

**Valor Medals Review Task Force Briefing to the Congressional Black Caucus-September 15 2018 (49m 35s)**  
**7 speakers** (Chris Isleib, Jeffrey Sammons, Dwight Mears, Bridget Locke, Timothy Westcott, Zack Austin, Ron Armstead, Executive Director of the Congressional Black Caucus Veteran's Braintrust)

**[0:00:00]**

**Chris Isleib:** The U.S. World War I Centennial Commission. Some of you know me, I've introduced around a little bit. But one of our most important programs, we've got a number of them, we've got a number of education programs, commemorative events we're doing, public outreach. But one of our most important programs is this one. Because this is not just, you know, commemorating somebody in particular. It's not just having a good event, and having fellowship. This is changing history. This is our chance to right a wrong in history. And it matters the world to us.

I'm going to introduce the folks who can tell you more about the program. But ultimately what this is about, and all of you down here have an idea, there were 350,000 African Americans who suited up to join the fight during World War I. And not a single one of them was seriously considered, during their lifetimes for the Medal of Honor. Especially during the war because of flawed policy. And this is about correcting that. So, with that, I'd like to introduce Dr. Jeffrey Sammons, who's the leader of our program.

**[0:01:28]**

**Jeffrey Sammons:** Thank you for coming out... We're going to start with Dr. Mears, who's going to give us a background on the Medal of Honor award itself, and then I'll be up next to do my part.

**[0:01:52]**

**Dwight Mears:** I'm Dwight Mears, and I'm the generalist in this research effort, because my focus is very broad on the Medal of Honor and over its entire history. And so, I got into this while I was in law school a couple of years ago. I had previously gotten into military decorations as an interest, while I was teaching history at West Point. Then I began to work as a records librarian while I was a law student, I ended up writing a book on the Medal of Honor, so the genesis of my involvement came to be. And I was shocked that a subject that most people know at least a little bit about had received so little serious scrutiny. And that's why I wrote a legislative and policy history on the medal. Which is more interesting than it may sound, from that brief description. So, I'm going to give you a very brief teaser on the evolution of the medal, and a couple of ways that it's influenced African Americans.

So, the medal came to being in the Civil War, and the reason that it took that long is our nation's distaste for the sense that titles and orders that were seen as European would be anti-democratic. When the medal was first proposed by the union army's adjutant general, the general-in-chief Winfield Scott actually vetoed it and said, "We ought not to do that, it would be un-American." Of course Winfield Scott eventually stepped down and so they went forward with it anyway. The first bill that was passed, was in 1861 for the Navy and it was very broad. They wanted to give the services the ability to incentivize virtually any action. So the Medal of Honor of that time evolved considerably by World War I, which is the focus of our research effort now. But that evolution is still important to go over.

The 1861 Act could actually recognize anyone from gallantry in action or other seaman like qualities. That's pretty important because those were both distinct acts to the routes of the award. And I'm sure all of us could agree that being ship shape could be very different depending on who makes the determination. The Army passed an act the next year, in 1862 for soldiers. Very similar to the Navy's, and paraphrase the same, "Gallantry in action as well as other soldier-like qualities." Two people could reasonably differ on what that means. Too commensurate with that, I was telling some gentleman earlier in one case an entire infantry regiment received the Medal of Honor for an enlistment extension. This was outside of combat to 864 people. They sent a trunk of Medal of Honors out to Maine to distribute. They were later rescinded on the grounds that that perhaps had not been a wise decision. But, I raise that not to cast dispersion on the medal or the Army, but to raise the fact that they had not yet fleshed out what the medal meant. In either statute or policy. In fact, the Army didn't write regulations on the medal until 1897. And so, in that policy vacuum there was a lot of experimentation going on, and the very rigid standards that we see today were a direct reaction to the lack of standards in the earlier years. African Americans comprised 25 recipients during the Civil War. And they later earned another 18 medals during the Indian Wars, that's during the interim period. But after the Spanish American War, there really was a dearth of African American recipients. And it wasn't necessarily because people weren't performing gallantry. It was in some cases because of structural things, in certain cases, segregation. That's the controlling factor that we're dealing with in this research. The Army, in its attempt to standardize the medal, finally offered clear regulations in 1897. And they actually did so without the blessing of Congress. And so, it took until 1918 to codify a lot of the restrictions that the Army wanted. They wanted a statute of limitations. The necessity of incontestable proof. Which today is considered two eyewitnesses. And by the 1890's, hundreds of Civil War veterans were asking for the medal every year. Because it started to become popular when they went to the Grand Army of the Republic reunions, and because there was no statute of limitations or no evidentiary standards, they could receive the Medal of Honor on their own affidavit, 35 years after the fact. And the Army technically could not do anything about it until they wrote the policy, or asked for legislation that effectively precluded that. And so, they took the case all the way to the U.S. Attorney general, who ruled that, "Well, in a court of law, the doctrine laches would preclude you from filing a lawsuit, 35 years under that. Why should the government have to give you its highest military

