

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2013*

**Remarks Honoring the 2013 National and State Teachers of the Year**  
*April 23, 2013*

*The President.* Well, hello, everybody. Please have a seat. I am thrilled to welcome our State and National Teachers of the Year to the White House this afternoon.

Now, if—people who know me know I've just got a soft spot for teachers, partly—my sister is a teacher, my mom was a teacher for a while. And if there's one thing we can't say enough to our Nation's educators, it is "thank you." So today we've got a chance to do that: to show our extraordinary appreciation for the difference that they make in the lives of our children and the lives of our Nation.

Now, before we get started, I've got to recognize another outstanding educator, our Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, who is as passionate about the future of our kids as anybody that I know. And I'd like to acknowledge and applaud the three outstanding principals of the year who are joining us because we know that unless we've got outstanding leadership in our schools, it's very hard for even great teachers to do their job. And so please give them a big round of applause as well.

Now, these educators behind me come from all over the country. They represent cities and towns of every shape and size, all types of schools. But the one thing that binds them together is that they are absolutely devoted to nurturing the next generation. They're role models who show our kids how to work hard to reach their potential. They encourage our children's passion. They inspire our children's imaginations.

And this year's National Teacher of the Year, Jeff Charbonneau, is from Zillah, Washington. Did I say that right, Jeff?

*Jeff Charbonneau.* Charbonneau, so yes.

*The President.* Charbonneau.

*Mr. Charbonneau.* Charbonneau from Zillah.

*The President.* From Zillah. [*Laughter*] That's why he's a good teacher. [*Laughter*] As Jeff put it, a teacher's "greatest accomplishments are revealed each time a student realizes that he or she has an unlimited potential." And I'll bet any—everybody here can remember a moment like that, when a teacher helped them find that spark that allowed them to get to where they are today, a teacher who saw something in us that maybe at the time we didn't see in ourselves.

Twelve years ago, when Jeff decided to return to his hometown to teach, Zillah High School had no engineering curriculum. The science curriculum was lagging. Kids had to go off campus for technology classes, and the computer resources were frankly pretty poor.

But Jeff was determined to turn that around. He wanted to convince kids that something like quantum mechanics wasn't something to run away from, but something to dive into. And he said, "It's my job to convince them that they are smart enough, that they can do anything."

And now, with Jeff's leadership at his high school, science enrollment is way up. Kids are graduating at college-level science—with college-level science credits. The school expects to have to hire more teachers now to meet the demand.

This kind of transformation is exactly why I've proposed preparing an additional 100,000 math and science teachers across the country over the next decade. And excellent teachers like Jeff could make up part of a master teachers corps, a network of outstanding educators who serve as leaders and mentors for their colleagues in these particular subject areas.

But it's not just classroom teaching that distinguishes Jeff. He reinvigorated the school's yearbook. He started an outdoors club. He brought his passion to the drama program. He's even helping out other schools. And because of Jeff, hundreds of thousands—or hundreds of students all over the State are now participating in high-skills robotics competitions and gaining valuable engineering experience, all in the name of creating what Jeff calls "paradise." That's what school is for him, that's what he wants it to be for his students, in their classrooms, but also in their activities and the greater community.

And basically, there's nothing that Jeff will not try to give his students the best education in every respect. And by the way, I think it's important for us to acknowledge Jeff's wife and children and mom and dad and brother, all presumably have to put up with him constantly doing all this stuff. [Laughter] And we appreciate them for the great support that they've given him.

Now, what's true for Jeff is true for every educator standing behind me. They understand that their job is more than teaching subjects like reading or chemistry. They're not just filling blackboards with numbers and diagrams. In classrooms across America, they're teaching things like character and compassion and resilience and imagination. They're filling young minds with virtues and values and teaching our kids how to cooperate and overcome obstacles. So today we honor the dedicated professionals that help guide that critical development.

Any parent knows it's hard to drop your son off or your daughter off at school that first time. In the instant that car door slams or the school bus door shuts, there is a little flutter that goes on. I like quoting somebody who said that being a parent is like having your heart outside your body wandering around. [Laughter] But these teachers, they're the ones that we trust with our kids. They're people who love our kids.

