

H.R. 6, cosponsored by myself and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. DANNER) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MCINTOSH) as well as 230 Members of the House.

That is why it is so important, we want to bring fairness to the Tax Code. That is why I am so pleased that the leadership of this House, led by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), the Speaker of the House, has made a decision to move a stand-alone piece of legislation, a stand-alone bill, which wipes out the marriage tax penalty for the vast majority of those who suffer. In the next few weeks, the Speaker intends to bring that legislation to the floor. That is good news as we work to bring fairness to the Tax Code by eliminating the marriage tax penalty.

I was just informed earlier today that the President in his State of the Union Speech tonight is going to discuss eliminating the marriage tax penalty. That is good news. Because it is time to make it a bipartisan effort. And while the President and Vice President GORE vetoed the legislation last year, he is now coming our way. I am very pleased. Let us make it a bipartisan effort. Let us wipe out the marriage tax penalty and let us send the President a stand-alone bill and let us bring fairness to the Tax Code.

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MARSHA PYLE MARTIN: A LEADER FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, during the short interlude we call life, we sometimes have the rare and memorable occasion to meet someone who exudes such a sense of positive accomplishment that we are forever changed just from that encounter.

I had that special experience when I met and heard Marsha Pyle Martin, who served as chair of the Farm Credit Administration Board. She appeared before our Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies of the House Committee on Appropriations to thoughtfully and persuasively argue that we need to be concerned about the financial condition of America's farmers and the future of agriculture in rural America.

I am sad to tell our colleagues that Ms. Martin passed from this life to her blessed rewards on January 9. This afternoon she is being celebrated in a memorial service at the Farm Credit Administration Offices in McLean, Virginia.

She is a woman who deserves this celebration, for she has helped so many by her caring for America's farmers and her advocacy on their behalf and for building a sound farm credit system in this country.

Marsha Pyle Martin was the first woman who ever served as chair of the Farm Credit Administration. While

that was a first for FCA, it was far from that for her. After all, she was the first woman senior executive in the Farm Credit System when she served as vice president of the Farm Credit Bank of Texas. She also was the first woman to serve as a director of the Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation.

I remember most vividly when she appeared before our subcommittee. Her dedication, her passion, her knowledge both overwhelmed and imposed her sense of purpose on our committee. She wanted efficient and competitive credit markets for borrowers, and it showed. She recognized the changing face of agriculture in America and wanted to both embrace and support the changes that are necessary for America's farmers to continue as the finest in the world.

Those who know agriculture know that the availability of credit at reasonable terms is critical, vital to success; and those who knew Marsha Pyle Martin knew that such a system was both her goal and her mandate to those who worked for and with her.

To her husband Britt, to her daughters Michelle and K.B. and her two grandchildren, I can only extend our deepest sympathies for the unexpected loss of their loved one. But may they be comforted and inspired by the fact that each and every day she tried to make a positive difference for people. Each and every day positive change was her goal and her accomplishment.

If only more people shared her vision, her energy, her commitment, just imagine how much better a place this world would be.

Mr. Speaker, I ask our colleagues to join me in thanking Marsha Pyle Martin for her lifetime of contribution. May her eternal reward be no less than triple what she gave in this world. For, because of her, many people live each day as a better one than they might have were it not for her.

May I ask the House, in her memory, for a moment of silence.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DIAZ-BALART) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DIAZ-BALART addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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DEMOCRATIC AGENDA FOR PROGRESS IN 2000

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, let me say that I am glad to be back.

I think my colleagues know and I am sure most of the American people or many of the American people know that the House of Representatives has

been in recess, has not had a session, for approximately 2 months since we adopted the budget at the end of November for the next fiscal year.

Tonight, of course, the President will give his State of the Union Address, which represents really a new opportunity. This is the second session of the 2-year Congress. And when we come back today, we know that although we perhaps only have about 10 months before the House adjourns and the Congress adjourns there is this 10-month period when we can pass legislation and get things done that will positively impact the American people.