decoration?" With the caveat that it was the only decoration at that time. So, of course that's important. They imposed regulations at first without statutory backing. Then in an attempt to rewrite the earlier history of the award, and effectively retroactively sanitize it, they asked Congress in 1916 to pass ex post facto legislation that would allow them to review and rescind medals that they no longer had jurisdiction over, going all the way back to the Civil War. They then had a commission that reviewed and rescinded 911 medals in 1917. Including those enlistment medals that I mentioned earlier. Which they very much regretted. Although some of them were undoubtedly lawful at the time. As you may know, the Constitution prohibits some ex post facto legislation, but today that's only a criminal penalty that Congress is prohibited from going back and changing the rules. But in civil matters, and matters of awards and entitlements, you can do it. It's just perhaps not the wisest thing. It's controversial.

And so, the standards that governed in World War I, the issue was Pershing knew that our soldiers were going to be fighting, in some cases with the foreign units. And that's what happened with many of the African Americans. And so, he realized that lack of a comparable reward structure would be very deleterious to our effort, because perhaps the private, who was French, in the trench next to you, would receive the Croix de Guerre, but you, as an African American soldier, or any American soldier, might receive nothing because of how strict the Medal of Honor criteria were. And there were no other valor medals. There were no service medals at that time. Except campaigns ribbons. So, he realized that failure to properly incentivize American soldiers could very much hurt the war effort. And so, he actually asked President Wilson to pass, well, an executive order. And they instituted the modern awards framework without congressional approval. And it was later blessed off. It was codified in 1918. Congress basically ratified it after the fact. Fortunately for him. Because that would have been problematic. But they, they basically surveyed what the other allied countries were doing. And they selected the British system as the exemplar to base the modern American awards off of. And the key distinction was we needed lower valor medals to have different tiers of recognition. Because only having a high medal of honor and no other awards meant the commanders had to choose between giving out our only military decoration or nothing. And that was basically a Hobson's choice, for lack of a better description. And it meant that by the end of the war we had very few Medal of Honor recipients. And they did go back, and they eventually increased the number shortly after the war to about 90. But notably, no African American soldiers, despite performing many acts of gallantry, and receiving foreign decorations, notably from the French government, none of them received the Medal of Honor. It's really difficult to look back on that and not think that discrimination, because it was not only palpable, but it was formalized as a matter of law that had to have tainted those, that lack of recognition.

In any event, one of my chapters focused on efforts to atone for discrimination. And so, I had the opportunity to review previous efforts to seek waivers from Congress. Because of course, these types of upgrade efforts do need a waiver in the statute of limitations, because they're so far after the recommendation. And they do get into issues sometimes of the perishability of evidence. That's the reason for having only seven years to recommend and approve a Medal of Honor, under regular criteria. But starting in the 1990s, there were a couple of African Americans that received the Medal of Honor for World War I, but there was never a systematic review. And that changed with the Clinton administration, the Army requested the authority to go back and commission a team of researchers to review African American participation in World War II. And that resulted in a number of Medals of Honor presented by President Clinton. That paved the way for an effort to award Asian Americans who were similarly seen as slighted during the war. That's how Senator Inouye received his Medal of Honor, with a number of Asian Americans that were upgraded. There was subsequently an effort that started in the early 2000s to recognize first Jewish and then later Hispanic, and a few other ethnicities as well, that came to fruition in 2014, under the Obama administration. Twenty-four veterans of various ethnicities were upgraded during that effort. But, interestingly, because World War II took the limelight in a lot of these reviews, they started at World War II and went forward. Or they just focused on World War II. And so, we're left with a strange dichotomy where some of the most glaring examples of inequality in racialized denial of rewards was actually during World War I. And yet there was no systematic review of World War I awards. And so, that's, I think, an excellent primer into why to look at this again. And make certain that this medal is not tarnished by our failure to reward it equitably. I think I'll be followed by Dr. Sammons.

