

in order to keep the Congress fully informed, I am providing a report prepared by my Administration. This report includes matters relating to post-liberation Iraq under section 7 of the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-338).

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 21.

Remarks to the 2004 National and State Teachers of the Year *April 21, 2004*

Thank you all very much. Please be seated. Welcome to the Rose Garden.

I told you not to tell the Elvis story. [*Laughter*] She told it anyway, didn't she?

Every President since Harry Truman has presented this award, Teacher of the Year Award. And there's a good reason for that. When you're in the company of some of the Nation's finest citizens, our greatest teachers, you're in the company of people who give their hearts and their careers to improving the lives of children. You're in the company of the best of our country.

I want to congratulate the teachers who are here from around the country. It is a great experience for Laura and me to greet you in the Oval Office. I guess the word I would describe the teachers as they came through is, they're joyous people. There's such a joy that radiates on your face and in your character. And on behalf of our Nation, I want to thank you for what you do. You make a great contribution.

In spite of the fact that she told the Elvis story, the best decision I made was to marry a teacher. Laura is a great First Lady for our country, and I'm really proud of her.

Besides the distinguished teachers who are here, I see we've got some other distinguished citizens with us today. Gene Hickok is the Deputy Secretary of the De-

partment of Education. Thank you for coming, Gene. I'm glad you're here.

From the great State of Kansas, Senator Brownback and Congressman Dennis Moore—I'm honored you both are here. Thanks for coming. I appreciate the fact that Lindsey Graham from South Carolina is here and Congressman Gresham Barrett. Thank you both for coming. I see Maria Cantwell, Senator from the State of Washington, is with us today and Congressman George Nethercutt—appreciate you all being here.

I appreciate so very much the Governor of the great State of Rhode Island, and the first lady, Sue, is with us. Thank you both for being here today—honored you took time to come. I'm confident our honoree is really pleased you're here.

I appreciate the fact that Senator Chafee—Senator Linc Chafee and Senator Jack Reed have joined us. Thank you for coming. And Congressman Jim Langevin is with us as well. Good to see you, friend. I'm glad you're back.

I also, too, want to congratulate the National Teacher of the Year finalists: Keil Hileman from DeSoto, Kansas; Jason Fulmer from Graniteville, South Carolina—you've been there, haven't you, Senator?—that's good—[*laughter*]—Dennis Griner from Palouse, Washington; and of course, our honoree, Kathy Mellor.

I also want to congratulate Kathy's family, Duke and her three children who have joined us today. I know there are some friends here with Kathy. Chris Sirr is with Kathy. She came all the way over, and I know there's other friends as well, and I'm honored that they would take time out of their lives to support their friend and honor their buddy in what is an important moment for our Nation, as we honor those who dedicate their lives to teaching.

I want to thank Tom Houlihan, who is the executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers. Ernie Fleishman, the senior vice president of education of Scholastic, Inc., thank you for being here. I want to thank the Council of Chief State School Officers and Scholastic, Inc., for organizing this program. I also want to thank Peter McWalters, who's the chief state school officer of Rhode Island.

Welcome, everybody. Thanks for coming.

It is fitting we have this annual ceremony because teachers are charged with a great mission. You do the vital work of teaching our children. You give them the skills that will help them succeed. You lay the foundation for realizing the American Dream.

You do more than that, though. You kindle imaginations. You foster a love for learning that can last a lifetime. What a fantastic gift to give a child. The best teachers treat every child with dignity and fairness and insist that their students treat others the same way. And through your encouragement and caring, you teach the students to respect themselves. To a child, it's a special feeling when a teacher knows your name and asks your opinion, cares what you think and gives you encouragement. For some students, unfortunately, you might be the only person who does that.

Anyone who has visited the classroom can see that teaching demands poise and warmth and, oftentimes, extraordinary patience, as my fourth grade teacher had to show. [Laughter] Yet, only the family mem-

bers of teachers know some of the other traits that define great teachers. They've seen you stay up late rewriting lesson plans. They've seen you seek new ways to advance your skills. They've seen you somehow summon the energy to make an after-school game or a play. For you, teaching is not just a profession; it's a calling you have answered. And we thank you for that. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

We ask a lot from our teachers, and you're right to expect a lot from society. I oftentimes say to people that if you're interested in being a responsible citizen and you're worried about the quality of the education in the community in which you live, do something about it. Support your schools. Support your teachers. Make a difference. As opposed to sitting on the outside complaining, get involved, help people search for excellence.

State government has got a responsibility as well. I used to say when I was Governor of Texas, education is to a State what defense is to the National Government. It's the most important priority. If people are worried about the quality of the education in the State in which they live, get your Governors to make education the number one priority of the State.

And finally, the Federal Government has got a role to play as well. We've increased spending here by 43 percent. The next budget will make it 50 percent over the past 4 years. In other words, there's a role for the Federal Government. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, we're making sure that Federal money actually goes to help students learn.

I love the spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act, by the way. It's what I call challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. You see, the reason you're Teachers of the Year is because you set high expectations. You know in your heart of hearts every child can learn. You're willing to raise that bar, to set high standards.

I appreciate so very much the willingness for teachers also to use the accountability

systems to determine whether or not what you're doing is working. It's a vital part of making sure that no child gets left behind. But make no mistake about it, we understand here in Washington that the people who really make student achievement possible are the good-hearted teachers who work hard every single day to make sure that no child is left behind. And that's why we honor you here in the Rose Garden.

Our 2004 National Teacher of the Year is Kathy Mellor. She embodies the qualities that all students and parents hope for in a teacher. For nearly 20 years, Ms. Mellor has taught English as a second language in North Kingstown, Rhode Island. Kathy redesigned her district's ESL program to better integrate students with their English-speaking classmates, and the educational benefits of her innovation have been clear.

As the parent of one of Mrs. Mellor's students wrote, "My daughter's English improved unbelievably that year." Gosh, that must be the best words a teacher can hear: "My daughter's English improved unbelievably that year." At the end of the year, she was able to finish her regular class assignments. The mom said, she's able to do so alone or with a little help from her.

Ms. Mellor's creative approach extends well beyond the classroom. She applied for and received a grant to teach English to the mothers of her ESL students. What a great gift. What a caring soul. Working with two colleagues, Ms. Mellor taught a group of women for 2½ years. At the end of the program, the women's language skills and personal confidence were both vastly

improved, and many went on to further education and to new jobs.

Ms. Mellor's 19 years in North Kingstown has earned her the reputation for creativity and caring and consistent success. She's humble and generous, always willing to share credit with others and committed to serving as a mentor to every colleague. Because she understands the importance of her work, her energy and her spirit have never waned. As Kathy put it, "After many years, I still look forward to Monday mornings. Working with this diverse community of learners and their supportive families is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done or ever could do." No wonder she's Teacher of the Year.

Every teacher here has chosen a rewarding and optimistic profession. And the families of America are glad that people like you show up every Monday morning. I thank each of you for your skill and dedication. I thank you for being an integral part of making sure America is a hopeful and optimistic country for all.

And now, it's my honor to introduce and to present this award to the National Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Kathy Mellor.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:16 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Donald L. Carcieri of Rhode Island and his wife, Suzanne; and Kathleen Mellor's husband, Duke, and children David, Adam, and Paige. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady, who introduced the President.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the Newspaper Association of America Convention

April 21, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Burl, thank you very much. I kind of like ducking those

questions. [*Laughter*] I appreciate you having me. I hope this toast business becomes