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Former President George H.W. Bush is among 15 people selected to be awarded the presidential Medal of Freedom, [the White House announced](#) Wednesday night.

The Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor, is awarded for "an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors."

A White House announcement specifically lauded Bush's work with former President Bill Clinton on charitable initiatives.

The move was widely expected to be seen as a bipartisan gesture from Obama to Republicans on Capitol Hill, fresh off a round of mid-term elections that ended Democrats' House majority but left them in control of the US Senate.

The announcement was made a day after former President George W. Bush respectfully declined to criticize President Obama, during a press conference in Dallas at the future site of the Bush library.

Others named by the Obama administration include German Chancellor Angela Merkel, billionaire philanthropist Warren Buffett, civil rights leader and Congressman John Lewis, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, poet and author Maya Angelou, holocaust survivor Gerda Weissmann Klein, former AFL-CIO leader John Sweeney and more.

"These outstanding honorees come from a broad range of backgrounds and they've excelled in a broad range of fields, but all of them have lived extraordinary lives that have inspired us, enriched our culture, and made our country and our world a better place," Obama said in a published statement.

Former President Bush, a World War II veteran, also served as vice president to President Ronald Reagan and as director of the CIA.

Last year's Medal of Freedom recipients included deceased Sen. Edward Kennedy, former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, deceased Republican Rep. Jack Kemp, deceased gay rights activist Harvey Milk [and 12 others](#) .