

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT PCAH COMING UP TALLER AWARDS

State Dining Room

1:45 P.M. EST

MRS. OBAMA: Thank you everyone. (Applause.) Please. (Applause.) Thank you so much, and good afternoon, and welcome to the White House. I love saying that. (Laughter.)

I'm thrilled to be here today as we honor this year's Coming Up Taller Award recipients. And these are outstanding programs that are expanding horizons, changing lives, and helping young people fulfill their dream across America and around the world.

I want to start by thanking the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities -- and this is the institution that sponsors these awards -- and I'd like to ask all of the committee members to please stand so that we can thank you and honor you for your service. (Applause.)

This is just an amazing group of people in their own right. They've been here for a few days, working hard, answering and asking questions, and we are so grateful to each and every one of them for their willingness to be involved in such a committed way.

I also want to recognize all of the artists, the teachers, the directors and the administrators, all of you who are on the ground every single day, running the programs that we honor today.

What you do isn't easy, and we know that, particularly right now during these days of a lot of belt-tightening. I know that many of you have been putting in probably longer hours and later nights just to keep things together, and sometimes probably paying out of your own pockets to keep everything going. But I also know that -- the difference that you're making in the lives of young people all across this country and around the world.

Because of you, teens in Arizona are publishing their own magazine, and children in central and south Los Angeles are learning to play instruments and performing in orchestras. Because of the work that you do, students in New York City are mastering Shakespeare. And in my hometown of Chicago, there are students learning traditional Mexican art forms. There are young people in Egypt who are learning basket weaving and storytelling, calligraphy and photography.

And you're not just connecting young people with music, dance, poetry and drama. But because of your work, you're connecting people, these young people to mentoring, to tutoring, to social services, and college counseling. You don't just show them the power of their imagination, but you show them the power of discipline and hard work and of teamwork, as well.

And these young people don't just become accomplished singers and painters and authors. They also become better students, they become better leaders, and they become better citizens, enriching not just themselves but their communities, teaching younger children the skills that they've learned, beautifying neighborhoods with murals and lifting their communities with their performances.

Ultimately, each of your programs is using achievement in the arts as a bridge to achievement in life. And you see all this every day, each and every one of you working so hard. You see this in your students as they become more confident and more engaged and more willing to take risks and to take responsibility for their futures. You see it when their academic performance improves, when you see improving attitudes and higher GPAs. And you see young people who never saw themselves as college material, you see them getting those acceptance letters and you see them going on to pursue their degrees. So we all know in this room the power of the arts to change young people's lives.

But we also know that even though so many young people in this country live just minutes from the centers of culture and power and prestige, many feel that these resources are miles away and very far beyond their reach.

That's why we're working to make the White House a showcase for America's rich cultural life, and opening the doors of this house to as many of our young people as we can, exposing them to classical music, exposing them to jazz, the spoken word, everything.

We want to show them that they have a place not just in our museums and in our theaters and in our concert halls, but they have a place in the halls of this White House, as well. We want to show them that they can have a future in the arts community, whether they do it as a hobby or as a profession or simply as an appreciative observer. We want to show them that if they work hard and if they believe in themselves, nothing is beyond their reach.

And I think one of the professional writers who works with young people through the InsideOut Literary Arts Project in Detroit, Michigan, he put it best when he said something very simple: "If you ask a kid to dream, he'll dream."

That's what this Coming Up Taller Awards are all about. That's what each and every one of you do every single day. You ask our young people to dream, and you give them the tools to fulfill those dreams. You affirm that their contributions are valuable, and their success matters to all of us. You help them see beyond the circumstances of their lives to the world of possibility that awaits them. And for that, we honor you. For that, we thank you, and we pledge to do everything we can to help continue the extraordinary work that you do.

And it is now my pleasure to introduce the co-chairs of the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities, two individuals who've used their extraordinary careers in the arts to render extraordinary service to this country, George Stevens and Margo Lion. Let's give them a round of applause. (Applause.)

(The Coming Up Taller Awards are presented.)

MRS. OBAMA: Well, let's do that again. (Laughter and applause.) Well, this is a good way to start the day, right? (Laughter.) Well, if we didn't know before, these awards remind us of what the power of arts and music and dance can do in the lives of our young people. We all know, the people in this room, because we live it every day, we work with these kids, we know the difference that this can make. That's why your work is so important.

So please keep it up. Stay strong. And to all the young people, we are so proud of you, so proud of you. You're representing everyone from your programs. And please, it's your job to take back all this energy and to share with the other students and young people in your communities and your programs. So please make sure you do that.

And with that I think the program is ended. Thank you all for coming, and have a good afternoon. (Applause.)

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