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JANUARY 04, 2025

# President Biden Announces Recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom

[ MORALLY OUTRAGEOUS ]



Today, President Biden named nineteen recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the Nation’s highest civilian honor, presented to individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public or private endeavors.

President Biden believes great leaders keep the faith, give everyone a fair shot, and put decency above all else. These nineteen individuals are great leaders who have made America and the world a better place. They are great leaders because they are good people who have made extraordinary contributions to their country and the world.

The awards will be presented at the White House on January 4, 2025. The following individuals will be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom:

### **José Andrés**

José Andrés is a renowned Spanish-American culinary innovator who popularized tapas in the United States. His World Central Kitchen provides large-scale relief to communities affected by natural disasters and conflict around the world.

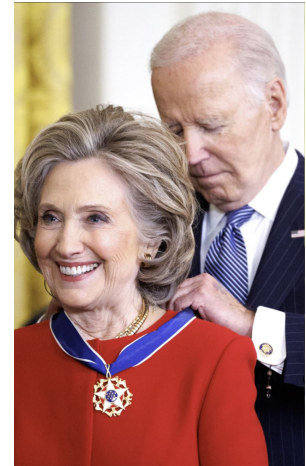
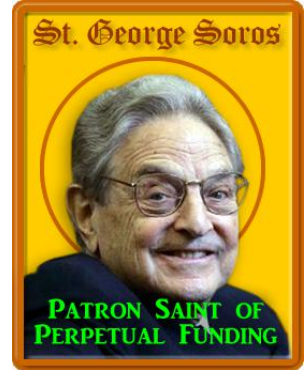
### **Bono**

Bono is the frontman for legendary rock band U2 and a pioneering activist against AIDS and poverty. He brought together politicians from opposing parties to create the United States PEPFAR AIDS program, and is co-founder of campaigning organizations ONE and (RED).

### **Ashton Baldwin Carter** (posthumous)

Ash Carter served as the 25th Secretary of Defense and devoted his career to making the nation safer for all. Throughout his career, he served under 11 Secretaries of Defense in both Democratic and Republican administrations.

### **Hillary Rodham Clinton**



Secretary Clinton made history many times over decades in public service, including as the first First Lady elected to the United States Senate. After serving as Secretary of State, she became the first woman nominated for president by a major United States political party.

### **Michael J. Fox**

Michael J. Fox is an actor who has won five Emmy Awards, four Golden Globe Awards, two Screen Actors Guild Awards, and a Grammy Award. He is a world-renowned advocate for Parkinson's disease research and development.

### **Tim Gill**

Tim Gill is a visionary entrepreneur whose work has advanced LGBTQI rights and equality. After transforming the publishing industry through groundbreaking software, he leveraged his success to secure key victories in the fight for marriage equality and anti-discrimination protections.

### **Jane Goodall**

Dr. Jane Goodall is a world-renowned ethologist and conservationist whose research transformed our understanding of primates and human evolution. She is a passionate advocate for empowering individuals and communities to protect and preserve the natural world.

### **Fannie Lou Hamer** (posthumous)

Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer transformed the struggle for racial justice in America. As a founder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, she challenged the exclusion of Black voices in the political system and laid the groundwork for the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

### **Earvin "Magic" Johnson**

Earvin "Magic" Johnson is a legendary retired basketball player who led the Los Angeles Lakers to five championships. Off the court, he is a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist who supports underserved communities through his Magic Johnson Foundation.

### **Robert Francis Kennedy** (posthumous)

Robert Francis Kennedy is remembered as an Attorney General who fiercely combatted racial segregation, and as a United States Senator who sought to address poverty and inequality in the country. His legacy continues to inspire those committed to justice, equality, and public service.

### **Ralph Lauren**

Ralph Lauren is a fashion designer who redefined the fashion industry with a lifestyle brand that embodies timeless elegance and American tradition. He has influenced culture, business, and philanthropy, notably in the fight against cancer and the preservation of the Star-Spangled Banner.

### **Lionel Messi**

Lionel Messi is the most decorated player in the history of professional soccer. He supports healthcare and education programs for children around the world through the Leo Messi Foundation and serves as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador.

### **William Sanford Nye**

Bill Nye has inspired and influenced generations of American students as “Bill Nye the Science Guy.” His dedication to science education continues through his work as CEO of the Planetary Society and as a vocal advocate for space exploration and environmental stewardship.

