

prevent votes on two outstanding circuit nominees I submitted on May 9, 2001, Miguel Estrada and Priscilla Owen.

The delays in the Senate confirmation process deter good people from seeking to serve on the bench and create a vacancy crisis in the Federal courts that harms the

American people. As I have said before, I call on the Senate to perform its Constitutional responsibility to hold timely up-or-down votes on all judicial nominees, no matter who is President or which party controls the Senate.

Remarks Honoring the National Teacher of the Year April 30, 2003

The President. Please be seated. Welcome to the First Lady's Garden. It's an appropriate place to honor some of our Nation's finest citizens. After all, the First Lady was and is a teacher, and I'm glad she said yes. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank the teachers, who have traveled from all over the country, for being here today. Thank you for your dedication. Thank you for your hard and rewarding work. The 54 teachers we honor today deserve the respect and the gratitude of our entire Nation. This is our way of thanking you all for your dedication, your service, and your love. Welcome to Washington.

I want to thank the Secretary of Education for joining us up here. When I picked the Secretary of Education, I wanted somebody who knew something about public education. I wasn't interested in a theorist. I was interested in finding a hands-on person. I knew Rod Paige when I was the Governor of the State of Texas, and he was the superintendent of the Houston Independent School District. He set high standards for every child in that district. He worked hard with teachers to achieve those standards. I really want to thank Rod for the job he did in Texas and, as importantly, for the job he's doing for America. Mr. Secretary, welcome.

We've got some fine Members of the United States Congress with us today: from the State of Georgia, Senator Miller and

Senator Saxby Chambliss—thank you, Zell and Saxby, for coming; from the State of North Dakota, Senator Dorgan and Senator Conrad—I'm honored to see both of you all; Senator Jeff Sessions and Senator Richard Shelby from the State of Alabama. It turns out that some of the finalists are from these States. [*Laughter*] And these Senators and Members of the House are here to join with Laura and me in thanking you all for your hard work. From the House of Representatives: Artur Davis from the State of Alabama; Mac Collins from the State of Georgia; Richard Burr from the State of North Carolina; Earl Pomeroy from the State of North Dakota; and Spencer Bachus, who happens to be the Congressman of the particular lady standing up next to me. Thank you all for coming. Thank you for your service and your dedication to education.

I do want to congratulate the National Teacher of the Year finalists: Lorraine Johnson of Newnan, Georgia; Melissa Bartlett of Statesville, North Carolina; Jennifer Montgomery of Bismarck, North Dakota; and Betsy Rogers. I'm going to have a little more to say about her later. I'm not going to tell you who won yet—[*laughter*]—but they might have figured it out. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Tom Houlihan, who is the executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers. I appreciate your service so very much. And I want to

thank the Council of State School Officers and Scholastic, Inc. for organizing this annual event to recognize our fine teachers. I also want to thank Edward Richardson, who's the chief State school officer from Alabama, Ray Simon from Arkansas, and Kent King from the State of Missouri for joining us as well.

The teachers we honor today come from many different backgrounds, from every part of this country. What unites them all is the deep conviction that every child can learn if given the chance. We honor them because they are willing to raise high expectations, to raise the standards for every child, because they know that with high expectations each child can rise to meet them.

When I campaigned for President, I used to say one of the commitments I would make is we would challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. You all have challenged the soft bigotry by setting high standards. You believed in the worth of every child. A good teacher believes in the possibilities of every boy and girl. A good teacher sees what is possible, and a good teacher believes in the responsibility of every school to bring out the best in every student.

In 2001, we passed what's called the No Child Left Behind legislation. I love that phrase, because it's a commitment of our Nation to make sure that not only does every child excel but no child gets left behind. Members of both parties, both Republicans and Democrats, came together to pass this law. Inherent in the law is the vision of high standards and money to meet the standards and historic reforms, all of which put the education decisions of America in the hands of teachers and principals and local officials.

