

Italy has made a remarkable progress in the past 14 months: the Italian Government with parliamentary support of different and even opposite political forces, and with the comprehension of different social groups and of all citizens. While this progress must and will continue and be developed because Italy needs it, Europe needs it, and I think the world as a whole needs it.

The announcement which has been made, just made in Brussels and in Washington—significantly because I was impressed by the words, “We, the leaders of the European Union and of the United States.” It was a beautiful *incipit*. Yes, well, I think that the trade—the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which will be realized—now we are the opening talks, but I am sure about also the conclusion—can represent a relevant contribution for promoting a new wave of development, of technologic advancement, of social justice on both shores of the Atlantic. And I think it can represent even something more. It is to say a new historic stage in relations between Europe and the United States, not only

economically, but also from a political and moral point of view.

My conviction is that the effect that a shift has been taking place in the center of gravity of the world development of international relations doesn’t cancel at all the crucial importance of transatlantic alliance, of transatlantic relations. On the contrary, it represents a new stimulus for us to make such a framework of relation more active, more competitive. It is absolutely necessary for a better world to have our common heritage of values and experiences be a decisive factor also in the course of globalization in the next future.

It is the spirit in which I am here to testify once more my personal friendship and my admiration for President Obama, only deploring that the visit of President and his family in Rome was so short, and expecting a new visit also in my new capacity. I be in another palace, but I be there to welcome you.

*President Obama.* That’s great. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

## Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Citizens Medal February 15, 2013

*The President.* Thank you very much, everybody. Please, please have a seat. Well, it is a pleasure to welcome some of our Nation’s finest citizens here to the people’s house. And let me be the first to congratulate each of you and your family members for the receipt of the highest honor a civilian can receive: the Citizens Medal.

We host a lot of events at the White House, but I have to admit this is one of my favorites, because it’s a moment when, as a people, we get to recognize some extraordinary men and women who have gone above and beyond for their country and for their fellow citizens, often without fanfare, often with not a lot of attention, very rarely for any profit. You do it because it’s the right thing to do, because you want to give back. And today we honor you, we celebrate you, and most of all, we have a

chance to say thank you. Because all of us—are what the rest of us aspire to be.

In America, we have the benefit of living in this big and diverse nation. We’re home to 315 million people who come from every background, who worship every faith, who hold every single point of view. But what binds us together, what unites us, is a single sacred word: citizen.

It’s a word that, as I said in my State of the Union Address, doesn’t just describe our nationality or our legal status, the fact that we hold a passport. It defines our way of life. It captures our belief in something bigger than ourselves; our willingness to accept certain obligations to one another and to embrace the idea that we’re all in this together, that out of many, we are one. It’s the thing that de Tocqueville noticed about America when he first came to visit: These folks participate, they get

involved, they have a point of view; they don't just wait for somebody else to do something, they go out there and do it, and they join, and they become part of groups, and they mobilize, and they organize.

That's who we are; that's in our DNA. That's what it means to be a citizen of the United States of America. We've all got busy lives. We've got bills to pay. We've got kids to car-pool, errands to get done. And in the midst of all the running around, it would be easy and even understandable for folks to just focus on themselves, to worry about our own lives, to look down the street and see a neighbor in need and say, "I'd like to help, but I've got problems of my own." To look across town at a community that's in despair and say, "That's just too big a challenge for us to be able to take on."

That's not who we are. That's not what we do. That's not what built this country. In this country, we look out for one another. We get each other's backs, especially in times of hardship or challenge. It's part of the reason why applications to AmeriCorps are at an alltime high. That's why volunteering in America is at the highest level it's been in years. And I know that makes Harris proud to hear.

Now, Harris Wofford has devoted his entire life to creating opportunities for Americans to serve. And the reason it's such a privilege for me to share the stage with him and all the others who are participating here today, is because you've taken commitment to a whole new level. Every day, you're out there righting wrongs, healing hurts, changing lives.

And when Janice Jackson was hit by a car at the age of 24, she was told by her doctors that the only thing she would ever move again were her shoulders. After suffering an injury like that, nobody would have faulted Janice for just focusing on herself. But as she recovered, and she regained her strength, she resolved to give some of that strength to others in need. Janice said that "from a wheelchair, I decided to devote my life to women with disabilities to tell them that even though you have limitations, you also have abilities." And every day, through

her mentorship and through her advocacy, that's exactly what she's doing.

