

its control of the Senate. The Republican majority never held 16 judicial confirmation hearings in 12 months.

The Senate Judiciary Committee is holding regular hearings on judicial nominees and giving nominees a vote in Committee, in contrast to the practice of anonymous holds and other obstructionist tactics employed by some during the period of Republican control. The Democratic majority has reformed the process and practices used in the past to deny Committee consideration of judicial nominees. We have moved away from the anonymous holds that so dominated the process from 1996 through 2000. We have made home State Senators' blue slips public for the first time.

I do not mean by my comments to appear critical of Senator HATCH. Many times during the 6½ years he chaired the Judiciary Committee, I observed that, were the matter left up to us, we would have made more progress on more judicial nominees. I thanked him during those years for his efforts. I know that he would have liked to have been able to do more and not have to leave so many vacancies and so many nominees without action.

I hope and intend to continue to hold hearings and make progress on judicial nominees in order to further the administration of justice. In our efforts to address the number of vacancies on the circuit and district courts we inherited from the Republicans, the Committee has focused on consensus nominees for all Senators. In order to respond to what Vice President CHENEY and Senator HATCH now call a vacancy crisis, the Committee has focused on consensus nominees. This will help end the crisis caused by Republican delay and obstruction by confirming as many of the President's judicial nominees as quickly as possible.

Most Senators understand that the more controversial nominees require greater review. This process of careful review is part of our democratic process. It is a critical part of the checks and balances of our system of government that does not give the power to make lifetime appointments to one person alone to remake the courts along narrow ideological lines, to pack the courts with judges whose views are outside of the mainstream of legal thought, and whose decisions would further divide our Nation.

The committee continues to try to accommodate Senators from both sides of the aisle. The Court of Appeals nominees included at hearings so far this year have been at the request of Senator GRASSLEY, Senator LOTT, Senator SPECTER, Senator ENZI and Senator SMITH from New Hampshire—five Republican Senators who each sought a prompt hearing on a Court of Appeals nominee who was not among those initially sent to the Senate in May 2001. Each of the previous 43 nominees confirmed by the Senate has received the unanimous, bipartisan backing of the Committee.

The confirmation of Judge Africk makes the 44th judicial nominee to be confirmed since I became chairman last July, and I hope to confirm our 50th nominee by the end of this month. I am extremely proud of the work this committee has done since the change in the majority. I am proud of the way we have considered nominees fairly and expeditiously and the way we have been able to report to the Senate so many qualified, non-ideological, consensus nominees to the Senate.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I supported the nomination of Lance Africk to be U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

I have had the pleasure of reviewing Judge Africk's distinguished legal career, and I have concluded that he is a fine jurist who will add a great deal to the Federal bench in Louisiana.

Judge Lance Africk has an impressive record in the private and public sectors. Upon graduation from the University of North Carolina School of Law in 1975, Judge Africk clerked for the Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal before joining the New Orleans firm of Normann & Normann as a civil attorney. In 1977, he moved to the Orleans Parish District Attorney's Office in New Orleans and became director of the Career Criminal Bureau, where he prosecuted criminal cases. From late 1980 to mid-1982, Judge Africk worked in private practice, representing plaintiffs and defendants in personal injury cases and serving as corporate counsel. In August 1982, he joined the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Orleans as an assistant U.S. attorney and served with distinction as chief of the Criminal Division until 1990. As a State and Federal prosecutor, Judge Africk became an expert in drug and public corruption matters. During his legal career, he tried to judgment or verdict approximately 40 cases. Since 1990, Judge Africk has served as U.S. Magistrate Judge for the Eastern District of Louisiana, bearing responsibility for often complex civil and criminal matters assigned from the U.S. District Court.

I have every confidence that Lance Africk will serve with distinction on the Federal district court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I am proud that the Senate today confirmed Lance Africk for Federal District Judge for the Eastern District of Louisiana. Again, I must commend President Bush for this nomination. He has chosen an exceptional man with a fantastic reputation for the Federal Bench.

I cannot say enough about Lance. Lance brings over 25 years of legal experience to this job, and for the past 12 years, he has served as the U.S. Magistrate for Civil and Criminal Matters. His commitment to community and country has permeated his career as an Orleans Parish District Attorney, a United States Attorney and most recently as a Federal Magistrate. I know that he looks forward to continuing his

service. He presents a true model of honor and professionalism to the bar.

