

Week Ending Friday, February 28, 2003

The President's Radio Address

February 22, 2003

Good morning. This week, Members of the House and Senate will return to Washington with a full agenda to address, from strengthening our economy, to reforming health care, to protecting national security.

On the Senate side, there is a crucial item of business that has been delayed for too long. We face a vacancy crisis in the Federal courts, made worse by Senators who block votes on qualified nominees. These delays endanger American justice. Vacant Federal benches lead to crowded court dockets, overworked judges, and longer waits for Americans who want their cases heard. Regional appeals courts have a 15-percent vacancy rate, and filings in those courts reached an alltime high again last year.

Since taking office, I have sent to the Senate 34 qualified mainstream nominees for the Federal courts of appeals. To date, only half of them have received a vote in the Senate, and 12 of the remaining 17 nominees have been waiting more than a year for a floor vote.

It is my responsibility to submit judicial nominations. It is the Senate's responsibility to conduct prompt hearings and an up-or-down floor vote on all judicial nominees. Yet a handful of Democratic Senators, for partisan reasons, are attempting to prevent any vote at all on highly qualified nominees.

One of these nominees is Miguel Estrada, my selection for the DC Court of Appeals. I submitted his nomination in May of 2001, and Miguel Estrada has been waiting ever since. That's almost 2 years, and that's a disgrace.

Miguel Estrada's credentials are impeccable. He has served in the Justice Department under Presidents of both political parties. He's argued 15 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, and he has earned the

American Bar Association's highest mark, a unanimous rating of "well-qualified."

Miguel Estrada is an exceptional nominee for the Federal bench. He also has a remarkable personal story. He came to America from Honduras as a teenager, speaking little English. Within a few years, he had graduated with high honors from Columbia College and Harvard Law School. Miguel Estrada then served as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, as a Federal prosecutor in New York, and as assistant to the Solicitor General of the United States.

If confirmed, Miguel Estrada would be the first Hispanic American ever to serve on this court, which is often considered the second highest in the land. He would break through a barrier that has stood for too long. His nomination has strong support from citizens and leaders in both parties and endorsements from the Hispanic National Bar Association, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and more than a dozen other distinguished groups. He's a role model for young people all across this Nation, living proof that in America, anything is possible.

I nominated Miguel Estrada for the Court of Appeals because he's a man of talent and character who will be an excellent judge. Yet after 21 months, he still cannot get an up-or-down vote from the Senate. Democrats are stalling Miguel Estrada's nomination, while they search in vain for a reason to reject him. Some Senators who once insisted that every appeals court nominee deserves a vote have abandoned that principle for partisan politics. Their tactics are unfair to the good man I have nominated and unfaithful to the Senate's own obligations.

I call on the Senate Democratic leadership to stop playing politics and permit a vote on Miguel Estrada's nomination. Let each Senator vote as he or she thinks best, but give the man a vote.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 10 a.m. on February 21 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 22. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 21 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

**The President's News Conference
With President Jose Maria Aznar of
Spain in Crawford, Texas**
February 22, 2003

President Bush. I welcome my good friend President Jose Maria Aznar to Crawford. We're especially pleased that Ana is with him as well. I visited his ranch on my first visit to Europe as the President. I'm very pleased to return the hospitality.

Spain is a strong and trusted ally. Our two nations have drawn closer than ever before in fighting terrorism across Europe and beyond. Spain has apprehended members of Al Qaida and continues to share vital information, intelligence information. President Aznar is a strong fighter in the war against terror, and I value his advice.

I respect and appreciate his leadership in the U.N., the EU, and NATO, to meet the new threats of this new century. For the Spanish people and for their leader, the cause of liberty is more than a phrase; it is a fundamental commitment expressed in resolute action.

President Aznar and I agree that the future of peace depends on the disarmament of Iraq. We agree that Saddam Hussein continues to be in violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1441. We agree that the terms of that resolution must be fully respected. By Resolution 1441, the Security Council has taken a clear stand, and it now faces a clear choice. With all the world watching, the Council will now show whether it means what it says.

Early next week, working with our friends and allies, we will introduce an additional Security Council resolution that will set out in clear and simple terms that Iraq is not complying with Resolution 1441. For the record, this would not be a second resolution on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction; it would

only be the latest in a long series of resolutions going back 12 years.

We will discuss this resolution with members of the Security Council, and we will hear again from Chief Inspector Blix. During these final deliberations, there is but one question for the Council to address: Is Saddam Hussein complying with Resolution 1441? That resolution did not ask for hints of progress or minor concessions. It demanded full and immediate disarmament. That and that alone is the issue before the Council. We will not allow the Iraqi dictator, with a history of aggression and close ties to terrorist groups, to continue to possess or produce weapons of mass destruction.

Our coalition draws its strength from the courage and moral clarities of leaders like President Aznar. In times of testing, we discover who is willing to stand up for the security of free peoples and the rights of mankind. Mr. President, you are clearly a man willing to take this stand. I thank you for your leadership. I thank you for your friendship.

President Aznar. Well, good morning, good day to everyone. I would firstly like to thank, on behalf of my wife and for myself, I would like to thank Laura Bush and George Bush for their invitation to visit the ranch. And this is a time to work, to rest, to talk in truly marvelous surroundings.

Spain is an EU member and a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council. Spain is very clearly in favor of the strength of the transatlantic link. In these three extremely important dimensions, Spain is committed with an active role in contributing to an appropriate response to the threat that Saddam Hussein's regime entails for international peace and security. We've worked very hard and with good results to forge consensus within the European Union that it is necessary to maintain. We share the efforts and the needs within the Security Council that the international community has to maintain to guarantee peace and security in the world.

Precisely, it is in the Security Council that the international community has laid the responsibility of maintaining world peace and security. Our responsibility is precisely to work so that the Security Council can exercise its responsibilities, working in order to