

In many of our private meetings together over the last 3 years, Bill Perry would always—always—bring up the welfare, the morale, the interests, and the future of our men and women in uniform who are enlisted personnel and their families. Secretary Perry's many trips abroad—and as the most traveled Defense Secretary in the history of the United States, there were many trips—were as much about checking in with our troops and their families and checking on their quality of life as they were about meeting with defense ministers and military leaders in other lands.

As a former private, his heart never left the members of the enlisted corps. As a former lieutenant, he understood the leadership demands we place upon our junior officers. But above all, he understood that whether enlisted or officer, military service is the ultimate expression of patriotism by those who choose to wear our uniform.

I will miss Bill Perry for many things, for his thoughtful temperament and manner, for speaking with the mathematician's unadorned clarity, a rarity in Washington. Teddy Roosevelt said that those of us in positions of authority should speak softly and carry a big stick. Bill Perry spoke softly and carried the biggest stick in the world with great care and a great effect. His quiet confidence was always an incredible comfort to me. There were qualities which our allies relied upon, and as long as he was Secretary of Defense, I never went to bed a single

night worried about the security of the United States or the welfare of our men and women in uniform. His practice of bipartisanship earned Bill Perry the trust and respect of the Congress and the American people as well as credibility abroad as an American who could speak for the entire country.

Many of you know that Secretary Perry's personal hero is his predecessor General George Marshall. During the crisis days of World War II, Marshall lived right here at Fort Myer and then went on to become a great Secretary of State and the third Secretary of Defense. While Bill Perry is one of just 16 to follow him in that difficult job, I believe he is the successor George Marshall would be most proud of.

The measure of a great Defense Secretary is whether he leaves our military stronger and our Nation safer than on the day he took office. It is, and we are.

And so it is my great privilege as President, as Commander in Chief, and as a grateful American citizen, to present William J. Perry with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian award.

Commander, publish the order.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in Conmy Hall. In his remarks, he referred to General Shalikashvili's wife, Joan, and Secretary Perry's wife, Leonilla. Following the President's remarks, Spec. John Christ, USA, 3d U.S. Infantry (the Old Guard), read the citation.

Statement on the National Economy *January 14, 1997*

Today's Consumer Price Index report makes clear that 1996 was an exceptional year for the economy in terms of low inflation and low unemployment. Indeed, the report confirms that the combined rate of unemployment and inflation, the so-called misery index, was lower in 1996 than in any year since 1968. We also learned that in the last 3 years we have had stronger real average hourly wage growth than during any 3-year period in nearly two decades

(1976–1978). Moreover, the core inflation rate in 1996 was as low as any year since 1965.

This is good news for the American people and more evidence that our economic strategy is working. Now is the time to work together in a bipartisan fashion and build on our success. That's why we will continue our efforts to reduce the deficit to zero, expand trade, and increase educational opportunities.