

July 8 / Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

cynical. We all have a stake in Government success, because the Government is us.

And we're doing things right. When we're tracking weather more effectively, that saves lives for folks who are in the path of a tornado. When we're delivering, effectively, data on improved health care choices, that's going to save lives and reduce costs. And we've got the potential to do so much better than we're doing right now, but we're going to need the help of the private sector and non-for-profits. Most of all, we want to make sure that we're empowering some of the folks who are sitting here today to make sure that they can deliver on the kind

of 21st-century Government that the American people want.

So thank you very much, everybody. Keep up the good work.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Peter Hudson, co-founder and chief executive officer, and Wayne Guerra, cofounder and chief medical officer, iTriage; Scott Wu, founding team member, Upstart Network, Inc.; Clair Holroyd, former senior product manager, Sony Network Entertainment; and Garren Givens, chief executive officer, Dibsie.com.

Statement on the Observance of Ramadan July 8, 2013

With the start of the sacred month of Ramadan, Michelle and I extend our best wishes to Muslim communities here in the United States and around the world.

For the world's 1.5 billion Muslims, Ramadan is a time for thoughtful reflection, fasting, and devotion. It is also an opportunity for family and friends to come together and celebrate the principles that bind people of different faiths: a commitment to peace, justice, equality, and compassion towards our fellow human beings. These bonds are far stronger than the differences that too often drive us apart.

This month also reminds us that freedom, dignity, and opportunity are the undeniable rights of all mankind. We reflect on these universal values at a time when many citizens across the Middle East and North Africa continue to strive for these basic rights and as millions of refugees mark Ramadan far from their

homes. The United States stands with those who are working to build a world where all people can write their own future and practice their faith freely, without fear of violence.

In the United States, Ramadan is a reminder that millions of Muslim Americans enrich our Nation each day: serving in our Government, leading scientific breakthroughs, generating jobs, and caring for our neighbors in need. I have been honored to host an iftar dinner at the White House each of the past 4 years, and this year, I look forward to welcoming Muslim Americans who are contributing to our country as entrepreneurs, activists, and artists.

I wish Muslims across America and around the world a month blessed with the joys of family, peace, and understanding. *Ramadan kareem.*

Remarks on Presenting the National Medal of Arts and the National Humanities Medal July 10, 2013

Hey! Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. See, everybody is cheering because I've bought their books, I've seen their movies, I buy their records.

[Laughter] So we're major contributors here.

Well, hello, everybody, and welcome to the White House. Thank you for joining us to cele-

brate the recipients of the 2012—because, I guess, this is retrospective—National Medal of Arts and National Humanities Medals.

Now, one of the special privileges of this office is getting a chance to honor individuals who have played an important role in my life as well as in the Nation's life. And that's what today is all about: celebrating some extraordinary men and women who've used their talents in the arts and the humanities to open up minds and nourish souls and help us understand what it means to be human and what it means to be an American.

I want to give some special thanks to the people who help to preserve and to support that cultural legacy: the Acting Chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Joan Shigekawa. Give Joan a big round of applause. Where is she? There she is. And her predecessor, the irrepressible Rocco Landesman. As well as the Acting Chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Carole Watson. Both organizations do an incredible job lifting up some of today's best artists and scholars and helping to cultivate the next generation of talent and intellect.

And I'd like to also acknowledge the Co-chairs of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, George Stevens, Jr. Where's George? There he is. As well as Margo Lion. Where's Margo? Good to see you. As well as Members of Congress who are here today, all of whom support the arts.

But we are primarily here to acknowledge these incredible individuals. And frankly, this is just fun for me because I feel like I know you all, because I've enjoyed your performances; your writings have fundamentally changed me—I think for the better, Marilynne. I believe that.

At first glance, this is a pretty diverse group. We've got incredible singers and dancers; we have poets and producers, musicians, playwrights, scholars. They come from all across the country, all around the world. And yet, for all their differences, today's honorees have one thing in common, and that is, they are teachers. Whether they realize it or not, they've taught us about ourselves and about our world.

American philosopher Will Durant once wrote that “the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.” And that's an extraordinary skill: to tell the untold stories of history, to reveal the sculpture that's waiting there in a block of stone, to transform written music into song, to make it look like those planes in space are actually flying like they are. [Laughter] I'm just saying. I remember when I first saw “Star Wars.” [Laughter] There's a whole generation that thinks special effects always looked like they do today. [Laughter] But it used to be you'd see, like, the string—[laughter]—on the little model spaceships. Anyway, I'm being led astray. [Laughter]

Because the arts and the humanities aren't just a source of entertainment. They challenge us to think and to question and to discover, to seek that inward significance, and that helps us grow and to change and to reach new heights and to understand each other at a time when the world is constantly crying for the capacity to bridge that gap and speak to people who aren't like us. And that's exactly what these artists and these humanists have done by working hard, developing their craft, following their dreams, never giving up.

Somebody like Allen Toussaint, who is being honored here for his incredible contributions to the rhythm and blues and jazz music of his beloved New Orleans. After his hometown was battered by Katrina and Allen was forced to evacuate, he did something even more important for his city: He went back. And since then, Allen's devoted his musical talent to lifting up and building up a city. And today, he's taking the stage all over the world, with all kinds of incredible talent, doing everything he can to revive the legendary soul of the Big Easy.

