WASHINGTON – President Obama today named 16 recipients of the 2009 Presidential Medal of Freedom. America’s highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom is awarded to individuals who make an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.

This year’s awardees were chosen for their work as agents of change. Among their many accomplishments in fields ranging from sports and art to science and medicine to politics and public policy, these men and women have changed the world for the better. They have blazed trails and broken down barriers. They have discovered new theories, launched new initiatives, and opened minds to new possibilities.

President Obama said, “These outstanding men and women represent an incredible diversity of backgrounds. Their tremendous accomplishments span fields from science to sports, from fine arts to foreign affairs. Yet they share one overarching trait: Each has been an agent of change. Each saw an imperfect world and set about improving it, often overcoming great obstacles along the way.

"Their relentless devotion to breaking down barriers and lifting up their fellow citizens sets a standard to which we all should strive. It is my great honor to award them the Medal of Freedom."

President Obama will present the awards at a ceremony on Wednesday, August 12.

Joe Medicine Crow – High Bird
Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow, the last living Plains Indian war chief, is the author of seminal works in Native American history and culture. He is the last person alive to have received direct oral testimony from a participant in the Battle of the Little Bighorn: his grandfather was a scout for General George Armstrong Custer. A veteran of World War II, Medicine Crow accomplished during the war all of the four tasks required to become a “war chief,” including stealing fifty Nazi SS horses from a German camp. Medicine Crow was the first member of his tribe to attend college, receiving his master’s degree in anthropology in 1939, and continues to lecture at universities and notable institutions like the United Nations. His contributions to the preservation of the culture and history of the First Americans are matched only by his importance as a role model to young Native Americans across the country.