

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Presenting the Public Safety Officer Medal of Valor
February 20, 2018

Thank you. Hi, Darrell. Thank you, thank you very much. And thank you—please—and thank you to Attorney General Sessions and to Secretary Mnuchin, Director Pompeo, Congressman Issa for joining us for this very special ceremony.

To a very, very incredible group of heroes who we're celebrating today, welcome all to the White House. Incredible job. Thank you.

To the families who are here with you, each of you also serves and sacrifices for your country, and so I want to thank all of the families, the great families, because you're being honored also. Thank you very much. Thank you. Great job. [*Applause*] Right?

We're also so pleased—and I will tell you—to be gathered here today to recognize 12 really extraordinary law enforcement officers and first responders and to award them the Medal of Valor. And that's a big deal.

As we come together to recognize these brave Americans, I know all of us here today, and across the entire Nation, are grieving for the community of Parkland in the great State of Florida. We're working very hard to make sense of these events.

On Saturday, I met with some of the survivors and their families, and I was moved—greatly moved, greatly moved—by their strength, their resilience, and heartbroken for the families whose loved ones were so cruelly torn from them forever. Forever and ever. We cannot imagine the depths of their anguish, but we can pledge the strength of our resolve. And we must do more to protect our children. We have to do more to protect our children.

This week, I will be holding a number of discussions with students, local leaders, and law enforcement to develop concrete steps that we can take to secure our schools, safeguard our students, and protect our communities. School safety is a top priority for my administration. That is why, when Governors from across the Nation visit the White House next week, we will be discussing, at great length, what the Federal and State governments can do to keep our students safe.

This includes implementing commonsense security measures and addressing mental health issues, including better coordination between Federal and State law enforcement to take swift action when there are warning signs. In addition, after the deadly shooting in Las Vegas, I directed the Attorney General to clarify whether certain bump stock devices, like the one used in Las Vegas, are illegal under current law. That process began in December. And just a few moments ago, I signed a memorandum directing the Attorney General to propose regulations to ban all devices that turn legal weapons into machineguns. I expect that these critical regulations will be finalized, Jeff, very soon.

The key in all of these efforts, as I said in my remarks the day after the shooting, is that we cannot merely take actions that make us feel like we are making a difference, we must actually make a difference. We must move past clichés and tired debates and focus on evidence-based solutions and security measures that actually work and that make it easier for men and women of law enforcement to protect our children and to protect our safety.

In the aftermath of this evil massacre, our spirits have been lifted by the accounts of bravery at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School—coaches, teachers, students, law enforcement

officers, and others—who have shown us that the forces of love and courage are always stronger than the forces of evil and hate.

It's this truth that brings us together today. The 12 patriots we honor come from many places and serve in many different roles, but they all share one thing in common: When faced with danger, they each put the lives of others before their own. These are very brave people that I'm standing with today.

Here with us are Lieutenant William Buchanan and Emergency Medical Technician Sean Ochsenbein. Where are you two guys? Yes, that's what I thought. *[Laughter]* Good looking guys. That's good. They were both off duty near Elizabethton, in the great State of Tennessee—and it is a great State—when they saw a smoldering car with a passenger trapped inside.

They braved smoke, fire, and the danger of explosion to rescue the man. And they saved his life. People thought it would be impossible to save his life. William, Sean, thank you both very much. Great job. Great bravery.

Fire Engineer Stephen Gunn is also here. He was first on the scene of a dangerous fire started by an arsonist in Phoenix, Arizona. As flames engulfed the home, Engineer Gunn charged inside to save an unconscious man. Within seconds, Stephen's helmet began to melt and his skin began to burn—not good—but he carried the man out before the house collapsed. And that's by seconds.

Engineer Gunn, I understand you keep your melted helmet as a reminder of that day. Now, you will have a symbol of our Nation's gratitude to go alongside of that very charred helmet. Something much prettier than that helmet. Beautiful medal. Thank you very much. Great job. Thank you. Thank you.

On a February evening in California, Harbor Patrol Officer David Poirier, Jr., of Redondo Beach Fire Department was aboard a patrol boat with the captain when they received a call that people were drowning in the ocean. Four people who had been fishing along the sea wall were swept into the ocean by raging waves. This was a rough day.

