

Chief Justice Moon, Mr. Knudsen, Friends & Families, ACLU Officers and our ACLU Honorees:

Our public schools have been under siege for a long time. Most recently, we've been told that our teachers are the lowest paid in the nation; our children in the 8th grade have not done as well as 4th graders in writing skills; many of our schools will not have money for maintenance and repairs to provide a physical environment for learning; moneys parceled out in thin streams could rob the Leave No Child Behind Schools of the needed resources to avoid sanctions under that monstrous legislation.

There are, however, a few things to make us feel that all is not lost in public education.

Recently, the University of Hawaii announced the awarding of 20 Regents scholarships to students in public and private schools who achieved exemplary academic records.

Several businesses in Hawaii have also announced students at both public and private schools who have received scholarships to universities of their choice.

There have been stories about fine school bands, about winners in electric car derbies; about teen-aged entrepreneurs. It is to be hoped they are the pools from which future leaders of our state will come. But the news story that is the most intriguing is the recognition that has been given to four public school students, one at Kahuku High, the other at Moanalua High, and two at Kalaheo High for advancing the cause of democratic rights in our state.

One of the finalists was engaged in working with students to understand politics and issues that affect our lives. Another of the students worked on voter registration among students, one of the projects in which I was engaged when I attended the School of Social Work at the University of Michigan and despaired over the fact that so many 18 year olds eschewed the opportunity to participate in the life of their state expressing very little interest in registering to vote or to become involved in the discussion affecting their lives and those of their friends, neighbors and families.

The most heartening award was given to two young women at Kalaheo High, Ms. Tindall and Ms. Shay-Mountain for their work in assuring civil liberties to a group of students much maligned -- the gays and lesbians -- not only by residents characterized as bordering on the conservative but also certainly those to the right of political spectrum.

In days when the U.S. Patriot and Homeland Security Acts cast wide nets to curtail the civil liberties of U.S. residents, it indeed takes courage for teenagers to work openly in the interests of students who are considered "outsiders" -- this despite the recent ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court against a Texas law.

As a former member of the University of Hawaii Board of Regents cognizant of the problems around gay and lesbian students on our 10 campuses, I am especially touched that among our over 180,000 students in the public schools there were two who braved the wrath and the scorn of others to preserve the civil liberties of students whose only difference from the

majority of others -- our children, our neighbors' children, our grandchildren -- is their sexual orientation. I am pleased that both will be attending our University in the Fall.

The leadership for which we clamor among our young students is being developed in all areas of our activities. Would that the Department of Education remain open to opportunities that foster the development of such leadership.

My congratulations to the winners and other finalists of the American Civil Liberties Union Youth Award.