But we also said that as we seek excellence for every child, we must design accountability systems at the State level to determine whether or not each child is learning. In order to make sure no child gets left behind, we must understand whether or not each child is learning to

read and write and add and subtract. And if they are, there will be plenty of praise. And if they're not, we will work to design programs to make sure no child gets left behind.

That's the crux of the law. Every State met the law's January 31st deadline for submitting their accountability plans for approval. I'm pleased to announce today that Secretary Paige has approved plans from Arkansas, Missouri, and Washington State, which bring the total number of approved plans to 16, covering 16 million children in public schools across America.

Secretary Paige and his Department will continue working with the rest of the States to get the plans approved quickly as possible. People are responding to the challenge at the local level. People are beginning to develop the accountability systems to show your States and your communities that you're doing your job, leaving no doubt in the minds of the parents and taxpayers and citizens—some of whom praise public schools, some of whom are critical of public schools—that in fact, you're performing. They will understand why you're here being honored in Washington, DC, as one of the top 54 teachers around our country.

Education reform depends on good laws and good plans, but you and I know it ultimately depends upon good teachers. Last June, States submitted to the Department of Education strategies for ensuring that all teachers are highly qualified. By this September, States will assess the programs they expect to make by 2005 and 2006 school year. And the Department is working with States to help teachers meet new definitions of teacher quality, so that every classroom will have a well-trained, highly effective teacher like you all.

Our 2003 National Teacher of the Year is an example of the highest professional standards and the finest personal qualities. Betsy Rogers teaches first and second grade students in Leeds, Alabama. She is an accomplished teacher with 22 years in the profession who could have her pick of any

school; yet, she chooses to teach in a school in an underprivileged rural area because she believes that devoted teachers and principals can make a difference in the lives of students from every background.

Teaching is a tradition in Betsy's family. Her grandmother was a teacher. Her mother taught Sunday school for 50 years. In her own career, Betsy Rogers is known for a commitment to students that goes beyond school hours. She gives before-school tutoring to students who need extra help learning to read and volunteers on school committees after hours. She attends sporting events and birthday parties for her students. She helps the families of disadvantaged students through local church and community groups.

Betsy also encourages her students to help each other. As she puts it, "No matter what your circumstances in life, you can always give." Teachers like Betsy Rogers put children on the road to becoming good citizens and, as importantly, successful adults. They show students that there are

a lot of caring people ready to help along the way.

I thank every one of our Teachers of the Year for your determination and your love. Each of you is an example of excellence in the classroom. Each of you is a model for a young teacher to follow. And your students are fortunate to have talented and good-hearted people in their lives, and our Nation is fortunate to have you in the classroom. Thank you for your work. May God bless what you do.

And now I'm pleased to introduce the National Teacher of the Year, Betsy Rogers.

[At this point, Helen Elizabeth Dawson Rogers made brief remarks.]

The President. Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:25 a.m. in the First Lady's Garden at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of National Teacher of the Year Helen Elizabeth Dawson Rogers.

Remarks on Signing the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools To End the Exploitation of Children Today Act of 2003

April 30, 2003

Thanks a lot for the warm welcome, and welcome to the Rose Garden and the White House. What a beautiful day. I'm glad you all are here, and I'm pleased that you could join us on a day a vital piece of legislation becomes the law of the land.

I appreciate the hard work of the Congress. I want to thank the Members of the Congress, the Senate, who are here and the Members of the House of Representatives who are here. I want to thank you all for your very hard work in getting this bill to my desk as quickly as you did.

This law, the PROTECT Act of 2003, will greatly assist law enforcement in tracking criminals who would harm our children

and will greatly help in rescuing the youngest victims of crime. With my signature, this new law will formally establish the Federal Government's role in the Amber Alert system and will make punishment for Federal crimes against children more severe. This law carries forward a fundamental responsibility of public officials at every level of government to do everything we can to protect the most vulnerable citizens from dangerous offenders who prey on them.

I want to thank our Attorney General, John Ashcroft, for his leadership on this issue. He is strong. He is steady, and he