Of course, the President will give his speech tonight and we will not know exactly what is in it until we hear it from him. But we know that he is going to talk about how the state of the Union is strong, how the country is strong economically, record new surpluses, overall crime rate down 25 percent, welfare rolls deeply cut.

A lot of progress has been made under President Clinton, certainly in the 6 or 7 years now that he has been in office.

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But part of the problem particularly in the last year is that many times when the President suggests a positive agenda, progressive agenda to the American people as he did in his last State of the Union address, the Congress, which of course is dominated by the Republican majority, the Republicans are in the majority, resists his recommendations and do not pass the legislation or provide the resources so that we can move his agenda. And so I hope that this year that will not be the case again.

If we look at what happened last year in the Congress, particularly in the House, there really was a resistance and most of the President's agenda was not adopted. I hope that is not the case this year. I hope that this year the Republican majority in the Congress will go along with the President's programs. If they differ slightly, fine, we can come to accommodations, but let us try to work together to come up with an agenda to pass legislation that helps the people and that moves this country quickly in a positive way into the next millennium.

I wanted to talk a little bit about President Clinton and the Democratic congressional leaders' agenda for a few minutes if I could. What we want to do is to get the job done, if you will, for the American people in the year 2000. I am going to talk about a few specific points. Basically our Democratic agenda for progress in 2000 includes, first, repairing, renovating and renewing our schools. Second, cutting taxes while maintaining fiscal discipline because obviously we want to maintain the balanced budget that we have had and the surpluses that we continue to generate. Third, the Democrats want to modernize Medicare and include a voluntary prescription drug benefit.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, during the 2 months that we were not in session I had many forums, some forums with senior citizens in my district, some with just people in general, constituents in general in my district. The number one concern that they had was with regard to health care. If it was seniors, they were concerned about the lack of access and the affordability of prescription drugs. Generally people expressed concern about the need for reform of HMOs because of the difficulties that they were having with HMOs in getting the health care that they thought that they needed.

Then, of course, I had a lot of my constituents who simply have no health insurance whatsoever and want to see what we are going to do as a Congress and as a country to provide more options for health insurance. But let me continue with the Democratic agenda. I am going to go back to some of those health care issues a little later. The Democrats' agenda for progress in 2000 also includes strengthening Social Security. The President in his last State of the Union address stressed that whatever surplus was created as a result of the Balanced Budget Act, that that primarily, overwhelmingly, should go to shore up Social Security.

Now, again when I had my forums in the district over the last couple of months, many of the seniors expressed concern over Social Security. I explained to them that Social Security was not bankrupt and that Social Security was sound but that the problem would come in, say, another 20 years, in another generation and that we needed to prepare now to make sure that for the next generation, Social Security was there. The President says the easiest way to do that is to certainly put a down payment down for the future by using the surplus primarily that is generated over the next 5 or 10 years.

The other very important, perhaps the most important part of our Democratic agenda for progress in 2000 is to enact a real Patients' Bill of Rights. Some of my colleagues know that for the last 2 years, I have been pushing for this. We have yet to have a conference on the Patients' Bill of Rights, on HMO reform. I was pleased to see, I believe, today that the Republican leadership indicated that they were going to have a conference between the House and the Senate to try to work out differences on the Patients' Bill of Rights, on HMO reform, at some time next week or very soon. I applaud them for that but I think it is crucial that we have a good, strong Patients' Bill of Rights and I will insist on that as one of the conferees, because this is an important issue and if all we do is put together some makeshift reform that really does not do anything, some Band-Aid approach, the American people are going to hold us responsible and say, "You didn't get the job done," so we need a strong Patients' Bill of Rights.

The other important part of our Democratic agenda for progress in 2000 is to raise the minimum wage. We all know that the economy is strong. We know that this economy has generated hundreds of thousands of new jobs. But the bottom line is there are a lot of people who work and who basically do not make enough money, even though they are working full time or have two or three jobs, because their salaries, their wages are so low. We need to enact legislation that was primarily sponsored here in the House by our minority whip the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BONIOR) to raise the minimum wage. Finally, we also need to pass legislation to fight hate crimes, another important part of our agenda.