[0:13:53]

**Jeffrey Sammons:** I thought that Dr. Mears was going to tell us a little more about himself. So, I'll say something. He's a West Point graduate that became a major in the United States Army. He and I share an alma mater, the University of North Carolina, Chapelwood Hill. Where both of us received our doctorates in history. And so, he is a trained military historian. And you can see, he knows what he's talking about. He gave us a very good summary of the history of the Medal of Honor. It was really useful for your understanding why we're here today, and what we're trying to do to bring about the change that he believes is necessary.

Well, I like to think that in some ways I've been an inspiration for what's happening here. My inspiration is someone by the name of William A. Butler. William A. Butler was born in White Plains, Maryland. Spent most of his life in Salisbury, Maryland, Eastern Shore. And moved to Baltimore, and then passed away in Washington D.C., so he is very much a son of this area. He served with the 15th New York National Guard. In fact was in the regiment essentially since its inception in 1916. And of course was with them when it became the 369th, better known as the Harlem Hellfighters, which we call the Harlem Rattlers, because that's what they called themselves. And if you were at the event last night, and saw the dough boys walking around with a rattlesnake insignia patch, right? And that's

because the unit adopted that symbol to represent what they were about. "Don't tread on me, we're some bad dudes." In any event, we know that Henry Johnson was a member of the 369th regiment, and in 2015 became the second African American to receive the Medal of Honor. In 1991, Freddie Stowers of South Carolina was the first African American to receive the Medal of Honor. And he was with the 371st regiment. So, as it stands, some 40,000 plus African Americans who actually were in combat in World War I, only two received the Medal of Honor, as Dr. Mears pointed out, posthumously and a long time from when their acts of heroism were committed.

My coauthor and I, John Morrow believed all along that William Butler was someone who should have been considered for a Medal of Honor. Let me tell you something about William, what he did. A German raiding party came into a trench up at 369th and captured lieutenant and numerous soldiers. Somehow Butler communicated with, and this is in the dark, it's early morning, 3:00 or 4:00 am. And you can't understand darkness, unless you've been or read about the Argonne Forest of Meuse Argonne in this period. In any event, he was able to communicate with his lieutenant in such a way that got the lieutenant and the men out of harm's way. He picked up a chauchat, which is an automatic gun normally used while prone. That means it's on the ground. It's notoriously inaccurate from a distance. But he decided that the only way that he could deal with this German raiding party was to run with the chauchat at them, and he had to have two men along with him to feed the belt of ammunition. And was able to take out the Germans without injuring, or killing any of the men, and was nominated for the Croix de Guerre with Palms, which is the same level of the award that Henry Johnson received. And because of research that I did as a result of an invitation that I received from Park University to give a speech on George Robb, I found that William Butler had been nominated for the Medal of Honor by his commander. That was on an index sheet along with George Robb's recommendation. Subsequently I found the actual letter of recommendation, but had it not been for my going in, having this invitation, deciding to do additional research on George S. Robb, that I would not have found this information out about William Butler. Because his personnel file was destroyed in the fire of 1974 at the personnel, Military Personnel Record Center. Nearly 80% of the records were destroyed in that fire. In addition to that, George Robb, who received the Medal of Honor, was the only member of the 369th that received it basically during the war, became a postmaster and then the state auditor of Kansas. And was one of Pershing's 100 Heroes of the War. Gives a speech at the Topeka Literary Society event. And writes about the black soldier in World War I. And this speech is full of stereotypical descriptions of black soldiers, et cetera, et cetera. But when he gets to William Butler he says that William Butler is the greatest example of heroism that he had witnessed in World War I.

