

Remarks to Reporters Following a Meeting With Associate Justice-Designate Samuel A. Alito, Jr.

January 9, 2006

Good morning. I just had breakfast with Judge Alito. I told him I think he conducted himself with such dignity and class in the weeks leading up to the confirmation process, which begins today.

Sam Alito is imminently qualified to be a member of the bench. I'm not the only person who feels that way. The American Bar Association looked at his record, looked at his opinions, looked at his temperament, and came to the same conclusion, that he is well qualified to be a Supreme Court judge.

Sam's got the intellect necessary to bring a lot of class to that Court. He's got a judicial temperament necessary to make sure that the Court is a body that interprets the law and doesn't try to write the law. And so I'm looking forward to your hearings. I know the American people will be impressed, just like I have been impressed and a lot of other Members of the Senate have been impressed.

And my hope, of course, is that the American people will be impressed by the process. It's very important that Members of the Senate conduct a dignified hearing. The Supreme Court is a dignified body; Sam is a dignified person. And my hope, of course, is that the Senate bring dignity to the process, give this man a fair hearing, and an up-or-down vote on the Senate floor.

Sam, good luck to you. Thanks for your agreement to serve. I appreciate you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:52 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on the No Child Left Behind Act in Glen Burnie, Maryland

January 9, 2006

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm introduction. It's great to be here with Laura. She is a fantastic mom. She understands something that's very interesting—all education begins at home. I can

remember her reading to our little girls all the time. Occasionally, I did, too, but stumbled over a few of the words and might have confused them. [*Laughter*] Laura cares deeply about education, as do I.

Thank you all for coming. We're here at North Glen Elementary School because it is a center of educational excellence. That's why we're here. We're here to herald success. We're here to say—[*applause*].

It so happens this is the fourth anniversary of when I signed the No Child Left Behind Act. I think the No Child Left Behind Act is one of the most significant accomplishments in education in a long, long time. I want to thank both the Republicans and Democrats who worked together back then to get this piece of legislation passed. It is a really important piece of legislation that is working. And I'm here today to talk about the spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act, the evidence that says it's working, and my deep desire to work with Congress to make sure it continues to have the desired effect on children all across the country.

First, I want to welcome our Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings. I've known her for a long time. She is a dear friend of mine who also happens to be a significant warrior when it comes to leaving no children behind in our society. She believes that I believe—like I believe, that every single child can learn, and we've got to make sure that every child does learn. I want to thank you for your leadership, Margaret. You're doing a heck of a job as the Secretary of Education.

I want to thank the first lady, as well, for being here—Kendel, thanks for coming. Tell that old husband of yours it's okay to sleep in occasionally. [*Laughter*]

Dutch, I want to thank you for being here—Congressman Ruppertsberger's district—real proud you took time out of your life to be here. Thanks for coming. I also want to thank Congressman Wayne Gilchrest for being here as well. Wayne, appreciate you taking time.

I want to thank all the local and State officials who've joined us. I want to thank Nancy Mann, the superintendent of schools for this school district. Julie, thank you—the principal, Julie Little-McVeary, who is the—listen, let me say something—and by the way,

Maurine Larkin, who is the former principal here.

One of the things that's interesting, that when you look at public schools, when you find centers of excellence, you always find a principal that is capable of setting high standards, working with teachers, demanding results and following through to make sure that the schools achieve the results. Every school requires a dedicated educational entrepreneur, someone willing to challenge the status quo if there's failure and being imaginative about how to achieve results. And you've got such principals here. Again, I want to congratulate Julie and Maurine for leading this school. You've done a heck of a job, and we're proud—we're proud to honor you.

We went to Laneie Taylor's fifth grade class. I see that they're here. Laneie, thank you—second-year teacher. Listen, schools succeed because they've got teachers that care. And I want to thank all the teachers who are here.

One of my predecessors as the Governor of Texas was Sam Houston. You may have heard of him, may not have heard of him—[laughter]—interesting old guy. He was the President of the Republic of Texas. He was a United States Senator. He was a Congressman from Tennessee. He was the Governor of Texas. He had done a lot of things. He led the battle of San Jacinto. I mean, he was a heck of a guy. They asked him, "Of all the things you've done in your life, what is the most important job?" He said, "Teacher." And so, all the teachers here, thanks for teaching. It is really an important job, and we appreciate your dedication in the classroom.

And to the parents of the students who come here, thanks for caring. Schools that succeed have got parents who are involved at the school. And so, whatever is working here in terms of parental involvement is—needs to be duplicated around this State and around the country, because parental involvement is a very important part of the success of schools around America.

So the No Child Left Behind Act—we got here to Washington, and I decided to make sure that the public school system in America met the promise of—and the hopes of our country. I understand how important it is to

have a public school system work really well. A vibrant America is one in which the public schools provide a avenue for success. And it's really important we have a good public school system. It's been important in the past that the public school system function well, and it's going to be really important in the future.