What I would like to do, Mr. Speaker, if I could, is to go through some of these items individually. I see my colleague here from Texas. I do not know if he wants to join me now. If he would like to I would certainly yield to him.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. I thank the gentleman for yielding. I want to just congratulate the gentleman for outlining the items. Especially I know he has been in the forefront when it comes to health care. I know one of the concerns that a lot of Members had and in conjunction also with the constituencies that are being serviced by managed care systems, that a lot of them are concerned that they do not have any appeal process. I know that we have been trying to push forward in allowing that opportunity that when individuals are denied access to health care, that they can be able to appeal. One of their concerns is that we will have too many lawsuits. I am here to attest to the fact that in Texas we have allowed for that appeal process to exist and we have not had the number of lawsuits and we have had the accountability on the part of the managed care systems to be a little more responsive. I think that the Patients' Bill of Rights needs to go through and we are hoping that it will. I am here just to thank the gentleman for that.

I know that he has also been in the forefront when it comes to prescription coverage. In the area of prescription coverage, it just does not make any sense now that in Medicaid for indigents we provide prescription coverage, yet when it comes to our senior citizens we do not. That to me just does not make any sense whatsoever, at a time when we know that we want to take care of our senior citizens, that prescription coverage is also a very instrumental effort and tool to take care of illness. As we all well know, when Medicare started, that was not the case. We did not use prescriptions as much as we do now for taking care of our patients. That is something I think that now is really important and we have got to make sure that that happens.

I am also very pleased that we have moved and are beginning to take care of our uninsured. We have the largest number of uninsured in Texas and it is

unfortunate that Texas also was unwilling to provide any local resources. Most of the resources for the CHIPS program, the children's program, are resources that were provided through the tobacco lawsuits. There is a real need for local communities to come forward, also, and help out in that process as the Federal Government, the President has moved forward in providing the uninsured children of this country an opportunity to have access to health care. As our leader in this area, I want to thank the gentleman for allowing me the opportunity just to say a few words and to thank him for his efforts. I look forward to working with him during this particular Congress.

Mr. PALLONE. I want to thank the gentleman for his kind words. I am really pleased that he is here because I think that his State really is a model for so many of the things that we have been talking about here on the House floor over the last year with regard to these health care concerns. If I could just comment on some of the things the gentleman said, with regard to the Patients' Bill of Rights, in many ways the Texas legislation, which has been in force now for a couple of years, is really a model for the Federal legislation, not only in terms of the basic rights that are provided to patients to protect them against the abuses of HMOs but also in terms of the liability provisions. It is kind of interesting, because I noticed that the majority leader, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARMEY), who for a long time has resisted, as long as I can remember he has been resisting the idea that there would be any ability to sue under Federal law, sue the HMO, finally came around today to saying that he would provide some limited ability to sue. Again, we are going to call him to task on that, to make sure that the Federal legislation that comes up here does provide the ability to sue as a last resort. I am sure that to some extent, though, he was probably saying that because of the Texas experience, because if we remember, when the Texas legislature was considering something like the Patients' Bill of Rights, there was tremendous opposition to any ability to sue on the grounds that the litigation would be forever and everybody would be suing the HMOs. I remember back in November when we last convened, at that point I think in the 2-year life of the Texas legislation, they had only had two people file lawsuits, maybe two or three people file lawsuits. That just totally denigrates the idea that somehow by allowing lawsuits against the HMOs that we are going to have all this litigation.

But the other aspect the gentleman mentioned is just as important. In other words, the problem is if we give people all these rights to prevent abuses by HMOs but they do not have any ability to enforce it, what good are the rights? We all know that. In our Patients' Bill of Rights that passed the

House, we have an internal appeal process. Then we also have an external appeal process, the idea being that if the HMO internally denies a person the ability to stay a few days in the hospital or a particular operation or procedure that the person and their doctor think they need, they can go outside the system without going to court and have an external review board look at it that is not dictated or controlled by the HMO. So we have that external review process before you would even have to sue in court. Texas has the same thing. That is one of the reasons why they have so few suits, is because these things go to an external administrative review and at that time usually the HMO reneges and lets people have the operation or procedure they think is necessary. Texas is really out front and very progressive in this regard. We need to do the same thing on the Federal level.

