

Congress Recognizes DEA Agents: Congressional Badge of Bravery Awarded

Congressional Badge of Bravery Awarded to FAST-Delta Members May 7, 2013



(L-R) Senator Tim Kaine Administrator Leonhart Deputy Administrator Harrigan Special Agent Joe Piersante

Police Week begins, as it always does, with the Blue Mass and ends with the National Peace Officers Memorial Service the following week. In between, a number of important events occur, all of which honor the sacrifices made by law enforcement officers who put themselves in harm's way to serve the public.

Following the Blue Mass on May 7, members of the United States House and Senate presented the Federal Congressional Badge of Bravery to seven Special Agents that are part of DEA's Foreign Deployed Advisory and Support Team (FAST) for actions they took in Afghanistan. The medals were presented in a ceremony held at the Dirksen Senate Office Building to Special Agents Matthew Fischer, Paul Harris, Jared Johnson, Joe Piersante, Brent Poortinga, Matthew Stewart, and Justin Vanderbilt.

Congress created the Federal Law Enforcement Congressional Badge of Bravery to honor exceptional acts of bravery in the line of duty by federal law enforcement officers. The medals are awarded annually by the U.S. Attorney General and are presented by the recipients' Congressional representatives.

All the agents who received the Badge of Bravery on May 7 are Virginia residents. Accordingly, Virginia Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, along with members of the Virginia delegation from the House of Representatives, including Majority Leader Eric Cantor, Representative Gerry Connolly, and Representative Rob Wittman, presented the awards. Neil MacBride, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, also attended the event and gave remarks.

Senator Warner spoke at the ceremony about how this was only the second time he has given out this award since it was created by an Act of Congress in 2008. He remarked on the important mission and critical function of DEA, and of the character and bravery evident in each of the awardees. "Every

day," the Senator stated, "American law enforcement officials like these seven Special Agents put their lives on the line in order to keep America safe. They perform their duties with honor and patriotism, and I admire them for their service to the nation."

Senator Kaine indicated that it was a rare honor for him to be able to put the spotlight on the best of the best in public service. He paraphrased a bible passage: No one shows greater love than when he lays down his life for his friends. The Senator then remarked how the Special Agents being presented this award are, like all law enforcement officers, willing to go even further: to put their lives on the line for people who they do not even know.

Congressman Connolly built on the remarks of Senator Kaine by stating that few of us are born heroes: our character is really only known when it is tested. He continued by saying each of those being awarded the Badge of Bravery were tested and demonstrated their extraordinary character and integrity. Majority Leader Cantor reminded us that while so many people take the work of law enforcement for granted, he and his colleagues in Congress do not do so, and this award is one way they express their appreciation. Congressman Wittman explained how his life philosophy is that we are put here on earth to make a difference in the lives of others, and how law enforcement changes the lives of scores of people, most of whom they do not know and may never even meet.

At the ceremony the Administrator spoke about the mission of DEA's FAST program and of Team Delta's actions on October 31, 2011. She discussed the unpredictable nature of drug enforcement operations and noted that when the unexpected happens, people find themselves tested, showing their true character. The Administrator continued by adding that each of those receiving the Badge of Bravery demonstrated incredible character, integrity, and perseverance both during and after the event in Afghanistan. She also said that while teamwork saved Joe's life, it was his enormous willpower, his physical conditioning, and his extraordinary personality, including a great sense of humor that made his incredible recovery possible.