Secondly, we have a moral obligation to make sure every child gets a good education. That's how I—it's a moral obligation to make sure that we herald success and challenge failure. It's not right to have a system that quits on kids. I mean, some schools may not think they're quitting on kids, but when you shuffle kids through the schools without determining whether or not they can read and write and add and subtract, I view that as quitting on kids. I called it the soft bigotry of low expectations. In other words, you believe certain children can't learn, so, therefore, just move them through. It's kind of a process world, isn't it? It's more important that somebody be shuffled through than it is to determine whether or not they're capable of meeting certain standards in certain grades.

And it troubled me to realize that in my own State of Texas, as well as other States, there wasn't that sense of urgency; there wasn't that sense of focus on results. It was kind of a process world we lived in. And we were beginning to realize that as a result of a process world, the kids were coming out of the school system that were illiterate. And it wasn't right. It was morally wrong, in my judgment, not to challenge a system that wasn't achieving great national goals such as an illiterate—a literate workforce. See, we live in a competitive world. And we'd better make sure our—the future of this country has the got the capacity to compete in that world.

And the best place to start is to make sure every child can read and write and add and subtract. And so that was the spirit behind proposing the No Child Left Behind Act. And as I mentioned, there was a lot of non-partisan cooperation—kind of a rare thing in Washington. But it made sense when it come to public schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act embodied these principles: First, there is a role for the

Federal Government, a funding role. In other words, the Federal Government has committed and should be committed to helping Title I students, for example. As a matter of fact, Title I program spending has increased 45 percent since 2001. There is what's called the elementary and secondary school program; that's up by 41 percent. In other words, there is a Federal dollar commitment—certainly not as big as the State government or as local government, nor should it be. I don't think you want the Federal Government funding all public schools. But I do think you want the Federal Government focusing money on certain aspects of public education.

I also believe that sometimes you can have so many goals there are no goals. In other words, there's just this kind of long list of goals, and so nothing gets accomplished. I'm the kind of person that believes that we ought to set specific goals, and one of the most specific goals we've set is that every child should be reading at grade level by the third grade and remain at grade level. That's a clear goal; it's easy to understand, there's no ambiguity with it. It says every child—not just some children, every child—ought to be reading at grade level by the third grade—no doubt—it's not the 2d or 10th; it's 3d—and remain there.

And so we back that goal up. And by the way, it's the understanding that if you can't figure out—if you can't read, you can't do math or science. Reading is the gateway to educational excellence. That's why I asked the kids in your classroom whether or not they read more than they watched TV. I was pleased to see a lot of hands went up. It's kind of a hard question to ask in this day and age, isn't it, particularly since we've got too many TV channels to begin with. [*Laughter*]

And so we quadrupled the amount of money available for what's called the Reading First Program. In other words, we set the goal, and the Federal Government has provided the money for certain parts of the education system around the country. We're not going to fund it all, but we're going to make targeted funding. And it's a good use of money, in my judgment.

On the other hand, it seems like to me if we're going to spend money, we ought to be asking the question, is it—are we getting the results for the money. In other words, once there's a commitment, a logical follow-up to that commitment is, why don't you show us—why don't you show us whether or not we're meeting goals. So, in other words, let's measure, finally. And so the No Child Left Behind Act has said that in return for Federal money, we'll test 3 through 8. Children will be tested grades 3 through 8.

And why do we do that? Well, one is to figure out whether or not kids are learning. It's an interesting way to determine whether or not the curriculum you're using works. I remember when I was the Governor of Texas, there was a lot of debate about different types of curriculum, different ways to teach reading. You might remember those debates. They were full of all kinds of politics. The best way to cut through the political debate is to measure. The best way to say, the program I'm using is working, is because you're able to measure to determine whether or not it's working. That's what this school has done. They said, "We welcome accountability, because we believe our teachers are great, and the system we use can work."

Another reason to measure is so that the parents stay involved. You know, there's a lot of anecdotal evidence about parents believing that the school their kids go to is doing just fine. That's what you would hope if you were a parent. I mean, it's a natural inclination to say, "Gosh, my kid goes to a really good school. I like the principal, I like the teachers." But sure enough, in some cases, the performance might not have been up to par.

And so making sure there's an accountability system that the parents get to see is one that says to a parent, you know, if things aren't going so well, get involved with the school and help. Or if things are going well, make sure you thank the teachers. Make sure you take time out of your day to thank the person whose soul is invested in the future of your child. It's like the teachers right here in this school have invested their time and efforts to make sure the children learn to read. I bet there's nothing better than a teacher to have a thankful parent come up

and say, “Thank you for making sure my daughter or my son has got the capacity to be able to succeed in this great country.”

