

The American Presidency Project

(<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>).



RICHARD NIXON (/PEOPLE/PRESIDENT/RICHA RD-NIXON)

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of 'Freedom to William P. Rogers and the Presidential Citizens Medal to Adele Rogers

October 15, 1973

IT IS very hard to keep secrets in government, and I must say that the other day here in this room when we announced the nomination of Gerald Ford as Vice President, that was a pretty well-kept secret.

I think, tonight, this is certainly something that Bill Rogers does not expect, and consequently, I think all of us will enjoy the presentation I am now about to make.

The Medal of Freedom, as you know, is the highest civilian honor that can be given to an American citizen. Bill Rogers has served for almost 20 years in government, and in those 20 years he has served for 4 years as Attorney General of the United States and 4 1/2 years as Secretary of State.

In that period as Secretary of State, he has traveled to 72 countries, has probably made over 150 speeches, formal and many more informal, has had to sit through at least 500 tedious dinners and perhaps 1,000 or even more tedious cocktail parties, but in that period of time, he has

represented this Nation, as we all know, with very great dignity. He has made us all very proud of our country and of his

representation of that country as Secretary of State.

I think that a French Foreign Minister put it pretty well when he summed up Secretary Rogers' qualities. I think it was something like this. He said that Secretary Rogers always says the words that he means, always means the words that he says, but doesn't always say the words that he means, and he said, "I"--he went further to say, he said--"I am always happy when he agrees with me, but I am never unhappy when he disagrees with me. That is the mark of a very successful Secretary of State."

As you know, of course, we have enjoyed the friendship of the Rogerses for over 30 years. We met 32 years ago at Quonset Point when we were both one of the lowest forms of life, I mean lieutenants, junior grade, in the United States Navy Reserve, and we have been close friends since that time.

But tonight, both as a personal friend and recognizing his services during the period I was Vice President and now in the period as President, and representing all of the American people, I have the honor to present to William P. Rogers the Medal of Freedom. I shall read the citation:

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AWARDS THIS

PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM

TO WILLIAM P. ROGERS

Prosecutor, Congressional investigator, and Cabinet leader under two Presidents, his brilliant career of public service has spanned more than a third of a century and touched all three branches of Government. As the 63rd Attorney General of the United States, he pioneered in the battle for equal rights. As the Nation's 55th Secretary of State, he played an indispensable role in ending our longest war and in starting to build a new

structure of peace. Through these efforts, the decency and integrity that are William Rogers' personal stamp are now felt more strongly among all people and nations. No man could seek a greater monument.

Now, the Secretary, of course, is desperately-will you please be seated is desperately trying to get up here to respond, but I have another award to make tonight, one that I know that even he did not anticipate.

I think that we sometimes underestimate the great role that is played by those who stand by our side, and when we think of Mrs. William Rogers-- Adele Rogers, as we know her--when we think of her graciousness through the years, of her superb poise, I think that we all would say that she truly deserved the title of being the First Lady of the Cabinet.

And consequently, tonight, an award is appropriate for her as well. The President's Citizens Medal has only been awarded once before, to Roberto Clemente posthumously, and so the second President's Citizens Medal will be awarded tonight and awarded to one who does not hold a government position, because the Citizens Medal does not go to people who held government positions, but to one who, standing with her husband, has represented this country at home and abroad with such magnificent dignity and poise and grace. I read now the citation:

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AWARDS THIS

PRESIDENTIAL CITIZENS MEDAL

TO ADELE ROGERS

As the Nation's premiere hostess in foreign affairs, Adele Rogers provided a warmth and charm that helped to humanize the climate of diplomacy in a time of vital American initiatives for peace. Her work as a leader in voluntary action and community affairs among her fellow Cabinet and Foreign Service wives set an example for millions in a time of widening horizons for American women. The first woman ever honored with this award, her achievements eloquently prove its credo---that a citizen need not hold public office to render far-reaching public service.

That is the first secret the State Department ever kept. [Laughter]

Now, we will, however, having awarded the Citizens Medal to Adele Rogers, we will give to Bill Rogers, Secretary Bill Rogers, the opportunity to respond.

Note: The President spoke at 10: 15 p.m. in the East Room at the White House following a dinner honoring the former Secretary of State and his wife.

