

Hypocrisy and lies: Barack Obama accepts “Profile in Courage” award in Boston

Kate Randall
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Former President Barack Obama took time out from his whirlwind schedule of island-hopping with the rich and famous—and collecting six-figure speaking fees for Wall Street appearances—to travel Sunday to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston to receive this year’s Profile in Courage award.

Set up by members of President Kennedy’s family in 1989, the award recognizes government officials whose actions supposedly “demonstrate the qualities of politically courageous leadership in the spirit of *Profiles in Courage*, President Kennedy’s 1957 Pulitzer prize-winning book, which recounts the stories of eight US Senators who risked their careers by embracing unpopular positions for the greater good,” according to the library’s web site.

Gerald Ford was honored in 2001 for granting a “full, free and absolute pardon” to former Richard Nixon, who resigned in disgrace in August 1974. Former President George H.W. Bush was awarded the prize in 2014 for crafting a budget deal that included tax increases after saying famously during his election campaign, “Read my lips: no new taxes.” Such figures are hardly regarded today by wide layers of the American population as models of courage.

However, the presentation of the award to Barack Obama Sunday evening brought the entire operation to new level of cynicism. The Kennedy Library notes on his award: “Throughout his two terms in office, President Obama upheld the highest standards of dignity, decency and integrity, serving not just as a political leader, but a moral leader, offering hope and healing to the country and providing young men and women of all backgrounds with an example they can emulate in their own lives.”

What exactly is the example that Obama set to be emulated by “young men and women of all

backgrounds?” He had doors opened for him throughout his political career, was guided and groomed by ruling circles as someone who could be marketed as a candidate of “change” while orchestrating the greatest redistribution of wealth in American history—to the rich—expanding war abroad and escalating the assault on democratic rights.

Now, having left office, Obama is preparing to make millions through lucrative book deals and speaking engagements as payment for services rendered.

Although Obama did not mention the Affordable Care Act or “Trumpcare” in the course of his remarks accepting the award, it is clear that the passage of Obamacare was one of the main reasons he was chosen. In an appearance on NBC’s “Today Show” Friday by JFK’s daughter Caroline Kennedy, former ambassador to Japan, and grandson Jack Schlossberg, Schlossberg said Obama “made tough choices over the eight years to give people health care.”

The ACA, however, did not “give people health care,” but required that they purchase it from private insurance companies. It has created the framework for corporations to slash health care, while shifting the burden of costs onto the backs of workers.

In his remarks, Obama exuded complacency about the current congressional wrangling over health care and offered outright falsehoods concerning the current state of politics in America today.

Referring to “some of the men and women who were elected to Congress the same year I was elected to the White House,” he said, “They took votes to save the financial system and the economy, even when it was highly unpopular. They took votes to save the auto industry when even in Michigan people didn’t want to see bailouts. They took votes to crack down on abuses on Wall Street, despite pressure from lobbyists and

sometimes their donors.”

But why were the votes to bail out Wall Street and the auto industry so unpopular? Precisely because they let the Wall Street swindlers off scot-free and slashed the jobs and wages of autoworkers. There was no crackdown on abuses by Wall Street. Eight years after the 2008 crisis—the eight years of Obama’s tenure as president—stock market speculation is at even higher levels.

Obama then stated that Democratic legislators found themselves in “a debate about whether a nation as wealthy as the United States of America would finally make health care not a privilege but a right for all Americans.” He continued, “They had a chance to insure millions and prevent untold worry and suffering and bankruptcy, and even death, but that this same vote would likely cost them their new seats, perhaps end their political careers.”

He went on: “I hope that current members of Congress recall that it actually doesn’t take a lot of courage to aid those who are already powerful, already comfortable, already influential. But it does require some courage to champion the vulnerable and the sick and the infirm, and those who often have no access to the corridors of power.”

Earlier on Sunday, Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price appeared on NBC’s “Meet the Press,” spewing outright lies about the House Republicans’ proposed American Health Care Act (AHCA) to “repeal and replace” Obamacare. He stated with a straight face that it would not throw millions off Medicaid, the insurance program for the poor—despite a proposed funding cut of \$880 billion over a decade—and that millions of people would be not be uninsurable due to “preexisting conditions.”

Where was the courage of the former president to “champion the vulnerable and the sick” in the face of this assault on Americans’ health care? The passion and outrage are not there because, in the end, the congressional “debate” over health care is one between friends, in which the for-profit health care industry is king.

The health and very lives of people will be at risk whatever compromise the Democrats and Republicans put together and impose on the American people. The next stage of the health care counterrevolution builds upon the pro-corporate framework of Obamacare.

In the ceremonious proceedings on Sunday, there was no mention of the Democratic administration’s two terms of unending war, its targeting of American citizens for drone assassination, its ravaging of cities such as Mosul and the killing of civilians and drowning of thousands of refugees seeking to flee war-torn areas hit by US airstrikes. What kind of “courage” is on display here?

Rather, the audience was offered platitudes bearing no relation to reality. The former president urged those gathered to “joyfully embrace our responsibility as citizens, to stay true to our allegiance, to our highest and best ideals, to maintain our regard and concern for the poor and the marginalized, to put our personal or party interests aside when duty to our country calls.”

All in all, a nauseating spectacle.



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