The other thing the gentleman talked about with the prescription drugs, I just find so many of my seniors coming to me at the forums or at the office and talking about the problem not only with price but also the inability to have any kind of benefit under Medicare. We have seen so many cases, the gentleman has probably seen them in Texas, too, as a border State. I am maybe a little more familiar with the Canadian example where people have been going across the border to Canada to buy drugs because it is so much cheaper. We know the majority of Americans who are seniors have no access to prescription drug benefits. That is really crucial, too. That is going to be part of the President's agenda and the Democratic agenda again.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. If the gentleman will yield further, we do have an experience in South Texas. In fact the gentleman is aware of the studies that we did in reference to the expenditure for certain prescriptions. When we looked at those prescription coverages and how much they cost, for a person with an HMO or the government, the prices ranged almost 25 percent less. The senior citizen was sometimes having to pay up to 300 percent more for the same medication. The same individuals that are paying for it are our senior citizens. Basically at the expense of our senior citizens, we are causing this to occur. I think the President is correct in saying that we need to come back and reassess that and that Medicare also has the responsibility to provide prescription coverage. I think that this is something that needs to occur, that needs to happen. For all practical purposes, the way it is now, it does not make any sense. We give it to our indigents but we do not provide it to our senior citizens. In fact, not only do we not provide it to them but we charge them 100, 200 to 300 percent more for the same prescription. We are basically robbing them. That is not right. We need to do whatever we can. I am hopeful that this time around there is a feeling that we can do a bi-

partisan effort in making something happen in this area. I am optimistic.

We have a unique opportunity as the gentleman well knows. It is an election year. We are all up for reelection, including Democrats and Republicans, both in the presidential and in the Congress and so it is a unique opportunity to ask our constituents to put the squeeze on their local official, their local Congressman and the presidential candidate, Republican or Democrat, to make it happen. I think it is something that most people feel it is the right thing to do. When we are asking our senior citizens to pay 200 to 300 percent more for the same prescription, it is not fair, it is not right, and we need to do something about it.

Again, I thank the gentleman very much for being here and taking the lead not only in terms of some of the health issues but a lot of the other issues that are before us. I thank the gentleman for allowing me the opportunity to say a few words.

Mr. PALLONE. I want to thank the gentleman again. I was just going to say there was one very positive development, I think, with regard to this prescription drug issue. That is, that a few weeks ago, I am sure the gentleman noticed that the major pharmaceutical companies, a lot of which are based in my State of New Jersey, announced that they were going to stop opposing a prescription drug benefit and speaking out against the President's proposed Medicare prescription drug benefit and were going to try to work with him to come up with a solution. I took that as a very positive development and contacted some of the pharmaceuticals in New Jersey which have their corporate headquarters in New Jersey in trying to work with them to accomplish that.

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On a somewhat negative note, though, I noticed that my colleague, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), revealed some documents that had been circulated by some of the pharmaceuticals last week where they indicated that they were still going to be spending money and doing ads and doing things to try to oppose some of the efforts to keep the costs down.

I would say that there are two things here. We need the Medicare benefit, but we also need to have affordable drugs. It is also important for the pharmaceuticals, as I know the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) has said, that whatever benefit we provide has to be an affordable benefit as well in terms of buying drugs. Because if there is some kind of benefit but the costs keep going up and ultimately people cannot afford it, the benefit does not do them any good.

So we need to have the benefit, but we also have to have affordability and I think kind of empower people to be able to act together so that they can keep prices down.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. That advertisement that has been going on with Flo

that comes out and she talks to our senior citizens, she is covered. She is taken care of right now with prescription coverage, but our senior citizens out there that are straight Medicare are not. I would attest the majority of Americans out there only have the straight Medicare and do not have prescription coverage.