Numerous letters of support have poured into my office praising Lance's qualities. Everyone who has ever talked to me about Lance has used the same words: fair, courteous, and intelligent. Not only does Lance possess these values, but he has instilled them in his family. His wife Diane and his four children mean the world to him and inspire his service. Today's action in the Senate only confirmed what I and everyone in Louisiana already knew; that Lance Africk will be an asset to the Federal Judiciary.

We need more people like Lance Africk on the Federal Bench. He is a true patriot who desires to serve his country to the best of his ability. He recognizes the importance of our judicial system and has dedicated his life to the system of laws that makes our country so unique. It is for these reasons that I wholeheartedly supported his nomination and am elated by the action of the Senate today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

The Senator from Georgia.

TEACHERS

Mr. MILLER. Madam President, I am at heart a teacher. Perhaps it is genetic, for I am the son of teachers. Whatever its source, a commitment to education runs deep in my soul. That is why, when I was Governor of Georgia, I chose to focus on education, for all our other challenges have at their root the same solution: Children who are loved and children who are educated.

I believe education is everything. It is the educated individual who makes this Nation stronger. It is the educated individual who adds to its wealth, protects against enemies, carries forward its ideals and faith.

The Latin phrase "alma mater" means "nourishing mother." That is a pretty good description of what our schools should be for our children.

Within those schools, all education starts with the teacher standing at the head of the child's classroom. Teachers are the world's most noble creatures, engaged in the world's most noble profession. Teachers are the architects who guide and shape the building of young lives. Teachers are the ones who call forth the best from our children and inspire them to reach new heights. Teachers, I think we would all agree, are the key ingredient to improving education.

So if we are to build a first class education system in this country, we must be able to attract and hold on to good teachers. Right now, we are losing that battle. We are losing that fight badly.

Last year we set a new standard in Federal aid for education with the passage of President Bush's far-reaching education reform bill. But while we have made big strides in Federal funding for education, we still have not touched teacher salaries at the Federal level.

I would argue that teacher pay is the most important area of all education. Yet our teachers work in sometimes deplorable conditions and for little pay. Public school teachers in America today make an average of \$43,335 a year. One would assume that about half of the States have teacher salaries above the national average and the other half have teacher salaries below that level. But actually, only 12 States, plus the District of Columbia, have salaries that are higher than the national average. The other 38 States are below the national average. In fact, the dollar gap between the lowest and the highest average salaries varies greatly from a low of \$30,265 in South Dakota to a high of \$53,281 in New Jersey.

Sadly, our teachers have even lost financial ground over the past few years. In the past decade, teacher salaries rose only one-half of 1 percent when inflation is taken into account. In many States, teachers actually lost ground to inflation.

Today in this Nation, teacher salaries account for a smaller proportion of total education spending than they did 40 years ago. In 1960, the average education expenditure devoted to teacher salaries was 51 percent. Today it is 36.7 percent, the lowest percentage since records have been kept.

As a result, many of the best and brightest of our young people today steer away from the classrooms to join the ranks of better paying professions. It has become clear that unless we in Congress take some drastic action, and take it soon, this disparity will only get worse because on the horizon ominous storm clouds loom darkly. We must hire 2 million more teachers in the next decade to keep up with new students who are entering our schools. Where are we going to get all those new teachers? Where?

Enrollment at our colleges of education is down 30 percent. Among those who are willing to try teaching, 40 percent leave the profession before the end of their fifth year. In some States, almost 20 percent leave after just 1 year. Most, of course, leave to pursue better paying careers. And who can blame them? It is a hollow message when we constantly tell our teachers how invaluable they are and then pay them so little.

What can we do, and what can we do quickly, to stop this brain drain from our schools? How can we make teaching more competitive with better paying professions? I will tell you how we could have an immediate effect. Let our teachers keep more of their hard-earned money.

I will be introducing a bill to give our teachers an immediate pay raise in the form of a tax cut. Simply put, teachers would keep more money in their pocket each payday and send less of it to the IRS. They need this money back home more than we need it up here. And I guarantee you they will spend it more wisely than we will. Hard-earned money always goes further in a house-

hold than it does in a rathole. I call it the Thank You Teachers Tax Cut. Here is how it would work.