Somebody like Ernest Gaines, who grew up as descendent of sharecroppers in the South and farming the same land as his ancestors. He did not let that define his future. Instead, he took that experience and used it to help fill in gaps in American literature with the stories of African American life. And then, Ernest moved back to Louisiana onto the very same land he and his family had once worked. And

he spent more than 20 years teaching college students to find their own voices and reclaiming some of the stories of their own families and their own lives.

Somebody like Joan Didion, who rightly has earned distinction as one of the most celebrated American writers of her generation. I'm surprised she hasn't already gotten this award. [Laughter] But in her early years, she was in school only sporadically, basically taught herself how to read while she and her family followed her Army office father around the country. She obviously learned quickly. She won a contest for Vogue in college, gave up her dream of being an oceanographer; writing became her world. And today, decades into career, she remains one of our sharpest and most respected observers of American politics and culture.

What's true for those three is true for all the recipients here. So many of you have touched me and touched Michelle, and now we're trying to get them to—Malia and Sasha—to see some of Anna's work or read "Gilead" because we want to share that, because we think it was important to us.

And we were—we celebrate people like our honorees here today not just because of their talent, but because they create something new. They create a new space and that becomes a lasting contribution to American life. And that's true for all of these honorees.

So together, the men and women with us today have helped us appreciate individual talent, but as I said earlier, they've also helped us to bridge our differences: to recognize all the things we share as Americans, whether it's arts or humanities or sports.

Frank, I grew up reading Sports Illustrated, and I think it was very good for me. I don't know about you. [Laughter] Because all these endeavors, they don't discriminate, they don't prejudice; they speak to all of us equally if we're open to it. They're part of all of our common heritage. They convey all these distinct voices and emotions and stories, and that's us. That's who we are.

So for more than 200 years, that culture has helped shape our views of democracy and freedom and tolerance and progress. Sometimes, the observations or the incredible art or scholarship that's been done by these honorees are overlooked, but somewhere, they're having an impact. And like Bobby Kennedy talked about, they create "ripples of hope." They're like stones in a lake, and it emanates, and we never know exactly how—or who will be touched by it. But it makes a difference. And it's made us better.

And the work that we honor today, the lifetime achievement of these artists and these scholars, reminds us that the human imagination is still the most powerful tool that we have as a people. That's why we celebrate their creativity and the fundamental optimism, the notion that if they work that hard, somebody will actually pay attention. And that's why we have to remain committed to the dreamers and the creators and innovators who fuel that progress and help us light the way ahead, because our children, our grandchildren deserve to grow up in a country where their dreams know no bounds and their ambitions extend as far as their talents and hard work can take them. And it's important that they have examples, people who've carved out a path for them.

So I want to thank today's honorees for doing their part to foster that spirit, to enrich our entire Nation. Every one of them has helped us see beyond outward appearances and appreciate the significant—the significance of what's within. And for that we are incredibly grateful.

So it is now my privilege to present these medals to each of them as one of our Military Aides reads their citations. Lee.

[At this point, Maj. S. Lee Meyer, USMC, Marine Corps Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the medals, assisted by Maj. Michael Wagner, USA, Army Aide to the President.]

Let's give our honorees one more big round of applause. Hey! You guys also.

Well, I could not imagine a more deserving group of honorees. We are thrilled to have them here.

Fear not, the party is not over. [Laughter] My understanding is the food here at the White House is not bad. [Laughter] And we may get some nice tunes from our Marine Band; they can play anything, so feel free to make requests. [Laughter]

But to all the honorees, thank you again for enriching our lives in so many different ways. We're going to have an opportunity to see you and your families and take some pictures with the honor-

ees. In the meantime, enjoy the reception. And thank you all. I hope you've enjoyed it. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:16 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to author Marilynne Robinson, actor and playwright Anna Deavere Smith, and sportswriter Frank Deford, recipients of the National Humanities Medal; and musician and composer Allen Toussaint, and authors Ernest J. Gaines and Joan Didion, recipients of the National Medal of Arts. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the reading of the citations.

Statement on the Resignation of Janet A. Napolitano as Secretary of Homeland Security

July 12, 2013

I want to thank Secretary Napolitano for her outstanding work on behalf of the American people over the last 4 years. At the Department of Homeland Security, Janet's portfolio has included some of the toughest challenges facing our country. She's worked around the clock to respond to natural disasters, from the Joplin tornado to Hurricane Sandy, helping Americans recover and rebuild. Since day one, Janet has led my administration's effort to secure our borders, de-

ploying a historic number of resources, while also taking steps to make our immigration system fairer and more consistent with our values. And the American people are safer and more secure thanks to Janet's leadership in protecting our homeland against terrorist attacks. I've come to rely on Janet's judgment and advice, but I've also come to value her friendship. And as she begins a new chapter in a remarkable career of public service, I wish her the best of luck.

Statement on Signing Legislation Concerning the Participation of Taiwan in the International Civil Aviation Organization

July 12, 2013

Today I have signed into law H.R. 1151, an Act concerning participation of Taiwan in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The United States fully supports Taiwan's membership in international organizations where statehood is not a requirement for membership and encourages Taiwan's meaningful participation, as appropriate, in organizations where its membership is not possible. My Administration has publicly supported Taiwan's participation at the ICAO and will continue to do so. Consistent with my

constitutional authority to conduct foreign affairs, my Administration shall construe the Act to be consistent with the "one China" policy of the United States, which remains unchanged, and shall determine the measures best suited to advance the overall goal of Taiwan's participation in the ICAO. I note that sections 1(b) and 1(c) of the Act contain impermissibly mandatory language purporting to direct the Secretary of State to undertake certain diplomatic initiatives and to report to the Congress on the progress of those