For Hispanics and a lot of our minorities and especially those individuals that have worked in areas that do not have any form of a pension, which a lot of people that have worked for small companies, do not have that extended care. So it is important that we reach out to those individuals and that we provide that care.

I think that it is about time that we come back and kind of look at that. I know that throughout history, when it comes to health care, we have had some endeavors of trying to take care of and provide health care in terms of universal, across the board, and that occurred in the 1930s with Roosevelt, 1960s with Kennedy and Clinton in the 1990s. Ironically enough, we have not been able to do that, and I am hoping that we can soon start talking about also those uninsured that are out there.

The uninsured, they are over 44 million and growing, and I would attest that if the economy was not doing as well as it is that we would have a lot more uninsured, and that is something that is very scary because a lot of people are out there that are in need, and these are people that are not poor enough to qualify for medicaid, not old enough to qualify for Medicare and are working Americans that fall in between. So there is a real need for us to reach out to that population as well and the uninsured.

We have been doing those efforts with the CHIPS program, the children's program, but there is a need for us to push forward. I am hoping that the insurance companies, because they have been, in all honesty, an obstacle in the past; and I look at Medicare and the reasons why we were able to establish Medicare when LBJ was because of the fact that the insurance companies recognized that when people reached 65 they got sick, and that is when they did not want us, that is when they wanted government involved at that point in time. And if they were poor enough they knew people did not have money so they did not mind government being involved in medicaid because, after all, they were too poor to pay for that insurance.

Now we have this middle class that cannot afford it, do not have the access and are uninsured out there; and there is a need for us to provide some alternatives. And I am hoping that the private sector can participate in that effort and we can be able to come up with some kind of response.

Again, from Texas, we have the largest number of uninsured, the largest throughout the country. I am not proud to say that. Yes, we should be

proud that we have passed some legislation on HMOs that are far-reaching in terms of appeal process, but some of those areas we are still lacking. So we are hoping that as we look at this session that we can concentrate on some of those specific areas and try to meet some of those needs.

Mr. PALLONE. Well, again, I appreciate the gentleman bringing that up. The gentleman says that Texas has the largest percentage of uninsured, but this is a problem that is national. Six years ago, when President Clinton first proposed the universal health care plan, which I think was a good idea and if we did not have all the opposition from the insurance industry and the Republicans that we probably could have worked something out that provided universal coverage, but now over the last few years we have been trying in some of these areas, as you mentioned, with the kids' health care initiative in particular, to try to plug up the holes and cover some of the uninsured in sort of a piecemeal fashion.

It has been working, but even with that, even with the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill to deal with the problem of people having preexisting medical conditions not being able to get insurance and a lot of them can even with the kids' care insurance, we still have the number of uninsured growing nationally. We have to do more.

One of the things that the President is going to announce tonight is a major new initiative to try to expand on some of these health care Federal programs to provide more coverage for the uninsured. If I could just mention a couple of things that I think are very significant, with regard to the kids' care initiative as well as Medicare, he has major proposals to spend money and to do outreach so we can get more kids signed up both for medicaid as well as the kids' care program. Because we have had a problem getting kids signed up, I think that one of the major reasons why they do not sign up is because, many times, those are the same parents of those children who are uninsured, and what the President is proposing now is to expand the kids' care initiative so that the parents of those uninsured kids can also sign up for insurance using the State and the Federal subsidy that is provided with additional funds that he is going to include in his budget. I think that is a great idea. We need to make sure that we get all the kids, but if we can get those parents in that will help.

Then the other thing the gentleman talked about is to try to build on the private sector. Because the main way people traditionally obtained health insurance and still do in this country was through their employer, and if we can create financial incentives for employers when they hire people to make sure that they provide a health insurance option, that will go a long way as well. This is a major issue.

