



STATEMENT

Condemning Remarks by Former President Trump that Diminish the Selfless Service and Sacrifice of Medal of Honor Recipients

(Washington – August 19, 2024) – Recently, former President Donald Trump diminished and insulted the selfless sacrifice of U.S. military service members awarded the Medal of Honor – and, by extension, every service member and military family member – who sacrificed in service of their country. Striking one wrong note after another, former President Trump gushed that the Presidential Medal of Freedom that he personally awarded to a partisan megadonor was “equivalent of,” “rated equal,” and, “actually much better,” than the deeply revered Medal of Honor – the highest award granted by the United States.

“...the Presidential Medal of Freedom, that’s the highest award you can get as a civilian. It’s the equivalent of the Congressional [sic] Medal of Honor but civilian version. It’s actually much better because everyone gets the Congressional Medal of Honor, that’s soldiers, they’re either in very bad shape because they’ve been hit so many times by bullets or they’re dead. She gets it, and she’s a healthy, beautiful woman, it’s very...[laughs] And they’re rated equal.”- [said](#) Donald J. Trump, former President of the United States, August 15, 2024

First authorized in 1861 during the U.S. Civil War, the Medal of Honor’s sharply limiting criteria for award are enshrined in [federal law](#) passed by Congress and first signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln.

Current law provides that, *“the President may award, and present in the name of Congress, a [M]edal of [H]onor ... to a person who while a member of the [U.S. Armed Forces], distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.”*

Circumstances for which the Medal of Honor may be awarded include,

*“(1) while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States;
“(2) while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or
“(3) while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.”*

By contrast, the Presidential Medal of Freedom was specifically established by mere Presidential [Executive Order](#) in 1945.

Under profoundly different criteria from the “gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty” in combat required for award of the Medal of Honor, any President may

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award the civilian medal, “to any person who has made an especially meritorious contribution to:

“(1) the security or national interests of the United States, or

“(2) world peace, or

“(3) cultural or other significant public or private endeavors”

Additionally, despite the repeated false equivalency statements by an ill-informed and poorly prepared former *Commander in Chief* Trump that the two medals are “equal” and that the civilian award is “actually much better” than the Medal of Honor:

For U.S. Navy personnel, the Medal of Honor of course ranks first in order of precedence, while the Presidential Medal of Freedom – authorized for wear on the naval uniform [after](#) all military decorations and unit awards – ranks 25th in order of precedence.

For U.S. Army personnel, the Medal of Honor is also obviously first in order of precedence, while the Presidential Medal of Freedom – authorized for wear on the Army uniform [after](#) all 33 military decorations and 18 unit awards – ranks 52nd.

Selfless service examples of a few of the recent Medal of Honor recipients:

U.S. Army [Sergeant First Class Alwyn Cashe](#) (3rd Infantry Division), “distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while engaging with the enemy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom,” when he rescued multiple members of his platoon from a burning Bradley Fighting Vehicle in Iraq even as he was on fire himself, and refused evacuation until his soldiers were safe. Ultimately, he died from his wounds.

“Again and again, he continues to go back, soaked in fuel, on fire, with no regard for his own safety to get everybody out.” -Col. Jimmy Hathaway, Cashe's company commander

U.S. Army [Staff Sergeant Travis Atkins](#) (10th Mountain Division), “distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty” when he tackled a suicide bomber in Iraq and wrapped him in a bear hug to shield his fellow soldiers from the blast.

“Aware of the imminent danger, Atkins threw himself on top of the suicide bomber, pinning him to the ground and shielding his Soldiers from the imminent explosion while bearing the brunt of the blast as the bomb detonated. In this critical and selfless act of valor, which mortally wounded him, Atkins saved the lives of three other Soldiers who were with him.”

U.S. Army [Sergeant First Class Leroy Arthur Petry](#) (75th Ranger Regiment), “distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with an armed enemy in the vicinity of Paktya Province, Afghanistan,” when he picked up live grenade during a firefight and threw it back in order to shield his fellow soldiers, thereby sacrificing part of his body in order to save the lives of others.

“Petry had already been shot in both legs when a grenade was thrown over a wall into the compound they were clearing. When it landed just feet away from two of his squadmates he

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knew exactly what to do. Without hesitating, he picked up the grenade to toss it back. As he released it, it detonated, taking off his right hand. 'If not for Staff Sergeant Petry's actions we [his fellow soldiers] would have been seriously wounded or killed.'"

U.S. Navy [Petty Officer Second Class \(SEAL\) Michael Monsoor](#) (Special Warfare Task Group Arabian Peninsula), "distinguished himself through conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity ... above and beyond the call of duty" in Iraq when, "*without hesitation and showing no regard for his own life, he threw himself onto a grenade, smothering it to protect his teammates who were lying in close proximity.*" "*The grenade detonated as he came down on top of it, mortally wounding him.*" He sacrificed his own life to save the lives of his teammates.

Appalling, Insulting, and Unacceptable

The selfless service and heroism of Medal of Honor recipients, in the face of grave or mortal risk to their own lives, reflects the very best our nation has to offer.

Mr. Trump's comments show a shocking lack of understanding, especially for a former Commander in Chief, of the inherent sense of selfless service, duty, and willingness to sacrifice their own interests and well-being – up to and including being willing to make the ultimate sacrifice – by the myriad dedicated men and women of our U.S. Armed Forces.

Our military service members take an [oath](#): "to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic," to "bear true faith and allegiance to the same," and, in the case of enlisted service members, to "obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over" them. Given this profound potential impact on the very lives of our military service members and those who love and care for them, the duties as Commander in Chief are among the most grave of all Presidential responsibilities.

These comments are appalling, insulting, and unacceptable to have been made by anyone, let alone by a former Commander in Chief. For their selfless service to our nation, America's military servicemembers deserve better.

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