Officer Poirier jumped into the dark, icy water and helped get the three survivors on top of a rock, while the captain went back for more help. And that on top of the rock was a rough stay for all of them. Each time waves crashed over the rock, they were all tossed back into the water. But again and again, Officer Poirier rescued them until more help arrived and saved the lives of those three people. Officer Poirier, a job well done. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

When a gunman began firing at the employees of Excel Industries in Hesston, Kansas, Chief Douglas Schroeder charged into the building without any backup whatsoever. He closed in on the shooter, dodging bullets and firing back, until he stopped the killer cold. Chief Schroeder, you saved a lot of lives. Thank God you were there. Thank you, Chief. Thank you.

Officer Andrew Hopfensperger, Jr.—that's a very important "Jr.," isn't it? Huh? *[Laughter]* I know you're very proud of your father—was patrolling the parking lot of Antigo High School in Wisconsin, during the school's junior prom, when he heard a burst of gunfire. Within 19 seconds, he found the shooter and took him down just before he was about to kill 4 innocent students. Andrew, incredible job. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you.

Finally, when terrorists attacked defenseless employees of the San Bernardino Department of Public Health, six of the heroes with us today chased them down and put an end to their sinister rampage, which was going to get a lot worse.

During the attack, Officer Nicholas Koahou was shot in the leg. But he continued to fight back, despite a really horrific wound. Today we are fortunate to honor him and the rest of that amazing team—Corporal Rafael Ixco, Detective Bruce Southworth, Deputy Shaun Wallen,

Detective Brian Olvera, and Investigator Chad Johnson. Thank you all very much. That's great. Great.

These are fantastic stories, and we thank you. To each of the 12 heroes who are about to receive the Medal of Valor, you have earned an eternal place in the gratitude, in our history, and in our hearts. Through your service and sacrifice, we are reminded that America's greatest treasure is her people. In your courage, we see America's strength. And in your character, we see America's soul.

And today one proud Nation says to all of you, thank you, God bless you, and God forever bless these great heroes. *[Applause]* Fantastic. Thank you, fellas. That's great. Incredible. Thank you so much.

Now I'd like to ask the Military Aide to come forward and read the citations.

[At this point, Cmdr. Richard I. Lawlor, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citations and the President presented the medals, assisted by Lt. Cmdr. Ginny R. Nadolny, USCG, Coast Guard Aide to the President.]

Very brave people. I want to thank you in particular. And enjoy the rest of your day, folks. We're doing some incredible things in our country, and you're starting to see.

And we will be working very, very hard on that horrible, horrible issue that took place last week in Florida. We're working very hard. We're going to come up with solutions. It's been many, many years, and there have been no solutions. We're going to come up with solutions.

Thank you all very much. Appreciate it. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:49 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of the Treasury Steven T. Mnuchin; Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Michael R. Pompeo; Lt. William Buchanan, Avery County Sheriff's Office in Newland, NC; Sean Ochsenein, emergency medicine student, East Tennessee State University; Kingsport, TN, resident Jerry Oaks, Sr.; Stephen Gunn, engineer, Peoria, AZ, Fire-Medical Department; Ofc. Nicholas Koahou, Redlands, CA, Police Department; Cpl. Rafael Ixco, Det. Bruce Southworth, and Dep. Shaun Wallen, San Bernardino, CA, Sheriff's Department; Det. Brian Olvera, San Bernardino Police Department; and Chad Johnson, District Attorney investigator, San Bernardino County. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the reading of the medal citations.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Medal of Valor presentation.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Buchanan, William; Gunn, Stephen; Hopfensperger, Andrew, Jr.; Issa, Darrell E.; Johnson, Chad; Koahou, Nicholas; Lawlor, Richard I.; Mnuchin, Steven T.; Oaks, Jerry, Sr.; Ochsenein, Sean; Olvera, Brian; Poirier, David, Jr.; Pompeo, Michael R.; Rafael, Ixco; Schroeder, Douglas; Sessions, Jefferson B. III; Southworth, Bruce; Wallen, Shaun.

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