

Laura and I met with Peace Corps volunteers in Ghana recently, and they are some kind of fired up. [Laughter] And a matter of fact, it is exciting to be with those good souls who are motivated to put—to go help, and in so doing, it really is the best foreign policy America could possibly have.

And today I just had my picture taken with a group of spirited volunteers—[laughter]—who are headed to Guatemala. And I thank you all for your service. And I'm glad you're here, and thanks for coming.

I believe strongly in the admonition to whom much is given, much is required. Those of you here today are living up to that noble calling, and you carry on the best traditions of American citizenship. In my first Inaugural Address, I said, it's im-

portant to be a citizen, not a spectator. And there's no better way to be a citizen [than]* to be a soldier in the armies of compassion, a foot soldier.

And so today we commemorate your work and the work of volunteers all across the country, here at the White House. I appreciate the lasting legacy that you've helped create in the hearts of our fellow citizens. I thank you for what you do. And I ask for God's blessings on your work. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:58 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The National Volunteer Week proclamation of April 22 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks Honoring the 2008 National and State Teachers of the Year April 30, 2008

The President. Good morning. Good morning. Welcome to the White House. Welcome to the Rose Garden. We're walking out of the Oval Office, Mike turns to me and says, "I like what you've done with the place." [Laughter] All I did was mow the lawn. [Laughter] Glad you're here.

I'm really glad to be taking a part of an event that honors America's teachers. It's a tradition that started with Harry Truman. It's a tradition that Laura and I have really enjoyed carrying on. She's not here, unfortunately. She sends her best. You know, I like to tell people that, you know, one of the interesting questions you get in my line of work is, "Can you name a teacher who had influenced you?" I said, "Yes, my wife." [Laughter]

But she and Jenna are out promoting a new book that they wrote called "Read All About It." I'm not suggesting that people buy it, of course. That would be un-

seemly here in the Rose Garden. [Laughter] But it is a book they're attempting to promote literacy. She sends her love. She understands what it means to be a teacher. We were so honored that our little girl chose to be a teacher as well. It made her dad feel really well. I'm sure—I just hope you know the influence you have on children. I suspect you do; that's why you're such a good teacher.

Good teachers hear a call. Good teachers are empathetic souls. And really, the best teachers have a special intuition and, I suspect, a little potential, and so the ability to see potential and the ability to have the patience necessary to watch it grow. I want to thank you for nurturing young minds. I thank you for providing such wonderful examples. And I thank you for inspiring the imaginations and unleashing the talents of our Nation's young.

* White House correction.

I'm up here with not only the Teacher of the Year, but with Margaret Spellings, the Secretary of Education. I do want to welcome Senator Gordon Smith and Senator [Congressman]* Greg Walden. Turns out they're both from the State of Oregon. [Laughter] I wonder why you're here? But anyway, I'm glad you're here. Thank you for being strong supporters of the teachers in your State.

I welcome the State Teachers of the Year. I really enjoyed seeing you in the Oval Office. It's fun for me to be able to greet you and say thank you. And I can't thank you enough for serving as such great role models for other teachers in your States. And we're sure glad you're here.

I do want to thank the National Teacher of the Year finalist: Lewis Chappelle, who is with us—thank you, Lewis—from California; June Teisan, from Michigan; as well as Tommy Smigiel, from Virginia—that would be Norfolk, Virginia.

I am obviously up here with the Teacher of the Year. I'll spend a little time talking about Michael in a minute, but I am so proud that his mom and dad have joined us, as is he. Thank you for coming. I know it brings you great pride to have raised a son who is dedicated to helping others. His wife is with us, for whom I'll say something else a little later; son and daughter is with us, as well as brother. Thanks for coming.

Finally, we got Ken James, president-elect, Council of the Chief State School Officers, who administers the Teacher of the Year program. Thanks for coming. And the rest of you are welcome here too. [Laughter]

One of the things that Margaret and I have tried to do is help teachers be able to set high standards and achieve accountability. And that was the spirit behind passing No Child Left Behind Act. It basically—if you really think about the act, it, one, refuses to, what I used to call—still

call—refuses to accept the soft bigotry of low expectations. I firmly believe that if you have low expectations, you'll achieve them. I believe that when you say to people, we want you to achieve high expectations, you really have got this great faith in the human potential. I also believe that if you're a teacher that you ought to welcome a law that says we trust you in your ability to set high expectations.

And secondly, behind that law is a notion that we'd like at least to know whether or not people can read, write, and add and subtract. Good teachers understand that. As a matter of fact, the Teacher of the Year understands that, and I suspect you all do as well. I'm often told that the accountability system is a—is meant to punish. I don't think so. I think it's meant to diagnose and correct and reward. And you're Teachers of the Year because you've got kids in your classroom who are excelling. And the reason we know is because we measure.