So, as a result of that, trying to figure out how we can get William Butler recognized. There's a lady from Salisbury, Maryland, Linda Dire, who has written about William Butler. There was also a biologist interestingly, at the university of Salisbury who was also very interested in William Butler. So, Park University President Gunderson heard my speech on Robb and Butler, and decided that Park University should be involved in an effort to honor, to try to make a case for William Butler's receiving the Medal of Honor. I want to make a long story short. How do we get from William Butler to where we are today? I made a decision that we should not just cherry pick people who we believe to be worthy of the Medal of Honor, because we had some inside information, or it was a favorite son, a native son. So, the decision was made that we should do, call for a systematic review of African-American soldiers who received the Distinguished Service Cross in World War I as well as the Croix de Guerre. And from that effort we engaged with the World War I Centennial commission, and decided that African Americans should be the starting point, because there's so much information that we have on them, they're clearly segregated, easily identifiable. We know that there were the 70 recipients of the DSC, or approximately 70. As well as eight were nominated for the Medal of Honor. Four of them from the 370th, which was the eighth Illinois in World War I. So, that's where we are today, that this has turned from a looking at individuals such as Burton Holmes, who was from South Carolina and nominated along with Freddie Stowers, to William Butler, to looking at a systematic review of African-Americans, but also to extend that to a systematic review of people who were denied an honor because of race, ethnicity, religion. Thank you.

**[0:24:07]**

**Bridget Locke:** Good afternoon everyone, and I am Bridget Locke. I am the Director of Strategic communications at Park University, the institution of higher learning. Where the George S. Robb Center for the Study of the Great War is housed. I bring you greetings from our entire university, and particularly on behalf of our president Dr. Gregg Gunderson. As Dr. Sammons mentioned, Dr. Gunderson is a passionate and staunch advocate for this work, and the only thing that would have kept him away from this moment is the one thing that coincides with this moment. It is homecoming weekend at Park University. And so, as you might imagine, as president, he has several obligations for homecoming weekend. And he regrets that he cannot be both places at once. But it's my honor to address you in his absence. He sends his regards, and he gave me strict instruction to convey his heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your interest in and your support of this important effort. So, thank you, each of you, for being here today. Because the George S. Robb Center is tied to Park University, I think it's really important that you understand who we are as a university community, and why we are suited to be a part of this effort.

First and foremost, we love the U.S. Military. We just love the military. Since our foundation in 1875, Park University has been an active supporter of the armed forces. Here are a few proof points. In the early 1900s, we established a Park College military department. In 1918 we began hosting a detachment of the student army training corps. From 1943 to 1945 we were included among the schools selected by the U.S. Navy to function as a Naval Cadet Training Center or the B12 program. In 1962 we launched degree completion programs for service members.

And in '72 we began offering degree programs at military bases. So, today we have campus centers on 33 military installations across the country. And we offer academic credit for military service. We offer special military tuition rates. And we have a dedicated resource to military and veteran students called the Global Warrior Center. So, the Global Warrior Center helps military students navigate such topics as employment, finances, post-traumatic stress disorder, and military to civilian transition. And we are renowned for our military friendliness. But that's really not why we are involved, and support our military and veteran students. Our philosophy at Park University is simple. We are called to serve those who faithfully and unwaveringly serve our country however we can. It's that simple. We love the military.

Our involvement in this effort also addresses another passion of ours. Park has historically endeavored to be on the right side of history, with regard to social justice issues. We have deep roots in honoring the value of diversity, equity and inclusion. This can be traced all the way back to our first days as an institution. Our original group of students included women and Native American scholars. And that was a makeup that was rare for the 1800s. Another example of our commitment to diversity can be found in the stance taken by Park University President Dr. William Young in the early 1940s. So, a little bit about Dr. Young. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, as American born citizens of Japanese descent all over the nation were sent into internment camps, Dr. Young was very disturbed by this practice. And so, in response he retrieved nine college aged Nisei students from the camps, and he brought them to our campus in Parkville, Missouri. Brought them to our campus' students. So, this was not, as you might imagine, a unanimously popular decision. And Dr. Young did catch a little bit of flak. But he fought the opposition of the townspeople when he took that stand. And in response, the university community followed his lead and rallied behind his students. So, diversity and inclusion was important to us then, and it's important to Park University now. During his first year on campus, our current president, Dr. Gunderson, declared it to be the year of inclusion. And so, with that, he set the expectation that we would have discussions around becoming a more inclusive university community. And in the following year, in 2017, he declared it to be the year of diversity. During which we had more challenging discussions about race relations, and our policies and procedures. So, that was a challenging year, but it was a necessary year. And this year it has been declared to be our year of engagement. So, Dr. Gunderson has issued a charge. He said that we need to learn from the years of discussion, and we need to interact, advocate, and be the change that we want to see. So, **our engagement in this systematic review is another opportunity for our university to be on the right side of history and social justice.**