The other thing, too, is I am sure the gentleman heard that during the break

a lot of the States are really worried about this now and they do not know what to do. I know New York and Wisconsin and other States are trying to come up with ways that the States can provide for the uninsured, but they are never going to be able to do it effectively without some Federal initiative. I think it is important to have that Federal initiative.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. One of the things I want to share with the gentleman and one of the concerns that I have and I will share with the gentleman the Texas experience in that the legislature moved for pretty good coverage overall but it is only funded at 55 to 65 percent, which means that even if they cover all the kids they are supposed to they are only going to cover half of the need that is out there.

One of the things that the gentleman mentioned that I would like to stress is that there were very little resources that were actually allocated for allowing individuals to educate people as to the fact that those monies were even available and so that if people do not take advantage of that it is not going to do any good. It can be out there, but that is one of the problems that we encounter in Texas is that they did it and they passed it, but if they do begin to utilize it only half of the people are going to be able to have access to it.

I wanted to share one other thing I think that is very important. I sit on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. From a veterans' perspective, and I have seen a lot of the documentation for veterans where they were promised access to health care and were not given that access to health care and there is a real need and we are pushing for it this time around to try to make something happen to provide access to health care for our veterans. Last year we moved on providing them additional monies for the ones that are in military raises as well as the pensions. This year we also want to concentrate on health care for our veterans, and we are looking at providing up to \$5 billion that is needed to make sure that those individuals are covered.

Last year, we had a big fight on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs when we tried to add up to \$3 billion for access to our existing services. We were able to add up to \$1.5 billion, but that was after a big fight and only after that money came from future resources. So it is kind of like giving a raise right now with the intent that next year that that money was coming out of future years. So we are in a deeper hole and we find ourselves in a problem and we have an obligation to our veterans to provide them access to health care, and throughout this country we have a multitude of veterans and the services have not been there. It has been poor access, and the quality also leaves a lot to be desired.

So we are hoping that as we move along this year that we look at access to health care for our veterans and also look at what we can do with TRICARE for our people that are in the military.

I have people that are in the border areas that will have to travel 200 miles to San Antonio to have access if they wanted to. Those are some of the areas that we really need to kind of look at a little more seriously and pay a little more attention to. Those veterans deserve what we have promised. We have gone back on our word as a Congress. We can blame the administration, but we as congressmen also have an obligation, and that obligation is to make sure that we hold up to our word to make sure that those veterans who served our country and protected us and have protected our democracy that we also assure that they would have access to health care.

I am hoping that we will also move in that direction.

Mr. PALLONE. I totally agree. It is interesting because I remember 6 years ago when President Clinton first talked about his universal health care plan, he had a very important proposal in there to expand programs for veterans as well. Again, we have not been able to fulfill that, and we need to. We need to make sure that the veterans' health care system is adequately funded and that we look at new technologies and new ways to do things for the next millennium because otherwise we are not meeting the commitment to them.

So I want to thank the gentleman again.

I yield now to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON). I have not been back here for some time now, but I am glad to be back and hear from the gentlewoman.

Ms. NORTON. I would like to welcome the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) back personally and to welcome all of my colleagues back. We have missed the gentleman, and we are ready for a very productive year.

I would especially like to commend and thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) for his initiative. He has been so much on the case for these issues for a number of years now, so I am not surprised that he would come to the floor and offer others of us an opportunity to come to the floor before the State of the Union speech this evening. I want to thank him for all of his hard work on the issues that face this House. There is no one more indefatigable in forcing us to face the issues than the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE).

I think it is a very good idea for us to look, pick out, among the many issues that the President will raise this evening, some which deserve to be highlighted. I must say that as I look down the subjects that are likely to be covered I see a very bipartisan agenda that the President will offer. This may be his last year in office, but it is a year that the Congress will be under the microscope as well to see if we can do better than we did last year by coming up with some substance to take home to the American people.

The President of the United States in this very Chamber last year put on the

table what became the mantra for the entire country: Save Social Security, reduce the deficit. That now, as I hear both sides of the aisle, is no longer the mantra of the President, or maybe our side, but everybody, the whole country, is saying save Social Security first; pay down the debt. We don't hear other issues rising to the level that we hear those issues, and I think that the President deserves credit because that is what a President is supposed to do. That is what the State of Union speech is for. He did that last year, and this year I am sure that will be a major part of his theme.

