

## The President's Radio Address *September 27, 1997*

Good morning. I want to talk this morning about a very real threat to our judicial system. For more than 220 years, our Nation has remained young and strong by meeting new challenges in ways that renew our oldest values. Throughout our history, our judiciary has given life and meaning to those values by upholding the laws and defending the rights they reflect, without regard for politics or political party. That is the legacy of the judicial system our Founders established, a legacy we recalled this Thursday on the 40th anniversary of the court-ordered desegregation of Little Rock Central High School.

But in the past 18 months, this vital partnership has broken down as the Senate has refused to act on nomination after nomination. And in Federal courthouses across America, almost 100 judges' benches are empty. In 1996 the Senate confirmed just 17 judges. That's the lowest election-year total in over 40 years. This year I've already sent 70 nominations to Congress, but so far they've acted on less than 20. The result is a vacancy crisis in our courts that Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist warned could undermine our courts' ability to fairly administer justice.

Meanwhile, our courts are clogged with a rising number of cases. An unprecedented number of civil cases are stalled, affecting the lives of tens of thousands of Americans, from the family seeking life insurance proceeds, to the senior citizen trying to collect Social Security benefits, to the small business protecting its right to compete. In our criminal courts, nearly 16,000 cases are caught in limbo while criminals on bail await punishment and victims await justice. Our sitting

judges are overloaded and overworked, and our justice system is strained to the breaking point.

The Senate's failure to act on my nominations, or even to give many of my nominees a hearing, represents the worst of partisan politics. Under the pretense of preventing so-called judicial activism, they've taken aim at the very independence our Founders sought to protect. The congressional leadership has actually threatened sitting judges with impeachment, merely because it disagrees with their judicial opinions. Under this politically motivated scrutiny, under ever-mounting caseloads, our judges must struggle to enforce the laws Congress passes and to do justice for us all.

We can't let partisan politics shut down our courts and gut our judicial system. I've worked hard to avoid that. And the people I've nominated for judgeships and had confirmed have had the highest rating of well qualified from the American Bar Association of any President since these ratings have been kept.

So today I call upon the Senate to fulfill its constitutional duty to fill these vacancies. The intimidation, the delay, the shrill voices must stop so the unbroken legacy of our strong, independent judiciary can continue for generations to come. This age demands that we work together in bipartisan fashion, and the American people deserve no less, especially when it comes to enforcing their rights, enforcing the law, and protecting the Constitution.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6 p.m. on September 26 in the Presidential Suite of the Westin Oaks Galleria Hotel in Houston, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 27.

## Remarks at the Hot Springs High School Ultimate Class Reunion in Hot Springs, Arkansas *September 27, 1997*

Thank you very much. What a beautiful day. What a beautiful setting. I want to thank all of you for being here. I thank my dear friend

David Pryor for his introduction, for continuing to play golf with me. *[Laughter]* And I forgive him for leaving Washington. It is a poorer place

for his absence. He served us so well there, and he graced the United States.

Thank you, Congressman Dickey, for being here today and for reaching across party lines, always with personal kindness, and I might say, always to stick up for our beloved State when it's under assault. We thank you for that.

Thank you, Governor McMath, who was a hero of my childhood, a hero of my young manhood, and he's still my hero. I'd like to be able to give a talk like that today. [Laughter] I was just over visiting with my 86-year-old aunt who graduated a year ahead of Sid McMath at Hot Springs High School; she was class of 1930. And I said, "Aunt Janet, do you want to come on over to the high school?" She said, "No, I don't get around all that well, and I've heard you give a lot of speeches." And I said, "Well it's not just me. It's David Pryor and Jay Dickey, and the mayor will be there." And I said, "Oh, Sid McMath is going to be there." And she said, "My God, he's the best-looking man and the best speaker I ever heard in my life." [Laughter] She said, "I'll be there." [Laughter] I don't know whether she's here or not, but she said she was coming.

I thank Governor McMath. I grew up as a child here living on the stories of how the GI's came home from World War II and took over the city government and the county government and cleaned it up and moved it forward. And I remember how Governor McMath stuck by Harry Truman when he was the first President who really advocated equal rights for all Americans, and he integrated the military, and he said we were going to have to get along together and go forward together. And it is in that tradition, I think, that so many of us try to serve. So I'm glad to see him.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to Helen Selig for being willing to run for mayor and serve as mayor of our hometown, because you have been unbelievable. Thank you so much. We thank you.

I thank David and Keeley for being willing to cochair this effort. Asking people for money is always a thankless effort, but they've made it about as attractive as you could make it, I think, today. If you haven't been through here, I hope you will go.