Speaking of engagement, we understand that the important journey on which we are about to embark, concerning this work, requires a team of like-minded advocates. So, we are honored to engage with the commission and with Dr. Sammons, the infamous Dr. Sammons. As he mentioned, he is really responsible for us having a seat at this table. He introduced to us a tie between George Robb, and sergeant Butler. And so, ever since he and Dr. Gunderson had that discussion, we've been all in. Also, by virtue of proximity, Park will have ample opportunity to engage with the national World War I Museum and Memorial, which is located close to our campus in Kansas City. And with Veterans of Foreign Wars who also have national headquarters in Kansas City. And we are also just a short drive from Fort Des Moines, where African Americans were commissioned for service during World War I. We believe that having such close access to these partners will greatly benefit our research efforts. And in the spirit of partnership, we would really like to specifically thank Congressman Cleaver and his staff. We've got a member of his staff with us today, Mr. Garza. For engaging with us. For being such strong advocates for the appropriate and fair recognition of all servicemen and women. And for providing consistent support to us as we become more involved in this effort. So, now that you know a little bit about our university, who we are and why we are at the table, I'd like to invite Dr. Timothy Westcott, who is Park University's archivist and director of the center, to share a little bit more about how we will become engaged in the center.

#### **[0:31:29]**

**Timothy:** Thank you, Bridget. It's always been a pleasure to work with her over the last couple of years, since she's joined the university. I also want to express deepest appreciation to Dr. Sammons. I agree with him that probably this journey would not have occurred if that invitation had not been extended a couple of years ago for the black history month. Foundation staff Chris, Zack, at least, it's been a pleasure working with you all. And Congressmen Cleaver and his staff, for their support.

George Seymour Robb was born in 1887 in a small town in Kansas, I believe you can still find it today. There's one building in the town. Salina, Kansas is more geographically where we place him, from that point. Following his older brother, he attended Park College, at the time, University today. Graduated in 1912. He attended Columbia University in New York City, graduated in 1915 a master's degree. When the United States entered World War I he enlisted and served as a first lieutenant in the 369th infantry regiment. During September 29th through the 30th of 1918, Rob was wounded several times and received a medal. His bravery during this offensive awarded him, as Dr. Sammons has said, a Medal of Honor.

**In 2005, Park University, Robb's two grandsons Ari and Andrew, established the George S. Robb Center for the Study of the Great War. A, to acknowledge their grandfather's service to the nation. But also, more in its entirety, all service members that served in the Great War.** I have currently four undergraduate students that have started the preliminary review. They started this summer. And looking at, again, approximately 70 African Americans on the DSC list. We have now submitted some information on SF 180s to the service office in St. Louis. We've also then begun

more of a thorough genealogical study. One of the benefits that we happen to have over the Shaw Study is ancestry.com. Because a lot of the draft cards and a lot of those items that we search so heavy for are now available. We will continue to work with Zach and Chris definitely, regarding national, archival, Library of Congress information. But we look forward to getting more in depth into maybe some of that family stuff . Jeff and I have already had that conversation about maybe coming to New York City, so with that I'll take questions later. So, I think, Zack, are you next?

**[0:34:43]**

**Zack:** Yeah, I'm next. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us today. We're very excited to get this effort underway, and we're thrilled that you all could be here for what we're liking to call the soft launch of our program. My name is Zack Austin, and it's a great honor to introduce myself as the adjunct director for the Bower Medals Review Task Force, as part of the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission. That is a mouthful. So, translated from the government speak that we use sometimes, that means that I'm responsible for corralling the group of volunteers that we've assembled for special projects to recognize some of the most deserving veterans of the first world war, who for various reasons beyond their control, the circumstances of their birth, were denied honors for their frankly, incredible achievements, service and sacrifice. I've got one foot with the Park University folks, and one foot in the commission, but I do want to highlight that when we're won't working on this project, there are no stovepipes. We're all one team, working towards the same kind of objectives. And that's really the approach that we think is going to enable us to carry forward the systemic view that my fellow panelists have spoken about today.