When Adam Burke returned from Iraq, he had more than earned the right to just focus on himself. He had served our Nation with honor: a recipient of the Purple Heart for wounds he received while rescuing a comrade from enemy fire. Because of that attack—because of the shrapnel that tore through his head and his legs—when Adam came home, he came home a wounded warrior, suffering from a traumatic brain injury, posttraumatic stress disorder. But a few years later, Adam found himself back on the family farm, and he noticed that working the land was therapeutic. His coordination improved. He was able to put aside his cane. So he decided to use farming to help other veterans with similar injuries see similar benefits. And by starting Veterans Farm, he's doing that every day.

When Jeanne Manford learned that her son Morty had been badly beaten up at a gay rights demonstration, nobody would have faulted her for bringing him home, holding him close, just focusing on her child. This was back in 1972. There was a lot of hate, a lot of vitriol towards gays and lesbians and anyone who supported them. But instead, she wrote to the local newspaper and took to the streets with a simple message: No matter who her son was—no matter who he loved—she loved him and wouldn't put up with this kind of nonsense. And in that simple act, she inspired a movement and gave rise to a national organization that has given so much support to parents and families and friends and helped to change this country. We lost Jeanne last month, but her legacy carries on, every day, in the countless lives that she touched.

And then when Dawn Hochsprung and Mary Sherlach, Vicki Soto, Lauren Rousseau, Rachel D'Avino, Anne Marie Murphy, when they showed up for work at Sandy Hook Elementary on December 14 of last year, they expected a day like any other, doing what was right for their kids, spent a chilly morning readying classrooms and welcoming young students. They had no idea that evil was about to strike. And when it did, they could have taken

shelter by themselves. They could have focused on their own safety, on their own well-being. But they didn't. They gave their lives to protect the precious children in their care. They gave all they had for the most innocent and helpless among us.

And that's what we honor today: the courageous heart, the selfless spirit, the inspiring actions of extraordinary Americans, extraordinary citizens.

We are a nation of 315 million people. Out of all these folks, around 6,000 were nominated for this medal. And today you're the ones receiving it not just for what you do, but for what you represent: for the shining example that you set every single day and the inspiration that you give each of us as fellow citizens, including your President.

So congratulations to the recipients. And now I would like our Military Aide to read the citations.

[At this point, Lt. Col. Owen G. Ray, USA, Army Aide to the President, read the citations. The President then presented the medals, assisted by Maj. Gary Marlowe, USAF, Air Force Aide to the President.]

*The President.* Let me close by just saying a few words of thanks. First of all, to Wendy and all the people at the Corporation for National and Community Service, thank you for all that you do to make our communities and our country stronger. We're very grateful.

To those who nominated these outstanding individuals, thank you for taking the time to

share their stories. The competition was stiff. And your words gave life to their work.

To all the family and friends who are here celebrating with the winners, thank you for the love and support that you provide to them every single day, because they couldn't do what they do unless somebody had that love and support for them. I know the awardees would agree that this honor belongs not just to themselves, but to everybody who supports them.

And finally, to the winners of this year's Citizens Medal, we want to congratulate you once again. A special note just to the families who are here from Sandy Hook: We are so blessed to be with you. I've gotten to know many of you during the course of some very difficult weeks. And your courage and love for each other and your communities shines through every single day. And we could not be more blessed and grateful for your loved ones who gave everything they had on behalf of our kids.

On behalf of a grateful nation, thanks to all of you for showing us what it means to be a citizen of this country that we love. Hopefully, we will all draw inspiration from this and remember why it is that we're lucky to be living in the greatest nation on Earth. Thank you all for coming, and enjoy the reception.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Sen. Harris L. Wofford; Janice Y. Jackson, creator and program director, Women Embracing Abilities Now; and Wendy Spencer, chair, Corporation for National and Community Service.

## Remarks at the Hyde Park Academy High School in Chicago, Illinois February 15, 2013

*The President.* Hey, Chicago! Hello, Chicago! Hello, everybody. Hello, Hyde Park. It is good to be home. It is good to be home. Everybody, have a seat. You all relax. It's just me. You all know me. It is good to be back home.

A couple of people I want to acknowledge: First of all, I want to thank your mayor, my great friend, Rahm Emanuel, for his outstanding leadership of the city and his kind introduc-

tion. I want to thank everybody here at Hyde Park Academy for welcoming me here today.

I want to acknowledge your principal and your assistant principal—although, they really make me feel old, because when I saw them—[laughter]—where are they? Where are they? Stand up, stand up. They are doing outstanding work. We're very, very proud of them. But you do make me feel old. Sit down. [Laughter]