

James exhibited an astounding sense of devotion and duty to our great Nation. He received numerous recognitions, medals and ribbons for his service including the Bronze Star Medal, the Purple Heart Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the Overseas Service Ribbon, the NATO Medal, the Combat Infantryman Badge and the Basic Parachutist Badge.

Mr. President, I express my deepest appreciation for the selfless dedication this soldier proudly exhibited in service to our country. He courageously put himself in harm's way to defend us, and for that we owe him an infinite debt of gratitude. I offer my deepest condolences and prayers for James' family and friends during this difficult time. I know that I am joined by all my colleagues in the Senate in mourning the loss of SGT James Michael Nolen, our Nation's protector and hero.

NOMINATION OF JACQUELINE NGUYEN

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I want to comment today on the confirmation earlier this week of the Honorable Jacqueline Nguyen to be judge on the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. Unfortunately, I was delayed in my return from Alaska, and I was unable to be here for the vote. Had I been here, I would have proudly cast my vote along with the rest of my Senate colleagues to confirm this highly qualified and well-respected jurist. Upon her confirmation, Judge Nguyen made history by becoming the first Vietnamese-American to serve as a U.S. district court judge in U.S. history.

I applaud the judge's unanimous confirmation by the Senate as an example of what we do all too infrequently, I am afraid—recognizing a public need and to acting appropriately and expeditiously to address it. I commend the President for heeding the recommendation by our colleagues from California and nominating a woman of obvious talent. The President nominated Judge Nguyen, I am sure, because he perceived in her a combination of the education, experience, and temperament appropriate for a life-tenured position on the federal bench. Her unanimous "well qualified" rating from the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary, earned after an 18-year career in the law, including nearly 7 years as a California Superior Court judge and roughly the same amount of time as an assistant U.S. attorney in the same district in which she will now serve as a Federal judge, would seem to be completely justified. I have little doubt that Judge Nguyen will be an outstanding Federal judge.

As impressed as we all should be with her qualifications, I believe we can all

look at the details of Judge Nguyen's life as a truly great and quintessential American story. Born in Da Lat, Vietnam, Judge Nguyen and her family were able to escape the approaching North Vietnamese and Viet Cong armies, departing Saigon in 1975 on a crowded helicopter as gunfire could be heard in the background. The Nguyen family was part of the great wave of Vietnamese immigrants who left their homeland to escape the Communist takeover. After stops in refugee camps in the Philippines and on Guam, the Nguyens made their way to California, spending several months living in a tent on the grounds of the Marine base at Camp Pendleton. The Nguyens eventually settled in La Crescenta. The judge, her siblings, and their mother cleaned dental offices after school and at night, while her father studied to be a computer programmer and worked in a gas station at night and on weekends. Eventually, her parents purchased a doughnut shop in North Hollywood. Judge Nguyen says she often did her homework during high school between shifts at the doughnut shop and also worked there while she was earning her degree from Occidental College. She would ultimately earn her law degree from UCLA.

I do not know Judge Nguyen, but I am impressed by her accomplishments and the drive she and her family have shown in coming to this country and embracing the opportunities the United States offers its citizens. I recognize in her story the same drive and love of country that I have seen among the Vietnamese-American citizens of Alaska. The United States is a nation made great in part by its diversity. I personally take pride in serving alongside our first African-American President, and at the same time as our first Vietnamese-American Federal judge. Still, as much as the confirmation of this highly qualified woman is an example of the possibilities available to all Americans, I cannot help but believe it is being hailed today as a point of immense pride by the Vietnamese-American community in my home State of Alaska, in Judge Nguyen's State of California, and all across this country. I extend the judge, and the Vietnamese-American community, my sincere congratulations.

STEM EDUCATION

Mr. KAUFMAN. Mr. President, a few weeks ago the Department of Education released application guidelines for the Race to the Top competitive grant program. I am very encouraged that these guidelines include a competitive preference for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—or STEM—education. I commend the Department for its foresight.

Throughout the year, I have spoken many times about how important a focus on science and engineering is to our continued economic recovery. Engineers and scientists have always been

the world's problem-solvers. They will help us to solve the challenges of clean water; lifesaving cures for cancer and disease; clean, renewable petro-free energy; affordable-health care; and environmental sustainability.

Yet, if we are to tackle these immense challenges, we can no longer wait to begin training our Nation's future STEM professionals until after they leave the K-12 education pipeline. That is why I am so pleased that the Race to the Top grant application emphasizes STEM education. This is just the kind of attention STEM education needs.

The Race to the Top fund is designed to reward States that have been successful in raising student achievement and have superior plans to accelerate education reform. State grant applications must, of course, focus on certain core education reform areas. However, an emphasis on STEM education is considered a competitive preference priority worth 3 percent of a State's application score. It is the only competitive preference in the Race to the Top application guidelines. Applicants will earn all or none of the designated points, thereby truly rewarding sound initiatives.

To meet this priority, each State must offer a rigorous course of study in STEM education. They are encouraged to collaborate with industry professionals, universities, research centers, museums, and other STEM-focused community partners. Additionally, each State must have a plan for preparing and assisting teachers in integrating STEM throughout the curriculum. This includes offering applied learning opportunities and relevant instruction for students.

There are some successful STEM education programs already in operation throughout the country. A study released by the National Academy of Engineering in September highlighted a handful of K-12 engineering curriculum projects. Other education-based initiatives are also spurring interest among our youth. For example, there is a remarkable afterschool program in Wilmington, DE, that I recently spoke about here in the Senate. It inspires high school students to pursue careers in STEM fields by teaching them how to build robots. It is a great program. All too often, though, these types of opportunities have not been available to all of our Nation's students. The Race to the Top grants will bring more opportunities to more students.

Perhaps the most important component for meeting this grant priority is that States' plans must prepare more students to pursue college majors and careers in STEM. They must also specifically address the needs of women and underrepresented minorities. The United States cannot maintain its position as a technological leader nor can we solve the problems we face without a diversity of perspectives and participation.