### **George W. Romney** (posthumous)

George Romney was a businessman who served as the chairman and president of American Motors Corporation. A public servant, he later served as both the 43rd Governor of Michigan and the 3rd Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

### **David M. Rubenstein**

David Rubenstein is co-founder and co-chairman of The Carlyle Group, where he built one of the most successful global investment firms. He is renowned for his philanthropy and generous support for the restoration of historic landmarks and the country’s cultural institutions.

### **George Soros**

George Soros is an investor, philanthropist, and founder of the Open Society Foundations. Through his network of foundations, partners and projects in more than 120 countries, Soros has focused on global initiatives that strengthen democracy, human rights, education, and social justice.

### **George Stevens, Jr.**

George Stevens, Jr. is an award-winning writer, director, author, and playwright. His career has been dedicated to preserving and celebrating the best of American film and the performing arts, including by founding the American Film Institute and creating the Kennedy Center Honors.

### **Denzel Washington**

Denzel Washington is an actor, director, and producer who has won two Academy Awards, a Tony Award, two Golden Globes, and the 2016 Cecil B. DeMille Lifetime Achievement Award. He has also served as National Spokesman for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America for over 25 years.

### **Anna Wintour**

Anna Wintour is a renowned fashion icon who has led Vogue as editor-in-chief since 1988. A champion for philanthropic causes, she is also the leading architect behind the annual Met Gala fundraiser and chief content officer of Condé Nast.

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# Presidential Medal of Freedom

The **Presidential Medal of Freedom** is the highest civilian award of the United States, alongside the Congressional Gold Medal. It is an award bestowed by decision of the president of the United States to "any person recommended to the President for award of the Medal or any person selected by the President upon his own initiative,"<sup>[3]</sup> and was created to recognize people who have 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.**"<sup>[4]</sup> The award is not limited to U.S. citizens, and, while it is a civilian award, it can also be awarded to military personnel and worn on the uniform. It was established in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy, superseding the Medal of Freedom that was initially established by President Harry S. Truman in 1945 to honor civilian service.

Occasionally, the medal award is further denoted as, "with distinction." There are no specific criteria for receiving the award with distinction; Executive Order 11085 simply specifies that the award should come in two degrees, and hence any decision to award the higher degree is entirely at the discretion of the president. In 2017, President Barack Obama stated that receiving the award with distinction indicates "an additional level of veneration"<sup>[5]</sup> in a class of individuals already held in the highest esteem. As of June 2024, the medal had been awarded with distinction at least 55 times, amounting to approximately 8% of all awards.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the supreme civilian decoration that can be awarded in discretion of the president, whereas its predecessor, the Medal of Freedom, was inferior in precedence to the Medal for Merit; the Medal of Freedom was awarded by any of three Cabinet secretaries, whereas the Medal for Merit was awarded by the president, as is the Presidential Medal of Freedom.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Overview

President John F. Kennedy established the presidential version of the decoration in 1963 through Executive Order 11085 (signed February 22, 1963), with unique and distinctive insignia, vastly expanded purpose, and far higher prestige.<sup>[8][9]</sup> It was the first U.S. civilian neck decoration and, if awarded with Distinction, is the only U.S. sash and star decoration (the Chief Commander degree of the Legion of Merit—which may only be awarded to foreign heads of state—is a star decoration but without a sash). The executive order calls for the medal to be awarded annually on or around July 4, and at other convenient times as chosen by the president,<sup>[7]</sup> but it has not been awarded every year (e.g., 2001, 2010). The recipient selection process is not made public, but the Trump administration stated that it included recommendations and nominations from the public, Cabinet, White House senior staff, and other presidential advisory bodies, which were then vetted prior to presentation to the President.<sup>[10]</sup> The order establishing the medal also expanded the size and the responsibilities of the Distinguished Civilian Service Awards Board so it could serve as a major source of such recommendations.<sup>[8]</sup>

The medal may be awarded to an individual more than once. Colin Powell received two awards, his second being with Distinction;<sup>[11]</sup> Ellsworth Bunker received both of his awards with Distinction. It may also be awarded posthumously; examples include John F. Kennedy, Steve Jobs, Pope John XXIII, Lyndon Johnson, John Wayne, Paul "Bear" Bryant,

### Presidential Medal of Freedom



The award's miniature medal

<b>Type</b>	<u>Civilian award</u>
<b>Awarded for</b>	Any reason as determined by the president <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Country</b>	<u>United States</u>
<b>Presented by</b>	<u>President of the United States</u>
<b>First awarded</b>	December 6, 1963 <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Total recipients</b>	652 (an average of fewer than 11 per year since 1963)



Service ribbons of the award  
(at left: Medal with Distinction)

#### Precedence

<b>Next (higher)</b>	<i>None</i>
<b>Equivalent</b>	<u>Congressional Gold Medal</u>
<b>Next (lower)</b>	<u>Presidential Citizens Medal</u>

Thurgood Marshall, Cesar Chavez, Walter Reuther, Roberto Clemente, Jack Kemp, Harvey Milk, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, Elouise Cobell, Grace Hopper,<sup>[12]</sup> Antonin Scalia, Elvis Presley and Babe Ruth.<sup>[13]</sup> Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner, civil rights workers murdered in 1964, were awarded their medals in 2014, 50 years later.