Measurement also is a way to let schools understand how they’re doing relative to other schools, or school districts to see how they’re doing relative to other school districts. In other words, if you’re living in the school district here, and one school like this was doing fine, another one is not, it should provide an opportunity for the principal of that school or the parents of that school to say, “Wait a minute. Look at this school over here; it’s doing fine. How come we’re not?” You can’t solve a problem until you diagnose it, is what I’m telling you. And our accountability system helps us all diagnose problems and solve them early, before it’s too late.

One of the interesting parts of the No Child Left Behind Act was what’s called supplemental service money. I don’t know if you’ve used it here or not—bet you have to a certain extent. It basically says, if a child is falling behind, here is extra money from the Federal Government to help you catch up. If a child needs help in reading, we’ve diagnosed a problem early and said, let’s make sure this child is not left behind. That’s what it says.

This is a bill that says, in return for Federal money, we’re going to measure; we’ll adjust. We’ll change to achieve the most important objective of all, to make sure every single child in America can read by the third grade and stay at grade level, that children can read and write and add and subtract.

Listen, I’ve been through this debate about testing. Again, I remember when I was the Governor of Texas, there was a lot of people saying, “How can you be for testing?” My answer is, how can you not be for testing? They said it was discriminatory to test. I said it’s discriminatory not to test. If you can’t know what a child—whether a child can read and write, how can you solve the problem? I’ve heard people say, “Oh, all you’re doing is teaching to test.” My answer is, if you teach a child how to read, they will pass the test. Accountability is crucial, in my judgment, for making sure the public school system meets the important goals of our society.

Having said all that, an important part of the No Child Left Behind Act is the under-

standing that one size does not fit all when it comes to public schools, and that the governance ought to be local. If you’ve noticed, I’ve never said the Federal Government is going to tell you how to teach. That would be the worst thing that could happen to the public school system. The worst possible thing is, we’re sending you money and now we’re going to tell you how to use it and how to teach and what curriculum to use. That’s the opposite of the spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act. The No Child Left Behind Act understands there needs to be flexibility and local control of schools.

We did not design a Federal test. There was great pressure to say, let’s have a Federal test. All that would mean, that once you have a Federal test, it could lead to local prescriptions for that test. We said the States ought to develop their own accountability systems, and that local people ought to have input into the design of the State at the—of local accountability systems. And so for those of you who think, well, the Federal Government has reached too far into the governance issue, it’s just not true. It’s not the case. As a matter of fact, quite the contrary; it makes sure that there was local control of schools. It made sure that the State had the option and opportunity to say to the local superintendent and principals, “Design your program that works. You’re closest to the people; you listen to the parents; you see the issues firsthand in the neighborhood in which you live. Come up with a curriculum that meets your own needs.”

The system is working. That’s what’s important for people to understand. And by the way, any attempt to roll back the accountability in Washington, DC, will be—I’ll fight any attempt to do that. I’m just not going to let it happen. We’re making too much progress. There’s an achievement gap in America that’s closing. We don’t need achievement gaps in this country. It’s not good for us to have achievement gaps where certain kids can read in fourth grade better than others. One of our goals has got to be to achieve that—close that achievement gap. And we’re doing it. How do we know? Because we’re measuring.

There’s what they called the Nation’s Report Card—it’s the National Assessment of

Educational Progress, NAEP. It's a way to kind of norm testing scores across States without having a national test. It's a way to determine whether or not the great State of Maryland is doing okay relative to your neighboring States, for example. It's a way for us to kind of get a glimpse about whether or not we're making progress toward achieving certain goals. In 2005, America's fourth graders posted the best scores in reading and math in the history of the test. That's positive. Ever since the test has been issued, 2005 was the best scores. If we didn't test, by the way, you could never say—I could never stand up and say this. I'd just be guessing, wouldn't I? It could be that we're doing fine—maybe not, maybe so.

African American fourth graders set records in reading and math in 2005. Hispanic 4th graders set records in reading and math. That's really good. It's important for our country that all children from all walks of life have the ability to realize the great promise of the country. The NAEP also showed that eighth graders earned the best math scores ever recorded; eighth grade Hispanic and African American students achieved the highest math scores ever.

As I said, there's an achievement gap—we know because we measure—and it's closing, and that's positive. And our goal has got to be to continue to work to make sure there is no achievement gap in America.

Now, let me talk about North Glen Elementary School. I don't know if you—those of you interested in this school have paid attention to these results, but I would like to share some—[*applause*]*—*if I might, I'd like to share some statistics with you, and perhaps this will give you an indication about why Laura and I came here.

In 2003, 50 percent—57 percent of North Glen students scored proficient in reading—57 percent—and 46 percent were proficient in math. Now, that's unacceptable. Fifty-seven percent is a lousy number. Forty-six percent, obviously, is even worse. But it was unacceptable to the principals and the superintendent and the teachers—that's most important. And so they got after it, and they figured out how to make sure that goals were met.