And so I want to thank you for being people willing to set high standards. Curiously enough, because we do measure, we have learned this fall that fourth graders and eighth [graders]* earned the highest math and reading scores in the history of our Nation's Report Card. That's a positive sign. Eighth graders set a record in math scores. In other words, because we are people who believe in accountability, we're beginning to get a sense for whether or not the achievement gap in America is closing. And it must close in order for this country to realize its full potential.

We understand that there's been some tough, tough neighborhoods, but that should not be an excuse for mediocrity. And I know our Teachers of the Year understand that and are willing to challenge the status quo and expect the best. And so we appreciate very much your work. And we hope Congress would reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act. It's—and we're

* White House correction.

committed to working with Members of Congress to do it. The good news is the act doesn't go away without reauthorization; it still exists.

And so what—last week, what Secretary Spellings did, because the act hasn't been reauthorized, is that she announced a package of reforms that the Department of Education is now implementing to improve the No Child Left Behind Act, reforms that support our teachers and provide help to struggling students.

One thing about No Child is that when you find somebody struggling, it's important to get extra resources to help that child get up to speed now, before it's too late. The reforms are going to deal with—help schools deal with dropouts, increase accountability, and ensure that more students get the tutoring we want.

And so I want to thank you, Margaret, for being a leader, realizing the situation needs to be constantly improved, and improving it. And I think you'll find these additional tools and these measures will help you, not hurt you, and make it easier to do your job.

And I hope Senators in Congress—we don't give up on reauthorization. I understand it's an election year and sometimes things don't get done, but this is a brilliant, important piece of legislation. And I thank you all for supporting us the first round. And I hope we can work together on this round as well.

One person who believes very strongly in the potential of each child is our Teacher of the Year, Michael Geisen, who happens to be from Prineville, Oregon. Before he entered teaching—interesting enough, if you're from Prineville, one of the options for you is to be a forester. And he loves nature. He's an outdoors guy, and yet he really longed to be with his fellow citizens. There's no better way to do so than teaching. And so 7 years ago, after being a forester, he got in the classroom at Crook County Middle School.

It was not an easy time for that school when he entered. Crook County had gone through five principals in 6 years. Students' test scores had flatlined. In other words, kind of, they were just maintaining, which is unacceptable. It's unacceptable to Michael; it should be unacceptable to everybody if we're just kind of maintaining.

And so Mike saw his challenge, and he rose to it. You raised a good guy. Great teachers like Mike are optimists who believe in setting high standards. He believes that every child can learn if given a chance. And so when he became head of the science department, he created assessments for the students, and he put a system in place to measure results. That's what confident, optimistic people do; they say, "I'm not afraid to measure." And if you believe every child can learn, then you want to assess to make sure they are.

He knew the importance of parental involvement, so he created family-oriented school projects that would enlist moms and dads in their children's work. I suspect a lot of the Teachers of the Year understand how important that is, and that's why you're sitting out there. And he saw results. In his first 2 years as the department chair, the school State achievement scores in science rose from 55 percent to 72 percent, and they're still rising.

Great teachers like Mike instill a love of learning in young people. And so he captivates his students. I told you about his humor, right? [*Laughter*] "Did a fine job out here, President." [*Laughter*] Well, that—he takes that humor into the classroom.

He also loves to use music in his classroom, and he has a hands-on science curriculum. So, like, on the music deal—so he turns to songs to get people to pay attention. One of the greatest hits he's used is about gravity. One I like was a blues song written from the perspective of a lonely bacterium. [*Laughter*] Mike, you can sing it here in the Rose Garden if you want to. [*Laughter*]

Michael Geisen. You got a band? [Laughter]

The President. Yes, I probably suggest you don't. But—[laughter]—I tried to dance here one time, and it made a—[laughter]—it didn't work. [Laughter]

But here's what one of his students said, "Mike Geisen is such an awesome teacher"—actually called him Mr. Geisen—" [he's] an awesome teacher. He could make watching grass grow interesting." No wonder you're Teacher of the Year. One of his signature achievements is the annual science fair where the students create everything from electric cars to electric hot-dog cookers. The fair culminates with what Mike calls "a legendary evening of science, creativity, food, and wackiness." It's not what a lot of people think as a science class, to be frank with you, but nevertheless, it's a reason he's the Teacher of the Year.

He's found innovative ways to use his innate humor and creativity to encourage students to take science seriously. And we need a lot of scientists in America.