As I look down this extraordinary list, I will choose only two issues to comment upon. I must say that I see so many items on this list that I think can rally the support of Members on both sides: Doing more, as our country and only our country can do, to prevent the global spread of AIDS and to prevent the spread of AIDS in our country which is increasingly becoming a disease of the poor, the black and the brown; expanding the EITC, one of the great bipartisan programs, especially now when so many people are reaching the limits in their own States of their ability to stay on welfare.

□ 1400

There is creating smaller schools, so that there is less of a critical mass of large numbers of students anonymous enough so that we have other Columbiners.

And of course there are the rising issues that were raised last year that I do not think we can go home without. I do not think anybody can face their seniors without prescription drugs this year. And of course, HMO reform or the Patients' Bill of Rights is so much overdue that I see the two sides coming together on those.

There are many other new issues that the President has put on his agenda such as the smart gun technology initiative, but I would like to focus on two issues that the President has raised. One is investing in modernization of schools. The other is increasing support for civil rights enforcement.

Let me say a word about investing in new and modernized schools. This issue has been on the agenda 3 to 4 years now. It is dangerously overripe. The President wants a tax credit to modernize over 6,000 schools, and \$1.3 billion in funding for 8,300 renovation projects in high-poverty, high-need school districts that do not have any capacity to make these repairs themselves over the next 5 years. We have children in trailers. We have children going to school in slums.

But I say to the gentleman from New Jersey that I want to draw to the attention of the body how our government, this Congress, has dealt with urgent matters like this affecting how we house students. In the sixties and seventies we poured, what amounts to "poured", billions of dollars into public and private colleges and universities to

allow them to borrow from banks to obtain funds to construct classrooms and dorms. That is what we did for people going on to higher education.

So Members of this body went to school, slept in dormitories, took classes in classrooms that essentially were funded out of a Federal program, an old loan program, that subsidized interest payments during the lifetime of payments so that the effective interest rate of those who borrowed to build classrooms and dormitories was 3 percent less than the actual rate.

Something close to that notion is what has been on the agenda for the last several years. The President has now switched to a tax credit instead, because we were not able to get a subsidy for the interest payments. What this would mean, for example, to colleges and universities, where they were mostly middle class folks, is that if the colleges, for example, borrowed at 10 percent, then the effective interest rate was 7 percent. What that meant was that a lot of us were able to go to school and classrooms and dormitories that were decent, and decent only because of this.

In other words, the Congress saw that there was a real need, and they did not say, look, go to your State legislature do that. They knew that enough money to do it was not going to come from the States. We in fact found a way to subsidize this.

I ask Members, I ask the gentleman from New Jersey, does he not think if we could do this in the sixties and seventies for college students, then in the nineties, and as we are now in a new century, we can do something similar for kids in school who go to school with leaky roofs, who go to school where there are rats, who go to school in trailers?

This is essentially the kind of moderate proposal that the President has offered, recognizing that he is dealing with a Congress which has people of many different points of view, so he does not come in and say, give them the money. He says, allow a tax credit to modernize up to 6,000 schools.

Can we possibly go home again without a proposal similar to this, I ask the gentleman from New Jersey?

Mr. PALLONE. The answer, obviously, is yes, we need to do it. I am trying today not to start out with a partisan statement, but the bottom line, we know that when the President has tried over the last 2 years to come up with some kind of way to help with school modernization, the different bond proposals, the different ways of helping the local municipalities, the Republicans have just opposed all these things. So he just keeps coming up with innovative ways of trying to get this across.

I think this is a great idea, and I have to say, I was listening to what the gentlewoman said about the need for smaller schools, modernization. Every district has this problem with either crumbling schools or overcrowded

classrooms and the need for money to build new schools.

