

University; Mario J. Molina, professor of chemistry and biochemistry, University of Cali-

fornia–San Diego; and former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

## Remarks at a Dinner in Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Presidential Medal of Freedom *November 20, 2013*

Good evening, everybody. Please have a seat. Michelle and I are so pleased to join you tonight to honor the legacy of an American leader in a building dedicated to the preservation of our American history.

And we are thrilled to be joined by so many people whose accomplishments helped write new chapters in that history. This morning I recognized 16 brilliant, compassionate, wildly talented people with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian award. And that was intimidating enough. Tonight I'm facing dozens of you.

To the Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients of this year and years past, it is a great honor to be with you for this anniversary celebration. To Wayne Clough, thank you for hosting us and for all the Smithsonian does to enrich our cultural heritage. And to Jack, I have to say that our new Ambassador to Japan, I'm sure, would be pleased with how you performed this evening. I'll give her a full report. *[Laughter]* To all the family members of the Kennedy family, we are grateful for your presence and your enduring contributions to the life of our country.

For centuries, awards have existed for military valor. And 50 years ago, President John F. Kennedy established a way to award extraordinary civilian virtue: contributions to our country, service to our democracy, a dedication to our humanity that has advanced the common interest of freedom-loving people, both here at home and around the world.

Since its creation, the Presidential Medal of Freedom has paid tribute to the creativity of writers, and artists, and entertainers. We've recognized the leadership of elected officials and civil rights organizers, the imagination of scientists and business leaders, the grit and determination of our astronauts and our athletes.

Because there is no one way to contribute to the success of America. What makes us great is that we believe in a certain set of values that encourage freedom of expression and aspiration. We celebrate imagination and education and occasional rebellion. And we refuse to set limits on what we can do or who we can be.

And other peoples in other times have marked their history by moments of conquest at war, by dominion over empires. But in the arc of human history, the American experience stands apart, because our triumph is not simply found in the exertion of our power, it's found in the example of our people. Our particular genius over 237 years has been something more than the sum of our individual excellence, but rather a culmination of our common endeavors.

It's a truth that resonated with President Kennedy when he said, ". . . I am certain that after the dust of centuries has passed over our cities, we . . . will be remembered not for our victories or defeats in battle or in politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit."

And that unbending belief that the power to make great a nation is found in its people and in their freedom, that was his philosophy. That is his legacy.

And it's a legacy told in villages around the world that have clean water or a new school and a steady friend in the United States, thanks to the volunteers of the Peace Corps. It's a legacy found in the courage of all who serve under our proud flag, willing, like President Kennedy himself, to pay any price and bear any burden for the survival and success of our liberty.

It's a legacy on display in the arts and culture that he and Jackie championed as part of our national character, a legacy planted on the Moon that he said that we'd visit and that we did, in the stars beyond, but also in the

breakthroughs of the generations of scientists that his audacious promise inspired.

It's a legacy continued by his brothers and his sisters, who have left this a more gentle and compassionate country. Jean, a Medal of Freedom recipient herself and a diplomat in every sense, is with us tonight. Bobby, whose wife Ethel is one of my dearest friends; as Jack noted, we'd be celebrating Bobby's 88th birthday today. Eunice and Pat were devoted advocates for Americans of all abilities. And Teddy, the youngest brother with the biggest heart, he was a happy warrior who never forgot who we were sent here to serve and waged a decades-long battle on behalf of those folks who sent us here: for workers' rights and immigrants' rights and the right to affordable health care. Tonight our sympathies are with the love of Teddy's life, Vicki, as she mourns the loss of her father, Judge Edmund Reggie.

And it's all told a legacy of service that the Kennedy family continues to this day: from Caroline, who's already drawing crowds of her own as she settles into her role as Ambassador in Japan; to his great-nephew, and Massachusetts' newest Congressman, Joe Kennedy; to the school of public service that bears the family name and teaches its young leaders how they too might one day pass the torch to a new generation.

This is a legacy of a man who could have retreated to a life of luxury and ease, but who chose to live a life in the arena, sailing sometimes against the wind, sometimes with it. And that's why, 50 years later, John F. Kennedy stands for posterity as he did in life: young and bold and daring. And he stays with us in our imagination not because he left us too soon, but because he embodied the character of the people that he led: resilient, resolute; fearless and fun-loving; defiant in the face of impossible odds; and most of all, determined to make the world anew, not settling for what is, but rather for what might be. And in his idealism—his sober, square-jawed idealism—we are reminded that the power to change this country is ours.

