

have to remember that our strength as a people runs deeper than our military might, it runs deeper than our GDP; it's also about our values and our ideals that each generation is called to uphold and that each artist helps us better understand.

And it's also about the capacity of the arts and the humanities to connect us to one another. In a nation as big as ours, as diverse as ours, as full as debate and consternation as it sometimes is, what the people we honor here today remind us of is that kernel of ourselves that connects to everyone else and allows us to get out of ourselves, to see through somebody else's eyes, to step in their shoes. And what more vital ingredient is there for our democracy than that?

In 1962, in the last months of his life, the poet Robert Frost was dispatched by President Kennedy to visit the Soviet Union. And it was a gesture of good will. Frost traveled and gave readings, filling venues all across Russia. What he really wanted to do, though, was have a chance to talk to Khrushchev. Frost was a poet, but he was also a pretty tough guy.

It wasn't until the end of his trip that the meeting was arranged. And when they met, even though Frost was frail and sick, he decided he had to speak his mind to the Soviet leader. And Frost stood up and he said, "A great nation makes great poetry." And then he told Khrushchev that he should reunite East and West Berlin.

A great nation should make great poetry. Like so many artists and musicians and writers and poets before him, and so many that came after him, Robert Frost wasn't afraid to say his piece or speak truth to power. He wasn't afraid to tell what was on his mind. He wasn't held

back by convention or what was considered normal or acceptable.

And that is an incredible power, an incredible resource. And we're seeing that power all across the world today. That's what challenges us. That's what pushes us to be better, to be more faithful to the sense of humanity that so often can be lost in the experiences of our daily lives.

Pissarro once said, "Blessed are they who see beautiful things in humble places." That is the blessing of those that we honor here today, and we are blessed that they are able to share what they see and what they hear.

So now it is my privilege to present these medals to our recipients in both the arts and the humanities.

[At this point, Maj. Barrett M. Bernard, USA, Army Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the medals.]

The President. I think it is entirely appropriate for all of us to stand and give a warm congratulations to the recipients of these awards. Not the recipients, you don't have to stand.

Well, congratulations to all the recipients. We're going to take some quick pictures with them, and then usually we have a party around here. [Laughter] Our Marine Band is very good, and the food is pretty good around here too. So enjoy yourselves, and thanks again for helping us to celebrate these extraordinary men and women of letters and the arts. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:54 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to jazz saxophonist and National Medal of Arts recipient Theodore W. "Sonny" Rollins.

Statement on the Death of Minister of Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti of Pakistan March 2, 2011

I am deeply saddened by the assassination of Pakistan's minister for minority affairs Shahbaz Bhatti today in Islamabad and condemn in the strongest possible terms this horrific act of vio-

lence. We offer our profound condolences to his family, loved ones, and all who knew and worked with him. Minister Bhatti fought for and sacrificed his life for the universal values

that Pakistanis, Americans, and people around the world hold dear: the right to speak one's mind, to practice one's religion as one chooses, and to be free from discrimination based on one's background or beliefs.

He was clear eyed about the risks of speaking out, and despite innumerable death threats, he insisted he had a duty to his fellow Pakistanis to defend equal rights and tolerance from those who preach division, hate, and violence. He most courageously challenged the

blasphemy laws of Pakistan under which individuals have been prosecuted for speaking their minds or practicing their own faiths. Those who committed this crime should be brought to justice, and those who share Mr. Bhatti's vision of tolerance and religious freedom must be able to live free from fear. Minister Bhatti will be missed by all who knew him, and the United States will continue to stand with those who are dedicated to his vision of tolerance and dignity for all human beings.

Statement on Congressional Passage of Legislation To Continue Federal Government Appropriations *March 2, 2011*

I'm pleased that Democrats and Republicans in Congress came together and passed a plan that will cut spending and keep the Government running for the next 2 weeks. But we cannot keep doing business this way. Living with the threat of a shutdown every few weeks is not responsible, and it puts our economic progress in jeopardy. That's why I'm calling on Democratic and Republican leaders of Congress to begin meeting immediately with the Vice President, my Chief of Staff, and Budget Director so we can find common ground on a budget that makes sure we are living within

our means. This agreement should cut spending and reduce deficits without damaging economic growth or gutting investments in education, research, and development that will create jobs and secure our future. This agreement should be bipartisan, it should be free of any party's social or political agenda, and it should be reached without delay.

NOTE: The statement referred to White House Chief of Staff William M. Daley. It also referred to H.J. Res. 44.

Statement on Senator Daniel K. Akaka's Decision Not To Seek Reelection *March 2, 2011*

Danny Akaka answered the call to serve right after high school by joining the Army Corps of Engineers during World War II. When he returned to Honolulu, he continued to serve the people of Hawaii as an educator before embarking on more than three decades of distinguished service in both Houses of Congress. Danny spent his career fighting for our troops, veterans, and their families, and for the rights of Native Hawaiians. He worked tirelessly to reform Wall

Street and to make sure that consumers and small-business owners are treated fairly in our system. His voice in the Senate will be missed.

Michelle and I would like to join the people of Hawaii in saying mahalo to Danny for his lifetime of service and offer both him and Millie our best wishes for the future.

NOTE: The statement referred to M. Mildred Akaka, wife of Sen. Akaka.