(Washington, D.C) — In light of recent statements made by a political candidate equating the Medal of Honor with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, it is essential to clarify the distinctions between these prestigious awards. As President of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), I feel a deep responsibility to ensure that the honor and significance of these medals are accurately represented and understood.

The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the United States government. It is bestowed upon members of the armed forces who have distinguished themselves through acts of valor beyond the call of duty. This medal is a symbol of extraordinary courage and sacrifice, often awarded posthumously. It is important to note that receiving the Medal of Honor does not require an individual to have been severely wounded; rather, it is awarded for acts of heroism that demonstrate exceptional bravery and gallantry in combat.

In contrast, the Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest civilian award in the United States. It recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to the national interests of the U.S., world peace, or cultural endeavors. While it is a tremendous honor, it is fundamentally different from military honors and should not be compared directly to the sacrifices made by our servicemembers.

Additionally, the Purple Heart is awarded to those wounded or killed while serving in the U.S. military. It serves as a poignant reminder of the personal sacrifices made in the line of duty and represents a different aspect of military service than the Medal of Honor.

As we approach the upcoming elections, it is crucial for all candidates and public figures to fully understand these distinctions. Misrepresenting the meaning and significance of these awards not only disrespects the sacrifices made by our veterans but also undermines the integrity of our national honors.

VVA urges all candidates to take this opportunity to educate themselves about the medals awarded to our nation’s heroes. Accurate understanding and respectful discourse regarding these awards can foster a greater appreciation for the sacrifices made by our veterans and their families.