So, a little bit about the task force, and how we're organized, and what our next steps are. We were established by official resolution of the Centennial Commission just at the end of June. And we are entirely a group of volunteers at the moment. So, everybody that you've heard from already on the panel is a volunteer with the task force. And we really couldn't do it without any of their efforts. Really, they're all important players. We've been convened to investigate veterans of the first world war, who as I mentioned, have been unjustly denied honors we think they have deserved. And right now, as we've spoken, we're taking the majority approach of going after African-American service members who we think deserve The Medal of Honor and did not get one during the first world war. In another life I was a budget analyst, and I want remind everybody a couple of the numbers that we brought up earlier. As Chris mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, some 350,000 African Americans served in the first world war. At that point they were part of the largest armed forces the United States had ever assembled. They're actually over-represented in the AEF compared to the average American population. And Dr. Mears mentioned earlier, we had 864 Medals of Honor awarded to one regiment in the civil war. We had 25 Medals of Honor awarded to African-American veterans of Civil War. And although the criteria changed, as we talked about, of those 350,000 African-Americans in the trenches on the western front, zero received the Medal of Honor. They were awarded other, lesser awards, with the United States. Most notably the Distinguished Service Cross. Some of them, like Henry Johnson, received no awards at the time from the American Government, and only received recognition from the French in a Croix de Guerre. But, more importantly, as we've discussed, there have been systematic reviews for minority veterans from every conflict. World War II to the present. And there has never been a systematic review of battle medal awards to minority veterans from the first world war. That is what we're seeking to change.

One of the things we haven't brought up yet ... And I know a lot of folks today here have just come from a symposium on female veterans ... Is this is actually not the task force's first undertaking. We're just wrapping up a project right now dealing with the Hello Girls, who were a group of female volunteers who went with the American expeditionary force to France, were instrumental in setting up the communications networks that kept the American offensive going. And for, really, until just a couple years ago, were not even recognized by the Department of Defense for being actual soldiers. And we have been working with some of our friends in the US Senate, specifically Jon Tester from Montana, and Dean Heller from Nevada to introduce a bill calling for a congregational gold medal for the group of Hello Girls at last. But now we've assembled this group that you've heard from today to focus on the African-American component of our systematic review for Medals of Honor from the first world war. Just to highlight some of the participants, obviously you've heard from our distinguished faculty, Dr. Sammons from New York University, the entire team at Park. We have a member of the commissioners from the World War I commission on board. Right now we have two retired flag officers, both major generals, who are participating in the project. And, we haven't mentioned this yet, **we have official resolutions from the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars endorsing this effort, and calling on Congress and the Department of Defense to instigate change and institute a systematic review.**

Now, we've spoken a little bit about the objectives, but I just wanted to cover our two primary ones once again. The first is we've heard some great stories of heroes from today, but we are dedicated to undertaking a systematic review, rather than reiterating what was done with Henry Johnson and Freddie Stowers about identifying individual veterans. Because who knows? Dr. Sammons mentioned that he discovered the Butler case serendipitously. **There could be others equally deserving out there, who are buried in an archive somewhere, waiting to be discovered. And for us to give them their voice once again, after 100 years of silence.** And we're committed to ensuring that every veteran who we think has the archival background to support a Medal of Honor nomination is put in forward to somebody at the Department of Defense who can make that decision. That feeds into our second objective, which is to know that in our research we are not going to be making recommendations. We're not going to

go to Department of Defense and say, "You need to award William Butler the Medal of Honor." What we're going to be doing is establishing the state of play. We're going to be putting forward a complete package of those who we think should be considered. And then it's going to be up to the Department of Defense to ultimately make the decisions about who is deserving of the medals, and who should be awarded them. So, our job is less to make the final decision, and much more to conduct the research and to open the legislative pathways that we need to do in order to get to a situation where these heroes can finally be recognized with the medals that they deserve. As Dr. Mears mentioned, our biggest hurdle to accomplishing that is waiting the statute of limitations. Obviously it's been a hundred years since World War I. Unfortunately no longer these veterans are still with us. And to ensure we have a legal framework to set up these Medal of Honor nominations, we'll have to pass a bill, usually with the other reviews that Dr. Mears has mentioned. These have been appended onto either the defense appropriations or the National Defense Authorization Act. But they have occasionally been done through standalone bills. And the purpose of that would be to essentially waive the time limitation on the Medal of Honor, and ensure that we can deliver the awards to those, legally, who we think deserve them.