It would include every full-time teacher, public and private, in every prekindergarten and K through 12 classroom. This tax cut would start immediately and would increase the longer the teacher stayed in the classroom.

Teachers with fewer than 5 years in the classroom, about 900,000 teachers, would get a tax cut equal to one-third of their Federal income tax. Teachers with 5 to 10 years of experience, also about 900,000 teachers, would get to keep two-thirds of what they would normally pay in Federal income tax. Teachers with more than 10 years' experience—about 1.8 million teachers—would have no Federal income tax at all for as long as they stayed in the classroom.

The Thank You Teachers Tax Cut would mean immediate pay raises of between 5 and 15 percent. It would put more money into teachers' pockets each and every payday. It would immediately give some equity to this noble profession. But it would be more than just more money. It would be a tangible show of our respect and our gratitude to this profession that is all too often taken for granted.

So it would be a huge tax cut, more than \$16 billion a year at a minimum—probably more, according to my very rough math. But when we are talking about a projected budget for 2003 of \$2.085 trillion, \$16 billion is not even 1 percent of that budget. Don't tell me we cannot tighten our belt that little to help our teachers.

We all know our teachers are not paid adequately. They are not in my State and they are not in your State. Some need more help than others. Mississippi has the lowest average salary for teachers in the South and South Dakota has the lowest paid teachers in the Nation. I would plead for the leaders of both parties in this Senate to support this tax cut.

I also think our Nation's Governors would like this proposal for two reasons: First, it does not interfere with the States' rights to set teacher salaries. But it does boost the bottom line for every State's teachers, and that is what is important.

Our Governors will also like it because today, and especially in the next few years, that Pacman called Medicaid is going to gobble up State revenues as never before. I warn you, that will leave a much smaller pot of money available at the State level for teacher pay raises.

I realize there are shortages in other important professions that have low salaries and bad working conditions, and I have great sympathy for those workers, too. But the long-term security of this Nation is wrapped up in our schools, and that is why this tax cut for teachers is such an important one now.

This tax cut is a chance to really help our children by making sure we

put good teachers in their classrooms and keep them there. It is also a chance to help our deserving teachers. It is the fastest, surest way to put more money into their pockets immediately.

Finally, this is a chance for the Senate, for the entire Congress, to say thank you to our teachers.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Kansas is recognized.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. ROBERTS. Madam President, thank you very much. This is one of those speeches I had not intended to make. I have to make it, but I would just as soon not make it.

I rise today to provide a few comments on the situation we are facing regarding the farm bill and the possibility of an assistance package this year. My colleagues are working very hard in the conference. I don't mean to perjure anybody's intent. These are friends of mine, and I know we have strong differences of opinion. But we are in pretty rough shape for the shape we are in, in farm country, and we need assurance that there will be an assistance package as of this year.

For several weeks now, I have been warning that we need to either get a farm bill finished and apply it to this year's crop or pass an agriculture assistance package, and then pass a new bill that goes into effect for the 2003 crop. The thinking behind that is it is better to pass a good bill than simply disagree on a bad bill and try to expedite that.

Prior to the Easter and Passover recess, I introduced an assistance package that I said was a placeholder if a bill could not be passed almost immediately after the recess period. Well, it is now April 17. We still have not passed a bill. In fact, the negotiations did break down yesterday, unfortunately.

It seems clear that a bill will not be passed as of this week. Madam President, the clock, if not expired, is certainly ticking. It is the 11th hour and 59th minute. It is time for us to admit what farmers and ranchers already know: It is too late to pass a bill that applies to this year's crop.

Consider these facts:

The 2002 wheat crop was planted last fall and harvesting in the far southern region will begin next month.

Several crop reports in recent days have said that 9 percent of the Nation's cotton crop is planted, including 37 percent in Arizona, 35 percent in California, and 13 percent in Texas, with the rest of the States starting to plant.

Corn planting is 59 percent complete in Texas; 25 percent in Tennessee; 3 percent in North Carolina; 26 percent in Missouri; 17 percent in Kentucky; and in Kansas—yes, we grow cotton—11 percent.

Another article said corn planters were already in the field in eastern