

Remarks on Presenting Posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant Robert J. Miller *October 6, 2010*

Please be seated. Good afternoon. And on behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House. And thank you, General Carver, for that beautiful invocation.

We are a nation of more than 300 million Americans. Of these, less than 1 percent wears the uniform of our Armed Services. And of these, just a small fraction has earned the badges of our special operations forces.

In the finest military the world has ever known, these warriors are the best of the best. In an era that prizes celebrity and status, they are quiet professionals, never seeking the spotlight. In a time of war, they have borne a burden far beyond their small numbers: training foreign militaries to stand on their own, bringing schools and medicine to remote villages, and taking to the terrorists and insurgents who plot against us.

Few Americans ever see their service, but all Americans are safer because of it. And our hearts swell with pride just hearing their names, including the legendary Green Berets. Today it is my privilege to present our Nation's highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor, to one of these remarkable soldiers, Staff Sergeant Robert J. Miller.

To do so, we are joined by Vice President Biden and, from the Miller's family's home State of Florida, a leader who helped make this day possible, Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas.

We are joined by leaders from across my administration, including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates; chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen; and leaders from our Armed Forces, including Army Secretary John McHugh and Chief of Staff General George Casey, as well as Commander of Special Operations Command, Admiral Eric Olson.

We are honored to be joined by Rob's fellow soldiers in whose ranks he served, his teammates from Alpha Company, 3d Battalion, 3d Special Forces Group from Fort Bragg, and those who now welcome him into their ranks, members of the Medal of Honor Society.

Most of all, we welcome more than 100 of Rob's friends and family, especially his father Phil, his mother Maureen, and his many brothers and sisters.

It has been said that courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point. For Rob Miller, the testing point came nearly 3 years ago, deep in a snowy Afghan valley. But the courage he displayed that day reflects every virtue that defined his life.

Rob was wise beyond his years. Growing up in Wheaton, Illinois, outside of Chicago, he was the boy in school who penned a poem about American GIs in World War II, men—like the soldier Rob would become himself—who he said “fought day and night, fighting for what they thought was right.”

Rob was born to lead—the high school gymnast who trained so hard his coach had to kick him out at night so they could close the gym. He was the Army recruit who pushed himself to his limits, both physically and mentally, to earn the title Green Beret. He was the Special Forces soldier who, on his first tour in Afghanistan, earned two Army Commendation Medals for his valor.

Devotion to duty, an abiding sense of honor, a profound love of country: These were the virtues that found their ultimate expression when Rob, just 24 years old and on his second tour, met his testing point on January 25, 2008.

Rob and his team were in the remote northwest of Afghanistan. Their mission: clear a valley of insurgents who had been attacking Afghan forces and terrorizing villagers. So when they came across an insurgent compound, Rob and his men made their move, unleashing their fire and calling in airstrikes.

Now, they were on foot, heading over to that destroyed compound to assess the damage and gather intelligence. It was still dark, just before dawn. It was freezing cold and silent, except for the crackle of their radios and the crunch of snow under their boots. Like so many times

before, Rob was up front, leading a patrol of two dozen Afghans and Americans on a narrow trail along the valley floor, the steep mountains towering over them.

First, it was just a single insurgent, jumping out from behind a boulder. Then, the whole valley seemed to explode with gunfire. Within seconds, Rob and his patrol were pinned down with almost no cover, bullets and rocket-propelled grenades raining down from every direction. And when enemy reinforcements poured in, the odds were overwhelming. Rob's small patrol of two dozen men was nearly surrounded by almost 150 insurgents.

With the enemy just feet away—some so close he could see their faces—Rob held his ground. Despite the chaos around him, he radioed back enemy positions. As the only Pashto speaker on his team, he organized the Afghan soldiers around him. But the incoming fire, in the words of one soldier, was simply “astounding.”

Rob made a decision. He called for his team to fall back. And then he did something extraordinary. Rob moved in the other direction, toward the enemy, drawing their guns away from his team and bringing the fire of all those insurgents down upon himself.

The fighting was ferocious. Rob seemed to disappear into clouds of dust and debris, but his team could hear him on the radio, still calling out the enemy's position. And they could hear his weapon still firing as he provided cover for his men. And then, over the radio, they heard his voice. He had been hit. But still, he kept calling out enemy positions. Still, he kept firing. Still, he kept throwing his grenades. And then they heard it: Rob's weapon fell silent.

This is the story of what one American soldier did for his team, but it's also a story of what they did for him. Two of his teammates braved the bullets and rushed to Rob's aid. In those final moments, they were there at his side, American soldiers there for each other.

