

the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-ninth.

George W. Bush

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Remarks Honoring the 2005 National and State Teachers of the Year

April 20, 2005

Thank you all. Please be seated. Welcome. Welcome to the Rose Garden. And it's a beautiful day to continue the tradition of honoring America's finest teachers at the White House. We're really happy you're here.

Somewhere along the way, all of us got to know a teacher who made a real difference in our lives. In my case, I married one—[*laughter*—and I appreciate you. I appreciate my love for Laura. I appreciate Laura's love for teaching, and I appreciate the great job you're doing as the First Lady.

She was raised in Midland, just like you were, Carol. Maybe that has something to do with it.

We like to say in our household, teaching is more than a job; it is a calling. You know what I'm talking about. You wouldn't be sitting here if you had not heard the calling. By helping every child realize his or her potential, our teachers show their students that dreams can become reality. What a fantastic job, isn't it, to help somebody realize a dream can become a reality. All who answer the call to teach deserve our support, our respect, and our affection.

Somebody who understands the role of a teacher is our Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, who is with us. Margaret has been a longtime friend. We were involved with education reform in Texas. We bring the spirit of reform to Washington, DC, and you're doing a fine job, Madam Secretary.

The chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, John Boehner, is with us, from the great State of Ohio. Thank you, John. Bob Filner from California; Doc

Hastings from Washington; Leonard Boswell from the great State of Iowa—welcome. Appreciate you all. I want to thank you for taking time out of your schedules to come here. This is an important moment, and I appreciate you recognizing it as such.

I want to thank the Mayor. Mr. Mayor, thank you for coming. I always like to tell the Mayor that it's important for the Mayor to fill the potholes—[*laughter*—particularly close to White House, Mayor. And you're doing a fine job. Last time I saw the Mayor was at Opening Day. For those of you who follow professional baseball, you know that we've got the Nationals here in town. It's exciting for the Nation's Capital to have the Nationals. And one of the reasons the Nationals are here is because of the Mayor. And so, Mr. Mayor, thank you for your leadership.

And City Councilwoman Carol Schwartz, who I referred to earlier—Laura, Carol, and I were raised in Midland, Texas. Pretty long odds for three people raised in Midland to end up in Washington in the Rose Garden, by the way. [*Laughter*] But welcome, glad you're here, Carol.

I want to thank the National Teacher of the Year finalists: Stan Murphy from California—San Diego, California; Vicki Goldsmith from Des Moines, Iowa; Tamara Steen from Washington State. We're proud you all are here.

And of course, Jason Kamras, who is standing right here. I want to welcome his parents, Linda and Marvin. Thank you for coming. Congratulations on raising such a fine man. And Jeremy—Jason allowed his brothers, Jeremy and Michael, to show up as well. [*Laughter*] I asked one of the boys if they ever thought Jason would amount to anything. He told the truth. [*Laughter*] Jason has proved you wrong. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank the 51 other State Teachers of the Year for being teachers and being such an accomplished teacher that you're being recognized here in the Rose Garden. We welcome you here. We thank you for your compassion. And we welcome your guests, as well.

We welcome Tom Houlihan, the executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, and we appreciate you sponsoring this event. We welcome Ernie Fleishman,

the senior vice president of Scholastic, Inc., which is a sponsoring organization of this event. We welcome Tom McInerney, the CEO of ING U.S. Financial Services, which is one of the sponsors of this event. Obviously, this is a big event to have required three sponsors. [Laughter] We're glad you're here. We want to thank the chief State school officers who are here today.

I want to pay particular respect to an educational entrepreneur who has shown one person can make an enormous difference. Wendy Kopp, the president and founder of Teach For America, is with us. And we welcome you back to the White House, Wendy, and we're glad you're here. There is a reason why Wendy is here, which you will hear in a minute.

America's teachers help our students develop the schools—skills they need to succeed in our schools. That's what you do. You teach a child how to read and write, but you also teach a child how to think and hope. Teaching is a demanding job. It's an incredibly demanding job. And I hope our fellow citizens understand how hard it is to get to the classroom every day and to keep your spirits up, to keep your vision clear about what is possible, and to keep your patience. I'm sure we tested our—patience of our teachers a lot, Mayor, when you and I were growing up. [Laughter]

I appreciate the fact that good teachers instill a passion for learning. You know, passion is a powerful word—word, and that's why the teachers are here with us, because they have instilled a passion for somebody to go to class every day to learn. When young people become good students with big dreams, they become better citizens. Our country is better off as a result of our teachers instilling passion and hope.