In 1970, President Richard Nixon awarded the medal to the entire Apollo 13 mission operations team, as well as to the mission's crew.<sup>[14]</sup>

Athlete and activist Simone Biles is the youngest person to receive this award at the age of 25.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Insignia

The badge of the Presidential Medal of Freedom is in the form of a golden star with white enamel, with a red enamel pentagon behind it; the central disc bears thirteen gold stars on a blue enamel background (taken from the Great Seal of the United States) within a golden ring. Golden bald eagles with spread wings stand between the points of the star. It is worn around the neck on a blue ribbon having white edge stripes. Women may choose to receive the award as a bow worn on the left chest (as for Margaret Thatcher).

A special and rarely granted award, called the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction,<sup>[16]</sup> has a larger version of the same badge, which is worn as a star on the left chest. It comes with a sash that is worn over the right shoulder (similarly to the Grand Cross of an order of chivalry), with its rosette (blue with a white edge, bearing the central disc of the badge at its center) resting on the left hip. When the medal with Distinction is awarded, the star may be presented hanging from a neck ribbon and can be identified by its size, which is larger than the standard badge.

In addition to the full-size insignia, the award is accompanied by a service ribbon for wear on military service uniforms,<sup>[17]</sup> a miniature medal pendant for wear on mess dress or civilian formal wear, and a lapel badge for wear on civilian clothes, all of which comes in the full presentation set. There is a silver bald eagle with spread wings on the miniature and service ribbon, or a golden bald eagle for a medal awarded with Distinction.

The Insignia was designed by the Army's Institute of Heraldry, led by Col. Harry Downing Temple.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Revocation



Medal and accoutrements, including the service ribbon, miniature and lapel badge



The Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction, as worn with white tie

There is no process for the award to be revoked. This issue has been raised regarding certain recipients, in particular regarding the award given to actor and comedian Bill Cosby.<sup>[19]</sup>

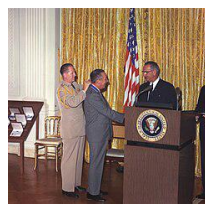
## Recipients

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### Gallery



A. Philip Randolph receiving the Medal from President Lyndon Johnson at one of the first ceremonies, 1964



Walt Disney receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964



President Richard Nixon presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Duke Ellington, 1969



President Gerald Ford awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction to Martha Graham, 1976



Arthur Goldberg speaking at his ceremony where he was awarded the Medal by President Jimmy Carter, 1978



President Ronald Reagan presenting Mother Teresa with the award, 1985



Former United Kingdom Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher receiving the award, in its unusual bow form, from President George H. W. Bush, 1991



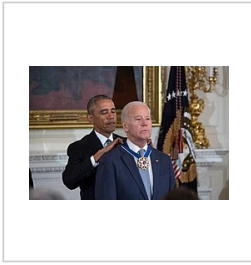
Rosa Parks receives the award from President Bill Clinton, 1996



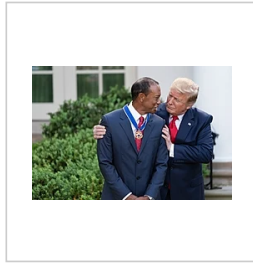
Fred Rogers smiles as he receives the award from President George W. Bush, 2002



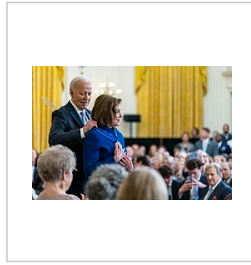
Bob Dylan receives the Medal from President Barack Obama, 2012.



President Barack Obama awards the medal with Distinction to then-Vice President Joe Biden, 2017. Biden later became the first president to receive the award before assuming office.



President Donald Trump presents the Medal to Tiger Woods, 2019



President Joe Biden presenting the Medal to Nancy Pelosi, 2024.

## See also

- [Awards and decorations of the United States government](#)
- [Awards and decorations of the United States military](#)

## References

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## External links

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