I didn't spend a lot of time talking today to the principal about the different analysis that went on, but I bet it was pretty indepth. But one thing for certain is, the test in '03 said we better do something different. When we find out something is going right, let's stay on it, and if something is going wrong, let's change. That's what happened here, because guess what—in 2005, 82 percent of North Glen students were ranked proficient in reading, and 84 percent were ranked proficient in math.

It's great news, isn't it? It's a system that says, why don't we show everybody whether or not we can succeed. And if we're not, we'll change; and if we are, we now have a chance to have the old President come by and say thanks, you know. [*Laughter*]

Interestingly enough, in 2003, 45 percent of the African American students in this school rated proficient in reading; in 2005, 84 percent are proficient. In other words, this is a school that believes every child can learn. Not just certain children, every child. And then they work to see to it that it happens. This—the statistics I just announced—oh, by the way, in 2003, 35 percent of African American students rated proficient in math. You've got to know math if you're going to compete in this 21st-century world. It's really important that math and science become a focal point of our high schools, for example. But it's not going to work if kids coming out of elementary school can't do math. Thirty-five percent of the African American students rated proficient in math; now it's 82 percent. It's a good score.

This is a fine school. We're here to herald excellence. We're here to praise the law that is working. I'm here to thank the teachers not only here but around the State of Maryland and around the country who are dedicating their lives to providing hope for our future. I want to thank the Members of Congress for working together on this vital piece of legislation, a piece of legislation that's laying the cornerstone for a hopeful tomorrow.

Laura and I's spirits are uplifted any time we go to a school that's working, because we understand the importance of public education in the future of our country. We also believe, strongly believe, that every child can

learn. And with the right focus and right energy, every child will learn. And as every child learns, the future of this country will never have been brighter.

Thanks for a job well done. God bless the teachers here and the principal. God bless the parents. And may God bless the students as well. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:26 a.m. at North Glen Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to Kendel S. Ehrlich, wife of Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., of Maryland. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks to the Veterans of Foreign Wars

January 10, 2006

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. It is an honor to stand with the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars—again. This is one of America's great organizations. I appreciate the proud and patriotic work you do across America. Thanks for your hard work in our Nation's Capital to make sure our Government listens to the concerns of our veterans.

Your members include veterans who served in World War II—I just happened to spend Christmas with one of your members—[laughter]—the Korean war, the Vietnam war, the Persian Gulf war, Panama, Bosnia, Kosovo, and many other operations. In the past 4 years, you've welcomed into your ranks new veterans who have defended liberty in places like Afghanistan and Iraq as a part of the global war on terror. No matter where you deployed or which century you wore the uniform, each of you stepped forward when America needed you most. And these days, first days of the year 2006, a grateful nation says, thank you for your service and the great example you set for today's men and women who wear the uniform.

I want to thank the commander in chief of the VFW, Jim Mueller. I had the honor of welcoming him to the Oval Office the other day, where we discussed issues important to our Nation's veterans and issues im-

portant to our Nation's security. He's a clear thinker. He's a patriot. I appreciate the invitation, Jim.

I'm also proud to be joined today by the Secretary of State, Condi Rice, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Jim Nicholson, Mr. Secretary.

Two Members of the United States Congress, one Republican and one Democrat, have joined us. [Laughter] Americans' quest for freedom and peace is a bipartisan quest, and I'm honored that Senator Pat Roberts is with us and Congressman Adam Schiff. Thank you both for coming.

Lieutenant General Bob Shea of the Joint Chiefs is with us today. As is my friend Lieutenant General Danny James, who was the Texas Adjutant General when I had the honor of being the commander in chief of the Texas Guard. [Laughter] Good to see you, Danny.

To all those who wear the uniform who are here, I particularly want to pay my respects to those wounded soldiers from Walter Reed. Thanks for serving. I'm proud you're here. And I want to report to our fellow citizens that we've got a fantastic health care system for those who wear the uniform. Any man or woman wounded in combat is removed immediately from the battlefield into the best possible care. I want to thank those at Walter Reed, those healers and helpers—not only at Walter Reed but at Bethesda and Brooks, where I recently went—for the great compassion and great skill that they show in helping those who have been wounded on the battlefield. May God bless you all.

As veterans and soon to be veterans, you have placed the Nation's security before your own lives. You took an oath to defend our flag and our freedom, and you kept that oath underseas and under fire. All of us who live in liberty live in your debt, and we must never forget the sacrifice and the service of our veterans.

A new generation of Americans is carrying on your legacy, defending our Nation in another great struggle for freedom, the global war on terror. This war began with a sudden attack on September the 11th, 2001. That morning we saw the destruction our enemies intend for us, and we accepted new responsibilities. Like generations before us, we're