I'd like to close with one more thought on that. And that is the Medal of Honor represents a sacred bond that America has with its veterans. It's the highest award that a grateful country can give to those who've gone above and beyond the call of duty to do the inhuman, impossible tasks in service of all Americans. We are very, very conscious of the fact that the gravity of these awards means that their rarity must be jealously safeguarded. We will never be in a situation where we're comfortable recommending a reward to prove a political point. But it is precisely for that reason that we have to ensure all Americans who deserve this award are able to get it. And that it is not an award for any one group of Americans just on the virtue of where they were born, or the color of their skin, or the gender they were born with. This is an award for any hero who will step forward, and through selfless service, devote themselves to their country. And we're committed to ensuring that the award is handled fairly, and we think justly. To that end, the task force is going to be introducing itself publicly on the first day of the association of the United States Army conference on the morning of October 8th. At the same time we're going to have a website launch then, detailing our efforts. And what we've established so far, what we've found in our research. And with that, I'm humbled to say I'm involved, and we look forward to hearing from your questions. So, thank you all for coming once again. It's been a real pleasure to introduce to you all.

[0:44:07]

**Ron:** I'm not going to come up to the podium. I think I can speak from here. These old legs aren't working like they used to. Now, I'm not a scholar. I don't have a PhD. But I graduated from school, I didn't graduate cum laude. According to my grandmother, I graduated Oh Lordy. And I want to put what you're doing in a little broader perspective. I had invited a direct descendant of sergeant William Carney of the Mass 54th regiment down here, David Robert, who I grew up with and didn't even know. He lives in New York, he was scheduled for some surgery. And when I tell people about the first awarding of a Medal of Honor to an African American I'd say William Carney was the first African American. And you know, there are some scholars that tell me no, he wasn't. See, because the date of action was in 1860, but he didn't get the award until after they dedicated the Shaw Memorial across the street from the state house in the early 1900s. So, they argue that he wasn't the first.

Secondly, we just had a panel discussion yesterday. And guess who's name we brought up? Dory Miller. We're still fighting it out for Dory. Right? And I'm ashamed to say that Frank Knox, the secretary of the Navy, was from Massachusetts, and his commentary was that the only thing that a negro could do in his Navy was swab the decks. All right? Now, fast forward. We had the two longest wars in American history. Vietnam, and now this global war on terrorism. No African American has been awarded the Medal of Honor in the current war, global war on terrorism. Even though Sergeant L. Wayne Cash from of all places, Sanford, Florida, the home of the Treyvon Martin incident, was nominated by his commanding officer, a general. He dies in a military hospital back here in Texas, and his posthumously given the silver star. He suffered burns on 90% of his body rescuing people from a Humvee. Why do I say all this? Because I want you to be assured that the fight continues about this awarding and recognizing African American soldiers and others. All right? So, that we don't actually fall, unfortunately, into the other category. And I want to just close on this remark. I want the congressional black caucus, veterans brain trust to be a part of this partnership. We will do everything and anything that we can to help in your efforts.

Lastly, Clifton Berryman, from Cambridge Massachusetts, World War I soldier, Distinguished Service Cross winner, Croix de Guerre recipient. Post office named after him. His grandson runs the largest church here in the district of Columbia, just outside. They tell me it's a megachurch. I'm still trying to go over there and hear him preach. So, I'd like to invite some of the folks that we've met along the way. Maybe next year we can talk about a larger reception like we gave last night. And invite some of the members, family members that I've met along this journey, to participate with us. I think the last Civil War soldier to get the Medal of Honor, it took 137 years between the date of action and the awarding. The last day of the Clinton administration, from Indianapolis, Indiana. Fascinating story about what it took. But this is an ongoing issue, and we pledge our support. We look forward to doing something larger, bigger, more illustrious next year. And yes, I have your picture.

[0:48:58]

**Chris Isleib:** Okay, with that, folks, that concludes our prepared agenda items. And so, we welcome you to stick around, enjoy some more fellowship. We've got still some more food, some more coffee, and we thank you for being here to hear what we have to say. Thank you.