He also is a role model. You all are all role models. He teaches his students the—about the importance of service by demonstrating it in his own life. One of the things he's done is he's volunteered a lot of time to raise money for rock—for a rock-climbing wall. He's an outdoorsman, as I told you. He strongly has a—respects the environment. And he's a family man. He's a role model because he's a good family man.

Jennifer is here—thank you for coming—as is Aspen and Johanna. And as Mike says, he calls them his favorite teachers. Isn't that an interesting concept? They are—I know they're proud of their dad, as is his family, and so am I. And so we join the

Geisen family in congratulating Mike on his well-deserved recognition as the 2008 National Teacher of the Year. [Applause] Not yet—[applause]—maybe.

I do want to say one final thing, and then we'll get Michael up here and let him give a speech. This is the last Teacher of the Year ceremony I get to do as President. And as I told you, I'm sorry Laura is not here, because she would share in this sentiment. This has really been one of the favorite events of ours during our time in Washington. You're probably just saying, of course, he says that to every event. [Laughter] It's always the favorite.

Actually, this is a fabulous opportunity for us to thank our teachers, people who could be doing something else in life and have chosen to go in the classroom to lift somebody's life up, to make a difference in the future of the country.

And so I know you know this: You represent teachers from all over America. So when I thank you, I'm teaching—I'm thanking teachers from all across our country. I appreciate you making our experience here in the White House a joyful experience. I thank you for making America a more hopeful place. And I ask God's blessings on your work and the work of teachers all across America.

And now the Secretary and I will give Michael his award.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:20 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jennifer, wife, Lisa and Ken, parents, Aspen and Johanna, children, and David, brother, of 2008 National Teacher of the Year Michael Geisen. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Mr. Geisen.

Remarks Honoring the 2008 Super Bowl Champion New York Giants April 30, 2008

The President. Welcome. It's my honor. Thank you for coming. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House. It's an honor to recognize the Super Bowl champs, the New York football Giants.

I appreciate you all coming. Mr. Vice President, thank you for joining me up here as we welcome the Giants to the South Lawn. I want to thank John Mara and his mom Ann, who's joined us; Steve Tisch and his mother Joan; of course, their head football coach, Tom Coughlin, and his wife Judy. He got the extension; that's a good thing. [Laughter] Makes it a little easier to be standing up here. [Laughter]

I appreciate all the players who have joined us today and the coaches and the personnel that make the club function.

I thank members of my administration who have joined us. I welcome Members of the Congress, Senate, particularly from New Jersey and New York, State elected officials from New Jersey and New York—that's a good thing to be here.

I welcome those from Walter Reed who have joined us today. And of course, welcome to all the Giants fans. [Applause] Behave yourselves. [Laughter]

First, it's good to be up here with the Super Bowl MVP, Eli Manning. We have a few things in common. [Applause] We got some things in common. Eli has a father and a brother in the same business he's in. [Laughter] Sometimes the press are skeptical. [Laughter] And he just survived a big wedding. So I asked him coming in, "Any advice?" He said, "I wasn't father of the bride." [Laughter]

New York Giants have one of the great storied histories of—in pro football. And this club carried on that great tradition. And perhaps—many would say this is probably the most exciting chapter ever written in the New York Giants' football history. After all, you started off the season and

allowed 80 points in the first two games. That would be called a lousy start. [Laughter] And then you're playing the Redskins—

Audience members. Boo!

The President. It's okay, you know. [Laughter] And the game wasn't going very well, as I recall. And then you rallied, and you won.

And a lot of the people that know something about football said that was the turning point. And the winning streak—what's interesting is—six straight games, as I understand, on two different continents. You also had a great road record. I don't know if the fans understand this, but you piled up more away-game victories than—in NFL history. And the good news is, your fans still loved you at home. [Laughter] They really loved you.

You got into the—you secured a wild card. And it was interesting, in the last game of the season, a lot of folks thought the coach would just kind of lay down and let New England cruise to a perfect season—I remember a lot of people speculating about that last game of the season—and yet you didn't, Coach. Your team didn't win on the scoreboard, but you won the hearts of a lot of Americans for contesting the game. And you also—your team—[applause]—and it clearly gave your team some self-confidence, because you stormed through Tampa Bay and then went into Dallas—

Audience members. [Applause]

The President. Okay, look, I'm a good sport. [Laughter] We're going to send Jessica Simpson to the Democrat National Convention. [Laughter]

Packers was one of the coldest games in NFL history. You lit up the field like you were on fire. And Lawrence Tynes, who's with us here, came through with a 47-yard fieldgoal in overtime, putting you