I want to thank all the members of my class who asked me to get involved in this, but especially the people who were my leaders so often when we were in high school: Phil Jamison,

Jim French, and Carolyn Staley. I want to thank all the former teachers who are here. I see Mr. Spurlin and Mrs. Irons and Mrs. Luebben, a lot of other people—I'm sure Paul Root's here—see if I make any mistakes he can quote back to me later on. [Laughter] But all the former teachers from Hot Springs High School, thank you for being here. And I'll bet you we have a very good representation from my class. Who's here from the class of '64, raise your hands. [Applause] That's the most timid response I ever got. [Laughter] Judge Woods, thank you for coming.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the things that has most bothered me as Hillary and I have worked in education over the last 20 years now, and as I have become President and had the chance to travel around the country and go into schools of all sizes and shapes all across America, is the dramatic decline in the offerings in the arts: in music, in other performing arts, in the visual arts.

We have so much evidence that children who have difficulties in their lives, that children who may come from disadvantaged backgrounds but may have a spark of mathematical ability, for example, do much better if they're given access to a music program. We have so much evidence that children who may have been emotionally scarred in some way may find a healthy and positive and wholesome way to get out of it if they're given a chance to be in a theater program, or to paint, or to do something else that gives some positive outlet to their energies and their feelings.

And we ought to be raising whole people. What we really want—since we know that over 90 percent of society's work can be done by over 90 percent of us—what we really have to raise are people that are whole, that are good, that have good values, but that are at peace with themselves, that are free to make good lives for themselves and, therefore, make a good future for our country.

So I think this is important because it's the kind of thing that ought to be done by people everywhere, to give our children a chance to have a full life. Here, it's even more important because we have so many people with artistic gifts who come here to live. Some of them come here to retire. When I walked in all the rooms there, I saw people of all ages doing all different kinds of things. And it will make us an even

better magnet. It will be a wonderful complement to the music festival, to the documentary film festival, to the school of math and science. It's something that makes, again, our town special. So I thank you for all of that.

Let me also say, the only thing I'm not sure I like about this is, I really don't think I'm old enough to have anything named after me. [Laughter] I thought you had to have at least one leg in the grave before they'd name anything for you. [Laughter] But if it helps raise another nickel, I accept, and I thank you. I'm profoundly honored.

Let me also say to all of you that if we really want to recover all the resources of this community and you want it to go into the next century with all the things that can happen here—if you go back to the 19th century, there's hardly a community anywhere within 500 miles that has a more unique history and that has more unique manifestations of that history still around, over the last 100 years or so—but if we want it to be that way, we're going to have to find a way to pay to develop it.

And David and Keeley have stuck their necks out, and we need to support them, both individually and corporately. They need help from our businesses and help from people who can afford to do it in accordance with their ability to pay. And I will do what I can to help to raise the funds as well. But we also need a large number of small contributions by people who may just be able to give a modest amount.

But I want this to be the people's house. I want you to feel when we get this done that it's not my name up there, that it's yours, every one of you if you contribute to it, when you go through these doors. And your children and your grandchildren and your parents and your grandparents may be there. That's what we're trying to do.

Finally, I can't help saying after what Governor McMath did that there are a lot of people I'm sure we all wish were here today. I know

Governor McMath wishes the men who fought in the Second World War with him who didn't come home were here. All of us wish that our parents were here. We wish our teachers who aren't living anymore were here. I wish our four classmates who died in Vietnam and the others who have died since then were here.

But I guess most of all, I wish Johnnie Mae Mackey were here. And apparently so does Carol Wilson. So I would like to ask Johnnie Mae's incarnation to come up here and lead us in a little round of hullabaloo. [Laughter] Thank you all so much. God bless you. Let's make this a success, what do you say?

Cheerleaders, cheerleaders, come on. I swear, this is living evidence of a comment that I made the other day that our cheerleaders still all can fit in their uniforms. Here they are. [Laughter] Come on.

Now, for those of us who were here when Johnnie Mae Mackey ran this school—[laughter]—you know, everybody that came out of this high school and went in the Marine Corps during the period that Johnnie Mae Mackey ran the school found that it was a step down in discipline and order. [Laughter] So try to visualize those magic days now.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:17 p.m. on the front steps of the historic Hot Springs High School which became a junior high school in 1968. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator David Pryor; Sidney McMath, former Arkansas Governor; Mayor Helen Selig of Hot Springs; David French, chair, and Keeley Ardman DeSalvo, co-chair, William Jefferson Clinton Cultural Campus; Phil Jamison, president, Jim French, vice president, and Carolyn Yeldell Staley, secretary, class of 1964; Virgil Spurlin, the President's high school band director; Edith Irons, Lonnie Luebben, and Paul Root, teachers at Hot Springs High School; former Circuit Court Judge Henry Woods; and Carolyn Wilson, who led the cheer following the President's remarks.