

through college, and when the youngest graduated, he retired. But he refused to rest.

For the last 9 years, Mr. Toth has been bringing smiles to visitors' faces as they arrive at the White House. Whether handing out gold coins to visiting children or passing out stories to adults, William makes sure that everyone leaves the White House with a memory.

America owes a great debt to William Toth. But like millions of volunteers across America, he will never ask us to repay it. And that's what makes his service, and the service of so many other volunteers, so unique.

The National Park Service has some of the best volunteers in the Nation. Whether it's here at the White House, at other sites around the Nation's Capital, or at the national parks around the country, National Park Service volunteers perform their duties with the simple goal of helping Americans enjoy our national treasures. They keep us connected to our history and help preserve America's natural beauty for future generations to enjoy.

That's why it's particularly fitting this week that we recognize both America's volunteers and America's national parks, for they both bring great joy to countless Americans.

At 77, William Toth continues to win over everyone he sees. In a letter she sent

me last month, his daughter Dawn wrote, "I just want to let you know who you have in your corner. In some ways, he's America's most important diplomat. And he'll make you look darn good." I know that can sometimes be a difficult task, and I appreciate all the help I can get, William. [Laughter]

The truth is, Mr. Toth, you make America look darn good. I want to thank you for your tireless dedication, for working here at the White House. I want to thank the volunteers at the National Park Service, and the American people thank you from the bottom of their heart.

God bless.

Arms Sales to Taiwan

Q. Mr. President, will Taiwan get the Aegis radar system this time?

Q. —sale to Taiwan?

The President. You'll find out when we make the—I make my decision clear.

Q. Have you made your decision, sir?

The President. Yes. I haven't made it clear yet, though. We'll let you know soon.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:57 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Dawn Foreman, Tracy Toth, and Melissa Eckert, daughters of Mr. Toth.

Remarks on Presenting the National Teacher of the Year Award

April 23, 2001

The President. Thank you all very much. Welcome to the Rose Garden. I was wondering if it was ever going to get warm in Washington. [Laughter] It does.

Mr. Secretary, thank you, and thanks for your kind introduction and thanks for your service to the children of our country. I don't know if you know this or not, but

just last week in Monticello, Mississippi, there was a school named in Rod's honor. It's the school he attended as a young man.

What makes the story interesting is that students of his generation were segregated by race. No more in this great land called America. The Rod Paige Middle School will know loud and clear that education breaks

down any barrier to success. Mr. Secretary, you're a role model for students across America and for a couple of adults, as well.

Education Secretary Roderick R. Paige. Well, thank you. Thank you.

The President. And I'm proud to have you on my team.

Secretary Paige. Thank you.

The President. I'd like to thank the Council of Chief State School Officers, Scholastic, Inc., and the National Selection Committee for organizing this event. You've done a splendid job. And I want to welcome to the White House Peter McWalters, president of the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Gordon Ambach, its executive director.

And I also want to welcome and congratulate 56 teachers of the year from all across America. You know, I used to say as the Governor of Texas, you can never thank a good teacher enough. Well, I'm going to try to do it as President: Thank you all, from the bottom of our hearts.

I especially want to congratulate the finalists: Christa Compton and Tonya Perry, Derek Minakami and Michele Forman, the National Teacher of the Year. I'll have a few things more to say about Michele in a moment.

For a half century, the White House has hosted a ceremony honoring the National Teacher of the Year and the State Teachers of the Year. Every American President since Harry Truman has presented this award, and that's as it should be. What we honor tells the world what we value, and we value America's teachers.

"A teacher affects eternity," Henry Adams once wrote. He meant that their influence is unending. Teachers play a vital role in the intellectual and moral education of children. They teach children how to read and write, and they teach children right from wrong. They teach students to love knowledge and to disdain ignorance. Teachers inspire students, fire imaginations, nurture their natural abilities, and encourage them to explore the possibilities of life.