A few months ago, we saw the true depths of a teacher's commitment when six educators were killed trying to protect the children they embraced as their own. There was the teacher who locked her first-grade students in a bathroom and whispered, "I love you," because, in her words, "I wanted that to be the last thing they heard, and not gunfire." The special-education teacher who was found cradling a student in her arms, trying to protect him from the evil that ultimately took them both.

In those moments, those brave teachers showed the world what they do is more than just educate kids. They embrace them, and they nurture them, and they love them. And we know that the men and women behind me do the same.

These folks did not go into teaching for money. [Laughter] They certainly didn't go into it because of the light hours and the easy work. They walk into the classroom every single day because they love doing what they do, because they're passionate about helping our children realize the best versions of themselves so that our country can become the best version of itself.

And I just want to say to all of them, I hope that in some small measure, this award keeps them going. Because I never want our teachers to feel discouraged at a time of budget cuts, at a time when all too often problems in the schools are laid at the feet of teachers; where we expect them to do so much, and sometimes they get so little in return.

I want you guys to know that the country appreciates you. The kids appreciate you. Parents appreciate you. What you do matters. It's critical to our success as a country, but most importantly, it's critical to those kids themselves. I cannot think of something more important than reaching that child who, maybe, came in uninspired, and suddenly, you've inspired them.

And by the way, I want to mention, I often talk about STEM and math and science; I really do think it's critically important. We've fallen behind on a lot of those subjects. But I don't want to neglect our English teachers and our arts teachers, our music teachers, our history teachers, our social science teachers, because, yes, we want folks inventing things and we need more engineers and scientists and probably fewer lawyers. I can say that as a lawyer. [Laughter] But part of what you're also teaching young people is qualities like compassion and being able to put yourself in somebody else's shoes. And that's what makes our society worth living in as well.

So bottom line is, thank you. And the least the rest—the least that the rest of us can do is to give all of these folks the respect that they've earned, the gratitude we owe them. Teaching is a profession and it should be treated like one. And that means we're going to have to recruit and prepare and reward our next generation of great educators more effectively. Secretary Duncan's been working with folks around the country on a new blueprint for teaching in the 21st century, listening to some of these outstanding teachers and educators and principals so that we can figure out what best practices are out there.

Educators like Jeff and everyone up here today, they represent the very best of America: committed professionals who give themselves fully to the growth and development of our kids. And with them at the front of the classroom and leading our schools, I am absolutely confident that our children are going to be prepared to meet the tests of our time and the tests of the future.

So we're grateful to all of you. Thanks for helping our kids dream big, hope deeply, and realize a brighter future. So with that, I would now like to present Jeff with his apple. And I want to—but don't bite into it—[laughter]—and invite him to say a few words. Give Jeff a big round of applause.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Susan Chin, principal, Veazie Street Elementary School in Providence, RI; Laurie Barron, principal, Smokey Road Middle School in Newnan, GA; Trevor Greene, principal, Toppenish High School in Toppenish, WA; Monika M. Charbonneau, wife, Andrew J. and Makayla M. Charbonneau, children, Marc E. and Darline M. Charbonneau, parents, and Ryan E. Charbonneau, brother, of 2013 National Teacher of the Year Jeffrey A. Charbonneau; Kaitlin Roig, teacher, Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT; and Anne Marie Murphy, special education aide, Sandy Hook Elementary School, who was killed in the December 14, 2012, shootings. He also referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : National and State Teachers of the Year.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Barron, Laurie; Charbonneau, Andrew J.; Charbonneau, Darline M.; Charbonneau, Jeffrey A.; Charbonneau, Makayla M.; Charbonneau, Marc E.; Charbonneau, Monika M.; Charbonneau, Ryan E.; Chin, Susan; Duncan, Arne; Greene, Trevor; Murphy, Anne Marie; Roig, Kaitlin; Soetoro-Ng, Maya.

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