The relentless fire forced them back, but they refused to leave their fallen comrade. When reinforcements arrived, these Americans went in again, risking their lives, taking more casualties, determined to bring Rob Miller out

of that valley. And finally, after fighting that raged for hours, they did.

When the dust settled and the smoke cleared, there was no doubt Rob Miller and his team had struck a major blow against the local insurgency. Five members of his patrol had been wounded, but his team had survived. And one of his teammates surely spoke for all of them when he said of Rob, “I would not be alive today if not for his ultimate sacrifice.”

This is the valor that America honors today. To Rob's family and friends, I know that no words can ease the ache in your hearts. But I also know this: Rob's life and legacy endures.

Rob endures in the pride of his parents. Phil and Maureen, you raised a remarkable son. Today and in the years to come, may you find some comfort in knowing that Rob gave his life doing what he loved, protecting his friends and defending his country. You gave your oldest son to America, and America is forever in your debt.

Rob endures in the love of his brothers and sisters, all seven of whom join us today. Your brothers laid down his life so you could live yours in security and freedom. You honor him by living your lives to the fullest, and I suspect Rob would be especially proud of his younger brother Tom, who, inspired by his big brother, is now training to be a Green Beret himself.

Rob endures in the Afghans that he trained and he befriended. In valleys and villages half a world away, they remember him, the American who spoke their language, who respected their culture, and who helped them defend their country. They welcomed him into their homes and invited him to their weddings. And in a sign of their lasting gratitude, they presented Rob's parents with a beautiful Afghan flag—Afghan rug, which hangs today in the Miller home, a symbol of the partnership between the people of America and Afghanistan.

Rob Miller endures in the service of his teammates, his brothers in arms who served with him, bled with him, and fought to bring him home. These soldiers embody the spirit that guides our troops in Afghanistan every day: the courage, the resolve, the relentless focus on their mission to break the momentum of the Taliban insurgency and to build the capacity of

Afghans to defend themselves and to make sure that Afghanistan is never again a safe haven for terrorists who would attack our country. That is their mission, that is our mission, and that is what we will do. And I would ask Rob's team, who were with him that day, to please stand and be recognized. *[Applause]*

Finally, Rob Miller—and all those who give their lives in our name—endure in each of us. Every American is safer because of their service. And every American has a duty to remember and honor their sacrifice.

If we do, if we keep their legacy alive, if we keep faith with the freedoms they died to defend, then we can imagine a day, decades from now, when another child sits down at his desk, ponders the true meaning of heroism, and finds

inspiration in the story of a soldier, Staff Sergeant Robert J. Miller, and a generation that "fought day and night, fighting for what they thought was right."

That is the meaning of this medal, and that is our summons today, as a proud and grateful nation. So please join me in welcoming Phil and Maureen Miller for the reading of the citation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:52 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Douglas L. Carver, USA, Chief of Chaplains; and Philip Miller, father, and Maureen Miller, mother, of Mr. Miller. Following the President's remarks, Lt. Cmdr. Matthew R. Maasdam, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citation.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Cresskill, New Jersey

October 6, 2010

A couple people I want to first of all acknowledge. Tim Kaine is here from the Democratic Committee. John Wisniewski is here, the New Jersey Democratic chairman.

Obviously, my main thanks go to Michael and Jackie, Zach, Melissa, Olivia for opening up their spectacular home, for being such incredible friends.

Michael basically took all the words out of my mouth. *[Laughter]* I don't really know what to say. *[Laughter]* Those of you who are interested in the Randy Moss trade—*[laughter]*—I have some opinions about that.

Look, one of the wonderful things about these events is I get the chance to spend some time just sitting with you individually, so I'm not going to give a long speech.

But let me just echo a couple of themes that Michael raised. You know, we're in a very tough election season. And we're in a tough election season because the country is going through a very difficult time. It's hard I think sometimes to appreciate the magnitude of what we faced when we came into office.

But this was the worst recession by far since the Great Depression. In fact, if you add up the

recession in '91, the recession in 2000, the recession when Ronald Reagan came into office—the three previous recessions—this one had a bigger impact than all three of those combined. We lost 4 million jobs in the 6 months before I took office, 750,000 the month I was sworn in, 600,000 in the 2 subsequent months. We had lost most of the 8 million jobs that we lost before any of our economic policies were put into place.

And so our first job was to stop the crisis. And we've done that. The economy is now growing again. We've had 8 consecutive months of private sector job growth. The credit markets are now functioning. World trade is now expanding again.

And so, as Michael said, we're moving in the right direction. But one of the reasons I ran for President was not just to put a tourniquet around the crisis. It was the fact that for a long time, I think everybody had a sense that we weren't doing everything we needed to make sure we can compete in a new 21st-century economy, that we had lost ground, and that there was a foundation that had to be rebuilt just to make sure that the next generation and