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Medicine Crow receives Medal of Freedom



Joe Medicine Crow emphasizes a point for President Barack Obama during his White House visit

WASHINGTON (AP) - Wearing a traditional headdress, Joe Medicine Crow on Wednesday received the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House. The award was clasped around his neck by President Barack Obama.

“Dr. Medicine Crow's life reflects not only the warrior spirit of the Crow people, but America's highest ideals,” Obama said as he introduced him and called him “a good man” in the Crow language.

Medicine Crow broke tradition and briefly spoke after Obama gave him the medal, telling the president he was “highly honored” to receive it.

Medicine Crow also took time before the ceremony to compose a new song for the new president – a warrior victory song which he

performed for Mr. and Mrs. Obama during a private ceremony at the White House.

Other recipients this year were Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, physicist Stephen Hawking, retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and 12 other actors, athletes, activists, scientists and humanitarians.

Medicine Crow was accompanied by his son Ron, daughter-in-law Clarise, Secretary of the Crow Tribe Scott Russell, Crow Sun Dance Chief Leonard Bends, and by Chris Kortlander, owner of the town of Garryowen, Montana, and director of the Custer Battlefield Museum, the main sponsor of the trip.

The president met Medicine Crow during a campaign stop last year when Obama, then a U.S. senator, was adopted as an honorary member of the Crow tribe.

In 1939, Medicine Crow became the first of his tribe to receive a master's degree, in anthropology. He is the oldest member of the Crow and the tribe's sole surviving war chief - an honor bestowed for a series of accomplishments during World War II, including hand-to-hand combat with a German soldier whose life Medicine Crow spared.

After the war, he became tribal historian for the Crow and lectured extensively on the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Medicine Crow's grandfather served as a scout for the doomed forces of Gen. George Armstrong Custer.

Medicine Crow was nominated for the presidential medal by Sen. Jon Tester of Montana and former Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming.