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I am pleased that the compromise agreement on the farm bill resulted in better balanced commodity loan rates; spending that is no longer front-loaded; and the strongest conservation provisions of any farm bill ever passed by Congress. The final provisions of the farm bill are also consistent with America's international trade obligations, which will strengthen our ability to open foreign markets for American farm products. While this compromise agreement did not satisfy all of my objectives, I am pleased that this farm bill provides a generous and reliable safety net for our Nation's farmers and ranchers and is consistent with the principles I outlined.

I thank the conferees for their hard work and urge Congress to send the farm bill to my desk promptly for signature to help ensure the immediate and long-term vitality of our farm economy.

Remarks on Senate Inaction on Nominations for the Federal Judiciary
May 3, 2002

Thank you all. Some of them were pretty good—and one of them was really good, right, Al? [*Laughter*]

I want to thank you all for coming, and I want to talk about an important subject, and that's our judiciary. One of the true strengths of our democracy is a judiciary that is fair, impartial, and independent. Our courts depend on the dedicated service of men and women who are called to decide disputes. Yet today, there is a vacancy crisis on our Federal courts. Both the President and the United States Senate have constitutional responsibilities to address vacancies on the Federal bench. I have nominated 100 outstanding jurists for these posts, but the Senate thus far has not done its part to ensure that our Federal courts operate at full strength. Justice is at risk in America, and the Senate must act for the good of the country.

I want to thank Al Gonzales; he's *mi abogado.* He's been my lawyer; he's been—served on the—as secretary of state in Texas; he's served on the U.S.—or the Texas Supreme Court; he and his able staff work long hours to really find the best possible nominees for the bench. And I want to—I appreciate Al's leadership, and I appreciate those who work with Al, on behalf of the White House, for their long hours.

I want to thank you all for coming. Thanks so very much for your interest in this important subject. And it's an important subject. I mean we're talking about an incredibly important part of our country. And I want you all to help spread the word about how serious the vacancy crisis is. You pay attention to this issue, and you can help advocate what I'm about to call the Senate to do.

This is Law Week—or Law Day, and it's a day we celebrate the legal profession in our democracy and a day set aside to recall the role of law in our society. This year's Law Day theme is "Assuring Equal Justice for All." And that's a noble theme, and it's a noble calling. We're all proud of our judiciary. We know that justice and security and prosperity can flourish only in a society governed by law.

We're grateful to our Federal courts; we're grateful for the vital work that they play in our American system. Federal judges are key to make sure America functions well. Every day, they uphold the rights of an individual, protect the innocent; they punish the guilty. Their rulings are essential to the rule of law in our Nation. To discharge their responsibilities effectively, the Federal courts must have judges.

Yet today, more than 10 percent of all Federal judgeships are vacant.

The Chief Justice of the United States recently warned that the number of vacancies is, in his words, alarming. The crisis is especially severe—especially severe—in our 12 regional Circuit Courts of Appeals, where more than 1 in 6 judgeships is vacant. The Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit, for example, handles some of our Nation's highest profile cases, including an important class of cases involving terrorists. But 4 out of 12 judgeships are not filled.

The Sixth Court of Appeals, which covers Ohio and Kentucky and Michigan and Tennessee, is even worse off. Back in March of 2000, when it had only four vacancies, its chief judge said it was hurting badly and would not be able to keep up with its workload. Today, 8 of the Sixth Circuit's 16 judgeships are vacant, despite the fact that I sent up 7 nominations many months ago.

All across America, the wait for justice is growing longer. The burden on Federal judges is growing heavier. And the frustration level of ordinary Americans seeking justice is growing greater.

To address this vacancy crisis, I have submitted the names of 100 Federal court nominees to the United States Senate. These 100 nominees are notable for their distinction and their accomplishments. They are exceptional for their humanity and their integrity. They are in the solid mainstream of American legal opinion, and they share a principled commitment to follow and apply the law, not to make law from the bench.

But the Senate has confirmed only one-half of my nominees. It has confirmed only 9 of my 30 nominees to the Circuit Courts of Appeals—only 9 out of 30. Every one of these 30 nominees rated so far have been judged either well-qualified or qualified by the American Bar Association, which has been hailed as the gold standard by Senate Democrats.

On May 9th, 2001, nearly a year ago, I submitted—I introduced my first 11 nominees to the Courts of Appeal. Yet the Senate Judiciary Committee has held hearings for only 3 of these nominees. All the others are still awaiting confirmation hearings—an entire year later. The eight still waiting a hearing include some of the leading appellate lawyers in the Nation, some of the most well respected sitting judges, and one of the country's finest law professors. Collectively, this group of 8 nominees has argued more than 60 cases in the Supreme Court of the United States. Yet all, every one of them, still wait for the Senate to take even the first step down the road toward confirmation.

The Senate can do much more and must do much more to address the current vacancy crisis. A year ago I urged Senators from both parties to rise above the bitterness of the past and provide a fair hearing and prompt vote for every nominee. And my call for a prompt vote—it doesn't matter to me who's in the White House or who controls the Senate. What matters to me is that we have a—that we address the vacancy crisis, that we solve the problem our Nation faces. That's what matters.

Let me tell you what the Chief Justice said recently. And I want you to know he was speaking expressly on behalf of the Federal judiciary. He asked the Senate to grant prompt hearings and up-or-down votes on all nominees. But the Senate has not acted, and by its inaction, the Senate is endangering the administration of justice in America.

All judicial nominees deserve a timely hearing, and they deserve a vote. As everyone here today understands, Americans need and deserve a judicial system at full strength. As we celebrate the role of law in our democracy, I call on Senate Democrats to end the vacancy crisis in our Federal courts by restoring fairness to the judicial confirmation process.

I want to thank you all for your interest in this incredibly important subject. I thank

you for standing for justice and fairness, the American way.

One of the things that I talk about to—when I go to these conferences to try to help developing nations, or I talk about when leaders come in the Oval Office—I always talk about the need for there to be rule of law, that in order for people to be able to realize their dreams, society must be a society of law, and there ought to be rule of law. And our country is a shining example of that. But in order to make sure we continue to shine, we've got to address problems in a timely way when we find them. And that's what I'm here to discuss, and I want to thank you for your interest.

And may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

Remarks at a Cinco de Mayo Reception
May 3, 2002

Thank you all very much. Please, *sientanse.* [*Laughter*] *Bienvenidos.* Welcome to the White House. This is the *casa para todos.* I'm honored you all have come to celebrate Cinco de Mayo. It's a pleasure to have you here. The victory we commemorate today is a source of tremendous pride to the people of Mexico and a source of inspiration to the people of America.

I want to thank *mi esposa,* Laura, for her—[*laughter*]—*mi amor.* I want to thank Sara for her passion for the education of Latino children. She is a—well, she's unique. She's smart; she's capable. After all, she's a *tejana.* [*Laughter*] But I really do appreciate her focus, her willingness to work hard to make sure that every child has got the opportunity to realize his or her dreams in America.

I want to thank *el Embajador de Mexico, mi amigo* Juan Jose Bremer, *tambien, esposa.* Thank you all for coming. And I appreciate all the *Mexicanos* who are here today. I'm glad you're here to celebrate a special day in your country, here in the White House. It's an indication of our friendship.

I want to thank members of my administration who are here, too many to name. I will name the Cabinet Secretary, Mel Martinez. I appreciate Mel's service. I see the Treasurer; *mi abogado,* Gonzales; the new Surgeon General nominee, Rick Carmona. Thank you, Rick; I appreciate you being here. I better stop now, before I forget somebody.

I want to thank Ed Pastor, the Congressman from the State of Arizona. Thank you for coming.

I want to thank Ana Maria for your being here. I really appreciate you coming. You did a great job as the emcee. And I know a lot of Americans watch your TV show, and we're honored you're here. I really want to thank Pedro Fernandez. Pedro, you're awesome. I'm not sure how you say that in Spanish—[*laughter*]—or *Mexicano, brillante.* [*Laughter*] But I want to thank you and your *tres hombres* for being here. [*Laughter*]

Al, thank you for leading the Pledge. Al is the Director of the Selective Service. He wears the Medal of Honor. And again, thank you all for coming. We're so honored to have you.

Cinco de Mayo commemorates a great victory in the battle of Puebla. I remember when I went down, Jose, to—the guest of the previous President, President Zedillo, to see a reenactment of the battle in Puebla. It was exciting, and it was able to see firsthand the great courage and the