This afternoon Michelle and I were joined by President Clinton and Secretary Clinton to

pay tribute to that proud legacy. We had a chance to lay a wreath at the gravesite at Arlington, where President Kennedy is surrounded by his wife and younger brothers, and where he will rest in peace for all time, remembered not just for his victories in battle or in politics, but for the words he uttered all those years ago: "We will be remembered for our contribution to the human spirit."

How blessed we are to live in a country where these contributions overflow in ways both heralded and not so heralded. The thousands of people in San Francisco who helped a little boy recovering from cancer live out his superhero dreams, that's part of that spirit. The Marines deploying relief after a devastating typhoon and all across an ocean, people checking on their neighbors after a tornado, the families across the country who will spend Thanksgiving Day cooking feasts so others less fortunate might eat—that's part of the spirit.

That's who we are: a people whose greatness comes not by settling for what we can achieve in our own lives, but also because we dare to ask what we can do, as citizens, to contribute to this grand experiment we call America.

And that's what our Presidential Medal of Freedom honorees embody, each and every one of them who are here today and those who we remember posthumously. That's the living legacy of the Kennedy family. And that is the responsibility we all welcome, as Americans, for our lifetime on this planet.

We are extraordinarily blessed to be Americans because we have the opportunity to serve in ways that so many of you have served, because we have the opportunity to touch lives in the ways that so many of you have touched lives.

God bless you all, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:26 p.m. at the National Museum of American History. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Ambassador to Japan Caroline Bouvier Kennedy; Jean Kennedy Smith, sister of former President John F. Kennedy; Ethel Kennedy, widow of former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy; former Rep.

Patrick J. Kennedy II; Victoria Reggie Kennedy, widow of former Sen. Edward M. Kennedy; and Miles Scott, a 5-year-old cancer patient who,

with the help of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, was given an opportunity to be the superhero “Batkid” for a day in San Francisco, CA.

## Remarks on Procedural Rule Changes in the Senate

*November 21, 2013*

Good afternoon, everybody. It’s no secret that the American people have probably never been more frustrated with Washington. And one of the reasons why that is, is that over the past 5 years, we’ve seen an unprecedented pattern of obstruction in Congress that’s prevented too much of the American people’s business from getting done.

All too often, we’ve seen a single Senator or a handful of Senators choose to abuse arcane procedural tactics to unilaterally block bipartisan compromises or to prevent well-qualified, patriotic Americans from filling critical positions of public service in our system of Government.

Now, at a time when millions of Americans have desperately searched for work, repeated abuse of these tactics have blocked legislation that might create jobs. They’ve defeated actions that would help women fighting for equal pay. They’ve prevented more progress than we would have liked for striving young immigrants trying to earn their citizenship. Or it’s blocked efforts to end tax breaks for companies that are shipping jobs overseas. They’ve even been used to block commonsense and widely supported steps to protect more Americans from gun violence, even as families of victims sat in the Senate Chamber and watched. And they’ve prevented far too many talented Americans from serving their country at a time when their country needs their talents the most.

It’s harmed our economy, and it’s been harmful to our democracy. And it’s brought us to the point where a simple majority vote no longer seems to be sufficient for anything, even routine business, through what is supposed to be the world’s greatest deliberative body.

Now, I realize that neither party has been blameless for these tactics. They’ve developed over years, and it seems as if they’ve continual-

ly escalated. But today’s pattern of obstruction, it just isn’t normal. It’s not what our Founders envisioned. A deliberate and determined effort to obstruct everything, no matter what the merits, just to reflight the results of an election, is not normal. And for the sake of future generations, we can’t let it become normal.

So I support the step a majority of Senators today took to change the way that Washington is doing business, more specifically, the way the Senate does business. What a majority of Senators determined by Senate rule is that they would restore the longstanding tradition of considering judicial and public service nominations on a more routine basis.

And here’s why this is important: One of a President’s constitutional responsibilities is to nominate Americans to positions within the executive and judicial branches. Over the six decades before I took office, only 20 Presidential nominees to executive positions had to overcome filibusters. In just under 5 years since I took office, nearly 30 nominees have been treated this way. Now, these are all public servants who protect our national security, look out for working families, keep our air and water clean.

This year alone, for the first time in history, Senate Republicans filibustered a President’s nominee for the Secretary of Defense who used to be a former Republican Senator. They tried everything they could to hold up our EPA Administrator. They blocked our nominee for our top housing regulator at a time when we need more help for more families to afford a home and prevent what has caused mortgage meltdowns from happening again.

And in each of these cases, it’s not been because they opposed the person, that there was some assessment that they were unqualified, that there was some scandal that had been unearthed. It was simply because they opposed