They prepare good students to be good citizens. They also know, better than anyone else, they can't do it alone.

It's so important for the moms and dads of America to hear this message: Be a good parent; love your children; teach your children to read early in life; and support the teachers who are spending time with your most precious, precious part of your family.

One of my predecessors as Governor of Texas was a guy named Sam Houston. Sam Houston was a United States Senator, the Governor of two States, Texas and Tennessee. He was even a President—the President of the Republic of Texas. And yet, with all these impressive accomplishments, he wrote that being a teacher in Maryville, Tennessee, gave him a higher feeling of dignity and satisfaction than any other office or honor he ever held.

Well, this year's National Teacher of the Year, Michele Forman, demonstrates the dignity and satisfaction of teaching. Mrs. Forman teaches social studies at Middlebury Union High, in Middlebury, Vermont. She says this: "I think I have the best job in the world. Every day is something new."

Mrs. Forman arrives at school every day at 6:30 a.m., a full 2 hours before the students arrive. Three mornings a week she teaches Arabic, which she's been doing for the past 4 years. Students earn no credit by taking the course; they attend the classes because of their love of learning—and probably, mostly because of their love of Mrs. Forman.

Michele Forman knows her subjects and has high expectations for her students. She believes there must be a mutual trust between teachers and students. She's highly regarded by her colleagues. She's a woman of boundless energy and enthusiasm. In all these ways, she is an example of excellence in education.

And so it's a high honor to present to Michele Forman the National Teacher of the Year Award.

[At this point, Mrs. Forman made brief remarks.]

The President. Well, Michele, thank you very much. In keeping the fine tradition of never missing to want an opportunity—[laughter]—or to waste an opportunity, let me say a few words about a pressing issue and a great opportunity for our country.

This week the United States Senate will begin debate on what's known as S-1, appropriately named because it is my number one priority, it is your number priority, and it's an education reform proposal. This is not just about another legislative debate. It's the best opportunity in a generation for having meaningful education reform come out of Washington, DC.

And we have an ambitious goal: All our children, every child in America, must have access to a safe and high quality school, so we make sure that standards are high. It's so important to raise the bar and expect the best from every child, just like you do; that results are tested—people shouldn't fear accountability systems in America. We want to know. We want to know whether children can read and write and add and subtract. And if not, we'll make sure they do early, before it is too late, and that schools are accountable.

We give more States more flexibility and freedom. We trust teachers in the classrooms, as opposed to having mandates out of Washington. We've got to trust teachers and principals to chart the path for excellence for every child, provide greater options for parents with bipartisan support for charter schools or public school choice or private tutoring programs.

In separate legislation we are working for liability reform to support and protect teachers who enforce reasonable standards of conduct in their classrooms. We're en-

couraging more of America's best and brightest citizens, including those who have served in the Armed Forces, to become teachers. This is a project near and dear to my wife Laura's heart. Unfortunately, she's not here. I wish she was, because she could explain a lot better than I could, but she's out traveling the Nation, reminding people that one of the most noble professions ever is to be a teacher, and recruiting teachers. And she's doing such a good job, I need to send her up to the Congress to convince them to behave.

We'll increase spending on education and focus that new spending on reforming schools that aren't performing well or on a powerful reading initiative.

I support historic new levels of education funding. Yet all of us know better schools require more than just funding. And I hope the Senate hears that we need meaningful education reform by high standards, accountability. My education reform has a good balance of new dollars.

Now, one of the interesting things that historians learn—and Michele is an historian—is that the President proposes, the Congress disposes. But the truth of the matter is, the people rule. And I hope the people of America contact the Members of the Senate and insist upon a passage of a well-balanced, meaningful reform package that will enhance our teachers' ability to do what you do well, which is to teach our kids.

It's an honor for me to be here. I welcome you to the Nation's Capital. And once again, thanks from the bottom of my heart, on behalf of all of America, for doing the job you do.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.