, Berkshire Hathaway Inc.; and musicians Beyonce G. Knowles and Paul D. "Bono" Hewson.

Remarks on Presenting Posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor to Chief Master Sergeant Richard L. Etchberger *September 21, 2010*

Please be seated. Good afternoon, and on behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House. And I thank you, General Cyr, for that wonderful invocation.

Of all the military decorations that our Nation can bestow, the highest is the Medal of Honor. It is awarded for conspicuous gallantry, for risking one's life in action, for serving above and beyond the call of duty. Today we present the

Medal of Honor to an American who displayed such gallantry more than four decades ago, Chief Master Sergeant Richard L. Etchberger.

This medal reflects the gratitude of an entire nation. So we are also joined by Vice President Biden and Members of Congress, including Congressman Earl Pomeroy and, from Chief Etchberger's home State of Pennsylvania, Congressman Tim Holden.

We are joined by leaders from across my administration, including Secretary of Veterans Affairs Ric Shinseki, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Jim “Hoss” Cartwright, and leaders from across our Armed Services, including Air Force Secretary Michael Donley and Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz.

I want to acknowledge a group of Americans who understand the valor we recognize today, because they displayed it themselves, members of the Medal of Honor Society. Most of all, we welcome Dick Etchberger’s friends and family, especially his brother Robert and Dick’s three sons, Steve, Richard, and Cory.

For the Etchberger family, this is a day more than 40 years in the making. Cory was just 9 years old, but he can still remember that winter in 1968 when he, his brothers, and his mom were escorted to the Pentagon. The war in Vietnam was still raging. Dick Etchberger had given his life earlier that year. Now his family was being welcomed by the Air Force Chief of Staff.

In a small, private ceremony, Dick was recognized with the highest honor that the Air Force can give, the Air Force Cross. These three sons were told that their dad was a hero, that he had died while saving his fellow airmen, but they weren’t told much else. Their father’s work was classified, and for years, that’s all they really knew.

Then, nearly two decades later, the phone rang. It was the Air Force, and their father’s mission was finally being declassified. And that’s when they learned the truth, that their father had given his life not in Vietnam, but in neighboring Laos. That’s when they began to learn the true measure of their father’s heroism.

Dick Etchberger was a radar technician, and he had been handpicked for a secret assignment. With a small team of men, he served at the summit of one of the tallest mountains in Laos, more than a mile high, literally above the clouds. They manned a tiny radar station, guiding American pilots in the air campaign against North Vietnam.

Dick and his crew believed that they could help turn the tide of the war, perhaps even end it. And that’s why North Vietnamese forces

were determined to shut it down. They sent their planes to strafe the Americans as they worked. They moved in their troops. And eventually, Dick and his team could look through their binoculars and see that their mountain was surrounded by thousands of North Vietnamese troops.

Dick and his crew at that point had a decision to make: ask to be evacuated or continue the mission for another day. They believed that no one could possibly scale the mountain’s steep cliffs, and they believed in their work. So they stayed; they continued their mission.

There were 19 Americans on the mountain that evening. When their shift was over, Dick and his four men moved down to a small, rocky ledge on a safer side of the mountain. And then, during the night, the enemy attacked. Somehow, fighters scaled the cliffs and overran the summit. Down the side of the mountain, Dick and his men were now trapped on that ledge.

The enemy lobbed down grenade after grenade, hour after hour. Dick and his men would grab those grenades and throw them back or kick them into the valley below. But the grenades kept coming. One airman was killed, and then another. A third airman was wounded, and then another. Eventually, Dick was the only man standing.

As a technician, he had no formal combat training. In fact, he had only recently been issued a rifle. But Dick Etchberger was the very definition of an NCO, a leader determined to take care of his men. When the enemy started moving down the rocks, Dick fought them off. When it looked like the ledge would be overrun, he called for airstrikes within yards of his own position, shaking the mountain and clearing the way for a rescue. And in the morning light, an American helicopter came into view.

Richard Etchberger lived the Airman’s Creed to never leave an airman behind, to never falter, to never fail. So as the helicopter hovered above and lowered its sling, Dick loaded his wounded men, one by one, each time exposing himself to enemy fire. And when another airman suddenly rushed forward after eluding the enemy all night, Dick loaded him too and,

finally, himself. They had made it off the mountain.

And that's when it happened. The helicopter began to peel away, a burst of gunfire erupted below, and Dick was wounded. And by the time they landed at the nearest base, he was gone.

Of those 19 men on the mountain that night, only 7 made it out alive. Three of them owed their lives to the actions of Dick Etchberger. Today we're honored to be joined by one of them, Mr. John Daniel.

Among the few who knew of Dick's actions, there was a belief that his valor warranted our Nation's highest military honor. But his mission had been a secret, and that's how it stayed for those many years. When their father's mission was finally declassified, these three sons learned something else. It turned out that their mother had known about Dick's work all along, but she had been sworn to secrecy. And she kept that promise—to her husband and her country—all those years, not even telling her own sons. So today's also a tribute to Catherine Etchberger and a reminder of the extraordinary sacrifices that our military spouses make on behalf of our Nation.

