

Press Releases: Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors

Remarks

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SECRETARY TILLERSON: Good evening. Good evening, all, and it's just such a pleasure to have you here and to welcome you to the State Department. As the Secretary of State and an ex officio trustee of the Kennedy Center, it really is a privilege to carry on the department's longstanding partnership with the Kennedy Center as we celebrate our distinguished honorees tonight.

Let me begin by thanking David Rubenstein, Deborah Rutter, Les Moonves, Michael and Noemi Neidorff, and all the other leaders and partners of the Kennedy Center for their commitment to one of our nation's marquee cultural institutions. I also want to recognize and thank the many supporters in attendance whose generous contributions facilitate hundreds of Kennedy Center performances each year for residents and visitors to our nation's capital, a truly special opportunity for them.

Artistic expression represents perhaps the highest form of freedom of speech – the words and the messages conveyed through music, through dance, the content of film, television, to reflect the free society that we are, even with our many flaws. It bridges our differences, it celebrates our diversity, and it draws us ever closer as a free people.

Regrettably, in large parts of this world today, such conditions do not exist. Regimes that are intolerant of artistic expression are intolerant of freedom itself. These freedoms that we enjoy, as all of you know, are protected daily by our men and women in uniform and are promoted by the diplomats who serve this country the world over. As the Secretary of State, I know that the world looks to America as the national example of liberty. And speaking through their creative works, each of our honorees tonight affirm the American value of free expression to the whole world.

Moreover, the honorees with us tonight are here because they have a special power to elicit powerful emotions and powerful responses in millions of people. They connect our memories of our past and our memories of those who

are most precious to us. Their performances leave the deep impressions that mark the years of our lives. Each of the performers honored tonight touch in our hearts what Abraham Lincoln called "the mystic chords of memory". For these reasons and as a celebration of our freedom and for your exceptional talents, we're proud to honor each of you tonight here at the State Department.

So, again, to all of our guests, welcome. We're delighted you can be here with us at the State Department. Please enjoy your dinner and the rest of the evening. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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