We expect a lot from our teachers, and teachers have a right to expect a lot from us. Education is one of the top priorities of this administration and this Congress. That's why we passed the No Child Left Behind Act. People from both parties came together. I love the spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act. I suspect the teachers love the spirit of challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. People believe that we ought to set high standards and believe that every child—

and if you do believe every child can learn to read and write and add and subtract, it makes sense to determine whether they are, so we can—and if not, so we can solve problems early, before it's too late.

Because of teachers and hard work, because we expect every child to learn to read and write and add and subtract, there's an achievement gap in America which is closing. I can say it's closing because we measure to find out if it is closing. I'm proud to report that test scores are up. In fourth grade, math test scores are up across the Nation by nine points over the last 3 years. Eighth graders improved by five points over the same period of time. We're making progress.

There is more to do. Margaret and I believe we ought to build on this success by bringing higher standards and accountability to the Nation's high schools. I'm sure the Nation's finest teachers share our commitment that every student must be prepared for college and, therefore, prepared for the jobs of the 21st century, so we can say after it's all said and done, no child was left behind in our country.

One of the finest teachers in our country is with us today. He is the 2005 National Teacher of the Year, Jason Kamras. He teaches mathematics at John Philip Sousa Middle School, right here in the Nation's Capital. Jason joined the Teach For America program. He did so because he wanted to show students, the so-called “hard to educate,” that with high works and high standards, they can overcome any challenge they face.

The Teach For America program asks for a 2-year commitment. Jason is now in his 8th year of that 2-year commitment. Because he chose to stay, countless students have better lives and they have a better future. He's usually at work at 7 a.m., and he rarely leaves before 7 p.m. He's had high expectations for himself, and he sets high expectations for his students. He works tirelessly to raise math scores, and his students are responding. Jason says, “Nothing surpasses the joy I feel when a student proclaims proudly, ‘Mr. Kamras, now I get it.’” I suspect the teachers here understand exactly what he means by saying that.

Like all great teachers, Jason knows that his students' needs do not end when the school bell rings. He understands that at the end of the day, there's more work to be done. And so he cofounded a program called EX-POSE, which takes students out of their southwest Washington neighborhoods to places like the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials or the National Gallery of Art.

Jason is also teaching his students how to produce photos about their lives and communities. I think you'll find it interesting to know that these photos have been shown at the Capital Children's Museum and other places around the District. In other words, Jason is building self-esteem.

When his students need individual attention, Jason is always there to support them, interestingly enough, even after they've left the school. I suspect this is some of your—some of you all share the same experience. When one of his former students was preparing for the SAT, Jason studied with him three times a week for 10 weeks. Isn't that interesting? The guy got a 1300 on the test. He now goes to Morehouse College in Atlanta. He's majoring in electrical engineering. He is the first person in his family to go to college.

He says, "I owe most of my success to Mr. Kamras. I do not know where I would be without him. He's more than a teacher to me. He is a true friend." Gosh, it must make you feel good as teachers to have somebody say, "You made a lot of difference in my life. You are a true friend."

Today America expresses its appreciation to Jason and to every one of our outstanding State Teachers of the Year. You give our young people the benefit of your knowledge, your support, your friendship. Your students are fortunate, really fortunate, to have you in their lives. And our Nation is fortunate to have you guiding the next generation of Americans.

God bless you all for your hard work. God bless your families as well. It is my honor to introduce the 2005 National Teacher of the Year, Jason Kamras.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:10 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Anthony A. Williams of the District of Columbia;

and District of Columbia Councilmember Carol Schwartz. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady and Mr. Kamras.

Remarks to the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Legislative Conference

April 20, 2005

Thank you all. Thank you all for the warm welcome. Please be seated. Thank you. Thank you, Al, for your kind introduction. I've had this good man by my side for quite a while. When I was the Governor of Texas, we worked together. [Applause] There you go. [Laughter] And now as the President of these United States, I'm proud to serve with Al Gonzales as our Attorney General.

I want to thank you for allowing me to come and speak to the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. It's an honor to be here. I see a lot of friends—I was going to say a lot of old friends, but—[laughter]—some of you are younger than I am.

I appreciate your hard work and your commitment to the entrepreneurial spirit of America. You know, one of the great things about our country is, the entrepreneurial spirit is strong. The dream of owning your own business is alive. The willingness for people to take risk is an important part of our society, and as a result, small businesses are being created throughout all our society, and the job base is increasing as a result.

I look forward to working with you the next 4 years to keep the prosperity of our country going. We share a common goal to make sure the American Dream is available for all. *El Sueno Americano es para todos.* [Laughter] This is the land of opportunity, and it must remain the land of opportunity, where our origins matter less than our aspirations. And this country's success depends not on accident of birth but on personal effort and drive and determination. And so I'll continue to work with you to create a society where personal effort is rewarded and opportunity is within the reach of every one of our citizens.

In order to make sure opportunity is within the reach of every one of our citizens, we've got to have an economy that continues to