On the same day, the White House released fact sheets on the two awards. Mr. Rogers responded as follows:

Mr. President, Pat, distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

I am at a loss for words because I had no inkling this would happen. I don't blame the President for not telling me, but I think my wife must have known, and I resent it.

I listened to what the President had to say about how many speeches I had made, how many conferences I had gone to, and recalling the 25 years we--well, 30 years we have known each other and the many speeches that he has made and many speeches that I have made and the many speeches that Pat has had to listen to and Adele has had to listen to, I think it is a miracle that Pat and Adele still look so young.

I am particularly pleased to be here tonight for obvious reasons and to receive this award, which I will cherish, but particularly because there are so many people here that have meant so much to us over the years. It is a little bit as if it were "This is Your Life," in the grand manner. Mamie Eisenhower meant so much to the President, Pat, and Adele and me, and is certainly one of the most loved women in the world. We are very happy, Mamie, that you are here tonight.

And the Nixon family, and the new Vice President-designate that has been so well received, and we are all so proud of, members of the Cabinet, Chief Justice of the United States, the many friends, and my own family, many friends I have known for so many years.

So, it has really been, Mr. President, a wonderful evening for us, and I want to thank you and Pat very much for making it what it is. It is an evening we will never forget. I am particularly happy though, to speak more frankly, because you gave that as one of my qualities, that the Chief Justice called me a good man, because I have been concerned recently by reading in the paper that I was an elder statesman.

Now, I am only 60 years old. In fact, I called Nelson Rockefeller and asked him if he thought it was fair that I was designated as an elder statesman, and he said no. As a matter of fact, I am planning to call Ronald Reagan as soon as I have a chance.

And I want to say that going into public life is, of course, different, 4½ years as Secretary of State, going back to private life is different. And one of the things that is somewhat maddening about it is that people come over to you, I think, with the same morbid curiosity they have when they stop at automobile accidents, and say to you, "What are you doing now?"

Well, I will tell you what I am doing now. I am picking a little cotton. And George, I really think that you got a little uptight on that. If you have been in Washington as long as the President and I have been in Washington, you come to realize this. There is not much cotton growing in Washington, but there are an awful lot of cottonpickers.¹

¹*Mr. Rogers was referring to a remark made by Secretary of the Treasury George p. Shultz on September 14, 1973, at a news briefing held during his trip to Tokyo, Japan, to attend the. multilateral trade negotiations. When asked by a reporter for his reaction to statements made by Melvin R. Laird at a White House news briefing on economic policy the day before, Secretary Shultz responded in part: "... I think the President's Adviser on Domestic Affairs should keep his cotton-picking hands off the economic policy for a change."*

And I don't really think Mel Laird meant anything by it, he just couldn't stand private life. When he got outside, he couldn't take it. He is a recidivist, really, a political recidivist, and I think that is just part of it.

Well, Mr. President, I again want to thank you very much. Probably the last 4½ years have been the most successful years in foreign affairs that this country has ever experienced, and under your leadership, I think all Americans know that we have had extraordinary progress in the field of foreign affairs. And I

think if there is one lasting impression that I gained, particularly from travels abroad, it was that the United States and the American people are respected and admired by almost everyone.

We are criticized, and people find fault with us, and obviously, we have our weaknesses. But basically, I believe that most of the people in the world have a deep respect for the American people, and I think all of us can be proud of the country that we live in.

Mr. President, I have been touched by some of the letters I have received, not the ones you might expect, but so many letters written in longhand by just ordinary people, two or three paragraphs just saying thank you, and I think that is a tribute to the American people that they would take that much trouble to express thanks for people in public life.

And in that spirit, Mr. President, I want to say that it is a great opportunity that you have given to Adele and me, and to all the others who have served with you, great opportunity. Representing the United States is a great honor, representing the people of the United States is a privilege, a great privilege, a privilege that comes to very few people. And with those thoughts in mind, in the spirit of the people, ordinary people who have written letters--and I am sure all of you who serve in the Administration have gotten them--I want to say, for giving Adele and me the opportunity we have had, the honor we have had to represent the United States, and for the privilege we have had of representing the American people, thank you.

Richard Nixon, Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to William P. Rogers and the Presidential Citizens Medal to Adele Rogers Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/255416>

