

environment that is free from the threat of sexual assault and in which allegations of sexual assault are thoroughly investigated, offenders are held appropriately accountable, and victims are given the care and support they need. Elevating these cases to a higher

level of command review is a very important step. I believe that sexual assault has no place in our military. I thank Secretary Panetta and Chairman Dempsey and look forward to seeing continued progress on this important issue.

Remarks Honoring the National and State Teachers of the Year April 24, 2012

The President. Wow, thank you, everybody. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. Welcome to the White House.

Before we get started, I want to recognize one of our greatest advocates for education and for teachers, our Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, is here. Give him a big round of applause.

Now let's face it, a lot of important people visit the White House. [Laughter] But to young people in classrooms around the country, nobody is more important than the men and women that we honor here today, the State and National Teachers of the Year.

These are the kind of teachers who change lives forever. I wouldn't be here today if it were not for teachers like these who challenged me and pushed me and put up with me and inspired me and set me straight when they had to. And I think everybody here can say the exact same thing.

Teachers matter. That's why I often tell young people: If you want a guarantee that you're making a difference every single day, become a teacher. A teacher is the key to a child reaching their potential. And if we need more proof—

[At this point, a baby chattered.]

The President. Yes, it's true. [Laughter] Yes. She agrees. [Laughter]

And if we need more proof that teachers matter, all we've got to do is look around this room. I'm honored to be here with teachers like Gay Barnes, from Madison, Alabama, one of the four finalists for this award. There's Angela Wilson, who teaches children of military families at Vicenza Middle School in Italy. Not

a bad place to hang out. [Laughter] There is Alvin Aureliano Davis, who teaches music in Florida.

And there is our 2012 National Teacher of the Year, Rebecca Mielivocki, from Burbank, California. So give Rebecca a big round of applause. And this is Rebecca's crew right here—[laughter]—who are very proud. Auntie and cousins and—[laughter].

Rebecca Mielivocki. My boss.

The President. Oh, boss. [Laughter] Even more important. [Laughter]

Now, you might say that teaching is in Rebecca's DNA, because both her parents taught in public schools. She saw how hard they worked, how much time and energy they devoted to their jobs, how much they gave to their students.

But when she was 18, of course, the last thing she wanted to be was a teacher. What teenager wants to do what their parents are doing? [Laughter] So, in college, she really rebelled and went to law school. [Laughter]

Now, she then tried a few different careers after that. After studying to become a lawyer, she went into publishing and floral design and event planning. But ultimately, she found herself drawn back to the classroom, and her students are so lucky that she did.

She's got high expectations for her seventh graders and for herself, but she also knows that school can be fun. And that fits a personality that she describes as "a 12-year-old goofball dying to get out." [Laughter] And I have to say, she was a little goofy when I met her. [Laughter] She was back there teasing me and asking Arne about our basketball games and stuff. [Laughter] You can tell she's just got a wonderful spirit.

And so in addition to everything they learn in her English class, Rebecca's students have had a chance to film their own adaptations of an O. Henry short story. They worked with a local writer to develop 5-minute plays, which professional actors then performed. Rebecca has led field trips to the science center, to the aquarium, to Chinatown, even the La Brea tar pits—that's a trip you really don't want to lose track of anybody. [Laughter] Only one kid? [Laughter] They never showed up that morning—[laughter]—I was wondering where they were. [Laughter]

Rebecca knows that education also is a responsibility that begins at home. So she hosts family nights to get parents involved. She sends home weekly parent memos so moms and dads know what's going on in school. She maintains a Facebook page for her class, where families can get information and updates 24/7.

And all this extra work makes a huge difference. When kids finish a year in Rebecca's class, they're better readers and writers than when they started. But even more than that, they know how important they are. And they understand how bright their futures can be. And they know that if they work at it, there's no limit to what they can achieve.

So Rebecca is the definition of "above and beyond." And so many teachers around the country are like her. She throws herself into her work for a simple reason: She knows that her students depend on her. And as she puts it, "Life is too short and too difficult to have anything less than the most engaged, enthusiastic teachers in schools." I couldn't agree more. And I know Arne couldn't agree more.

I also want to point something else out. Rebecca said in applying for this award, she said that in some ways it's harder than ever to be an educator. Even in the best of times, teachers are asked to do more with less. And today, with our economy still recovering from the worst recession since the Great Depression, States and

communities have to stretch budgets tighter than ever.

So we've got a particular responsibility as elected officials in difficult times, instead of bashing teachers to support them. We should be giving States the resources to keep good teachers on the job and reward the best ones. And we should grant our educators the flexibility to teach with creativity and passion in the classroom and not just teaching to the test. And we should allow schools to replace teachers, who, even with the right resources and support, just aren't helping our kids to learn.

Because we've all got something at stake here. Our parents, our grandparents, they didn't build the world's most prosperous economy and the strongest middle class in the world out of thin air. It started with a world class education system. That was the foundation. And in the long run, no issue will have a bigger impact in our success as a country and the success of our citizens.

So, every day, when teachers like you put in long hours or dig into your own pockets to pay for school supplies or tweak lessons so they're even better than they were last year, you're not just serving your schools or your students, you're also serving your country. And you're helping to preserve the basic promise of America, that no matter who you are, where you come from, what you look like, what your last name is, you can succeed. You can make it if you try, if you put in the effort.

So, on behalf of the American people, thank you all for everything that you do. And congratulations. I'm going to present this spiffy looking award to Rebecca Mieliwocki.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:11 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Anita Schackman, former principal, Luther Burbank Middle School in Burbank, CA; and Bill and Sue Lipschultz, parents of Rebecca Mieliwocki.