

The White House

Office of the First Lady

For Immediate Release
May 08, 2013

Remarks by the First Lady at National Medal for Museum and Library Services Ceremony

East Room

1:49 P.M. EDT

MRS. OBAMA: Thank you. (Applause.) Thanks so much. Thank you, all. How is everyone? Good afternoon. Please, sit. Welcome to the White House. I love saying that. (Laughter.) I am thrilled that all of you could be here today as we honor these 10 outstanding libraries and museums.

I want to start, of course, by thanking Susan -- where did you go that quickly -- there you go -- (laughter) -- for that very kind introduction, but, more importantly, for her outstanding work on behalf of our country and our nation's museums and libraries. As Susan told me in the back room, these are her peeps. (Laughter.) So she's doing a phenomenal job.

And of course, I want to recognize our guests of honor today -- this year's medal-winning libraries and museums. Thank you all for your outstanding contributions to communities and to our country. Every day, you all are pushing boundaries, defying expectations and redefining what it means to be a library and museum in this country.

You're not just exposing our young people to science and the arts, you're actually putting instruments and paintbrushes and computers into their hands and helping them blossom into musicians and artists and scientists themselves. You're not just helping kids check out books, you're actually teaching them to read those books.

You're tutoring our kids who have fallen behind in a grade level. You're teaching English as a second language. You're developing the next generation of lifelong learners. And I also understand that there are some of you who are even members of our Let's Move Museums and Gardens initiative -- yes, indeed. (Applause.) And you know that I greatly appreciate that work, everything that you all are doing to make it fun and creative for kids to develop lifelong health habits. Thank you for that work.

So when I think about what you all do, I think it's best summed up by a phrase in the 1920 annual report of one of today's honorees, the Boston Children's Museum. The report stated that the goal of this museum is to "make better citizens." And more than anything else, that's what all of you do -- you help create better citizens.

You help people across this country become more informed and engaged in our communities. You teach our young people about our history, and you inspire them to play a role in shaping our future. And I know this work isn't easy -- not at all. I know that many of our libraries and museums are dealing with tight budgets and juggling more and more demands with fewer resources.

But instead of scaling back your missions, you all are expanding them. You're reaching out to underserved populations, taking on issues like poverty and illiteracy. You're partnering with schools and community organizations, finding new ways to share your resources as widely as possible.

Take the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, for example. They ran a summer lunch program, serving 6,700 meals to hungry children. And all of you are embracing the magnificent diversity of the communities that you serve -- making sure that everyone, no matter where they're from or what language they speak, can enjoy all that you have to offer. And that is precisely what we try to do here at the White House.

As you know, this house, in many ways, is a museum. And we have worked so hard to open up this place to as many of our young people as possible, doing everything from hosting workshops on poetry to having modern dance. Yes, the Alvin Ailey dancers danced right here. And then the curators realized that some of those leaps were threatening the chandeliers. (Laughter.) I don't think they thought that through, so they were wincing as the leaps were happening. (Laughter.)

But we've also hosted jazz, classical and country music workshops here for young people, because like all of you, we want our young people to know about and be proud of this nation's rich cultural heritage. And we want them so desperately to discover their own gifts, and to fulfill their own potential, and start thinking about their own contributions to our great American story. And your libraries and museums are such a crucial part of that vitally important work.

And Barack and I, we are truly proud of everything you do. And it is a real joy and an honor for us to host all of you here. We can't say thank you enough. But hopefully, today is one small way to remind you that the work that you do is so critical. It's important. It is valued. And we hope you all keep doing what you do every single day. As I tell all of our teachers and folks out there doing the hard work, please don't get tired. (Laughter.) We need you.

So congratulations again on this tremendous achievement. And now it's my pleasure to present the medals to today's honorees. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

(The awards are presented.)

MRS. OBAMA: Let me just take the opportunity to have the triplets stand, since they are here. Let's give the triplets a hand. (Applause.) We're proud of you guys too. (Laughter.) You can sit down. (Laughter.) You guys are such rule followers. I love it, I love it. (Laughter.)

Well, that concludes our awards. I hope we all leave here inspired and rededicated, because as we can see from the stories that we've heard that your work is really powerful, and it is impactful, and it can change lives. You do it quietly. You do it without much fanfare or you don't require a lot of attention.

So hopefully, today gives you that little bit of light you need to just keep going, because this country needs you. We need the work that you do. And it's just our hope that every community in this country can have the resources that you are providing to your communities. That should be our goal.

And with that, I think now it's time to have a little fun, as my husband always says. We've got a little reception over there. We have some nice food here at the White House. (Laughter.) They know how to throw a nice party. So I encourage you to enjoy, partake, walk around, eat -- have some cookies. (Laughter.) We'll put Let's Move on hold for just a couple of cookies. (Laughter and applause.)

So enjoy your time. You have earned it. We are grateful. Congratulations again. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

END
2:10 P.M. EDT