



TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS BY  
THE HONORABLE G. WILLIAM MILLER  
SECRETARY OF THE U.S. TREASURY  
AT THE PRESENTATION OF A GOLD MEDAL AUTHORIZED  
BY ACT OF CONGRESS  
AT THE CAPITOL  
MARCH 6, 1980

Ladies and gentleman, not only from the Congress and from the public, but, ladies and gentleman of the Wayne family. It's a very special privilege and pleasure for me to be here for a number of reasons. One, I've just left a meeting to discuss the economic policies of our nation, and it's nice to have a respite from that, and to come to a subject that's related. Because you cannot talk about John Wayne--his life and his contribution--without thinking about the inherent strengths and capacities and meaning of our country.

The second reason I'm happy to be here is that I rarely get to be in such elegant company. And I'm delighted to be able to see the wonderful people who have known and loved and been a part of John Wayne's life.

And another reason, of course, is that this is the most popular medal that we've ever struck. So we have a winner. And in that sense, the United States is not only recognizing a great American but is making that recognition available to many, many Americans who share that sense.

When you think of John Wayne, whether he was portraying a fighting Marine, or whether he was that indomitable Western cowboy, he always projected that sense of admiration, of love and affection for his country. Whether he was on the screen or off the screen, he always contributed to that spirit of our great nation.

He spoke in terms of affection for America and the freedom that allowed all the people to thrive and to make their way in this world against odds that may have impeded us as we started on our individual progress. In a substantial way, he projected a vision of a strong human being, the kind of strong human being that each of us hopes to be. Some people called him a legend, some even called him a national resource, but no matter how others pictured John Wayne or Duke, as his friends knew him, he always possessed honor and dignity and was unashamed of affection for his homeland.

In authorizing the striking of this gold medal, Congress has placed John Wayne among the most illustrious group of the nation's outstanding individuals. Only a small number of Americans have received this kind of honor. The distinguished group includes George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Jonas Salk, Thomas Edison, Charles Lindbergh, Marian Anderson--great names.

It is not difficult to perceive the patriotism of this remarkable man. He espoused faith in America time and again, in his speeches, in his personal relations, and always through the films he appeared in. He saw his films and his roles as a catalyst for stirring our feelings for America. He acted in and financed the film entitled "The Alamo" so that, in his words, he could recreate a moment in history that will show this generation of Americans what their country stands for, what some of their forebears went through to win what they had to have or die--liberty and freedom.

At this time in our history it is important for us to remember that patriotism is an acceptable demonstration of our faith in our country. John Wayne was a patriot. He wanted his own children to understand American ideals and to adhere to them. He stated one time that he was grateful each day of his life to wake up in the United States of America. He wanted his children to also have that sense of gratitude. He said about his daughter, I don't care if she memorizes the Gettysburgh Address, but I hope she understands it.

It's interesting that he should have used Abraham Lincoln's address as the embodiment of his feelings, because he was shown in a recent poll to be second only to Abraham Lincoln as a name and a face most readily recognized by all Americans.

So it's therefore appropriate today that we honor his memory and his impact and his contribution upon the American scene, by a presentation of the Presidential medal, which is shown in replica here, inscribed very simply and very eloquently, "John Wayne, American." This is the replica, but this is the real medal in gold. And it may be the last time that Congress, if it's going to balance the budget, will be able to do this. So to the family, I would like to present the gold medal that has been made available by an act of the Congress of the United States.

Congratulations.

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