Now, this story might have ended there, with the family finally knowing the truth. And for another two decades, it did. But today also marks another chapter in a larger story of our Nation finally honoring that generation of Vietnam veterans who served with dedication and courage, but all too often were shunned when they came home, which was a disgrace that must never happen again.

A few years ago, an airman who never even knew Dick Etchberger read about his heroism and felt he deserved something more. So he wrote his Congressman, who made it his mission to get this done. Today we thank that airman, retired Master Sergeant Robert Dilley, and that Congressman, Earl Pomeroy, who, along with Congressman Holden, made this day possible.

Sadly, Dick's wife Catherine did not live to see this moment. But today, Steve and Richard and Cory, today your Nation finally acknowledges and fully honors your father's bravery.

Because even though it has been 42 years, it's never too late to do the right thing. And it's never too late to pay tribute to our Vietnam veterans and their families.

In recent years, Dick's story has become known, and Air Force bases have honored him with streets and buildings in his name. And at the base where he trained so long ago in Barksdale in Louisiana, there's a granite monument with an empty space next to his name, and that space can finally be etched with the words "Medal of Honor."

But the greatest memorial of all to Dick Etchberger is the spirit that we feel here today, the love that inspired him to serve, love for his country and love for his family. And most eloquent—the most eloquent expression of that devotion are the words that he wrote himself to a friend back home just months before he gave his life to our Nation. "I hate to be away from home," he wrote from that small base above the clouds, "but I believe in the job." He said, "It is the most challenging job I'll ever have in my life." And then he added, "I love it."

Our Nation endures because there are patriots like Chief Master Sergeant Richard Etchberger and our troops who are serving as we speak, who love this Nation and defend it. And their legacy lives on because their families and fellow citizens preserve it. And as Americans, we remain worthy of their example only so long as we honor it, not merely with the medals that we present, but by remaining true to the values and freedoms for which they fight.

So please join me in welcoming Steve, Richard, and Cory for the reading of the citation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Brig. Gen. David H. Cyr, USAF, Deputy Chief of Chaplains, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, DC; Robert L. Etchberger, brother, and G. Steven Wilson, Richard C. Etchberger, and Cory R. Etchberger, sons, of Mr. Etchberger. Following the President's remarks, Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Maasdam, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citation.

Statement on Armenian National Day September 21, 2010

The people of the United States join the people of Armenia in celebrating Armenia's day of independence today. On this occasion, we recognize and pay tribute to the spirit and accomplishments of the Armenian people and to their achievements around the world. The United

States is proud of the historic ties and friendship between our countries and honored by the many contributions Americans of Armenian ancestry have made to our Nation. We congratulate the people of Armenia on their national day.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session in Falls Church, Virginia September 22, 2010

The President. Thank you, everybody. Thank you. Well, it is great to see you. Thanks, all, for taking the time to be here. I know it's a little warm under the Sun, so if anybody at some point wants to shift their chairs into the shade, I'm fine with that. I won't be insulted.

I want to just make a couple of acknowledgments of people who are here. First of all, I've got the Secretary of Health and Human Services—so she's charged with implementing the Affordable Care Act—Kathleen Sebelius. She's doing a great job—former Governor of Kansas, former insurance commissioner, knows all about this stuff. We're very proud to have her on the team.

Somebody who helped to champion the kinds of reforms and patients' rights that we're going to talk about here today, Congressman Jim Moran is here. Thank you so much, Jim; and Falls Church Mayor Nader Baroukh. I was just mentioning, Baroukh means "blessings" in Hebrew, one who's blessed. And Barack means the same thing. So he and I, we're right there. [*Laughter*] And I know he feels blessed to be the mayor of this wonderful town.

When I came into office, obviously we were confronted with a historic crisis, the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. We had lost 4 million jobs in the 6 months before I was sworn in, and we had lost almost 800,000 the month I was sworn in. Obviously, the economy has been uppermost on our minds, and I had to take a series of steps very quickly to

make sure that we prevented the country from going into a second Great Depression, that the financial markets were stabilized. We've succeeded in doing that, and now the economy is growing again.

But it's not growing as fast as it needs to, and you still have millions of people who are unemployed out there. You still have hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their homes. There's a lot of anxiety and there's a lot of stress out there. And so so much of our focus day to day is trying to figure out how do we just make sure that this recovery that we're slowly on starts accelerating in a way that helps folks all across the country.

But when I ran for office, I ran not just in anticipation of a crisis. I ran because middle class families all across the country were seeing their security eroded, partly because between the years 2001 and 2009, wages actually went down for the average family by 5 percent. We had the slowest job growth of any time since World War II. The Wall Street Journal called it the "lost decade."

And part of the challenge for families was, is that even as their wages and incomes were flatlining, their costs of everything from college tuition to health care was skyrocketing.

And so what we realized was we had to take some steps to start dealing with these underlying chronic problems that have confronted our economy for a very long time. And health care was one of those issues that we could no longer ignore.