I have the combination. My district is one where we have some smaller urban areas where I have seen crumbling schools that need new roofs and new gyms and all that, and other, more suburban towns that I represent where they are in trailers and they talk about how they may have to go to split sessions because there has been so much of an influx of new people, and they have not been able to keep up with it.

I think the school modernization program is crucial. Of course, we have not mentioned the fact that the president has been and we have been somewhat successful in getting the Republicans to provide funding to reduce class size at the lower levels, because the gentlewoman talked about smaller schools. Smaller schools to me means not only smaller schools physically, but also smaller classes, so there is more individual attention.

Even that was opposed by the Republicans. We had to go tooth and nail until we finally got more money to reduce class size and hire more teachers.

The other idea that the President came up with with regard to higher education is so crucial. Again, when people talk to me about education, their biggest concern is the ability, whether they are going to be able to send their kids off to college. The costs are just skyrocketing.

In New Jersey, where we send most of our students out of State because we do not have enough slots in-State for them, it is a particular crisis. So what the President has proposed in terms of helping parents and students to pay for higher education I think is crucial. The gentlewoman is right on point.

Ms. NORTON. I thank the gentleman. I want to say a word about one other issue.

Of course, as a former chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, I am always pleased to see something on the agenda that relates to civil rights enforcement. A few weeks ago I was at the White House with a 101-year-old woman from the District of Columbia who had lived through reconstruction, through Jim Crow, all here in this city, which had legal segregation.

The President announced that he would be submitting money for civil rights enforcement, at \$695 million for civil rights enforcement. This of course is an issue that by now should bring us all together. This is not about affirmative action, which is an issue where we are in some substantial disagreement with some on the other side. This is about sheer enforcement, as more and more people come forward not only to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, but to many of the civil rights agencies.

I have been able to find common cause with Members from the other side on these issues. In fact, I can recall amendments in the appropriation process where we worked together. I

certainly hope this money to increase civil rights enforcement will in fact be forthcoming.

The President announced just this week a special appropriation to bolster the Equal Pay Act and equal pay enforcement and opportunity. The gentleman may remember that in this very Chamber, not a very bipartisan Chamber, at this time last year when the President mentioned equal pay for equal work, somehow everybody in the Chamber got off her and his bottom to applaud, and that is because this issue has now become an American issue, it is no longer a woman's issue, because men have seen that their wives, who have the same education that they have, somehow bring home less money.

It is time we stopped talking about it, stopped sloganizing it, and do something about it. So the President has put in \$27 million for an equal pay initiative for enforcement of the Equal Pay Act and for other purposes related to enforcement.

I like and I hope all of us will like the part that says, to teach business how to meet the legal requirements. We think that one of the reasons that there continues to be unequal pay is that business has not been well educated on this important section that has been in the law since 1963. It was passed before the laws barring discrimination on the basis of race were passed.

If in fact we use the traditional apparatus, we can come together on the widely-hailed notion of equal pay. I believe that the President's proposal will help us.

There are other things in his equal pay proposal that go to helping, for example, the Labor Department to improve its own work on training women for nontraditional posts, because once women are in nontraditional posts the pay begins to come up automatically.

We have huge equal pay problems in this country still, stemming largely from the fact that women are pouring into the work force. They still continue to go disproportionately into traditional jobs. We still see women seriously undervalued, even in those jobs.

If we look at women in my profession at all, we will see women earning less money than men who enter the profession. There is lots of work to be done there. When the President takes initiative on civil rights enforcement, on equal pay, then we are putting our money where our mouth has been for a long time.

I want to thank the gentleman for his work on this special order and for allowing me to highlight some of the issues of special importance to me.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman. I share her praise for the President's equal pay initiative.

If I could just say one thing about the additional funds for civil rights enforcement, one of the things that I worry about, and having been back in the district for the last two months

now, my district, not the District of Columbia, is that I just see a lot of cynicism on the part of my constituents over commitments, if you will, or promises that they see the government making in sort of general terms that when it gets to the specific do not happen.

That is why I think it is important. If a civil rights violation occurs, there has to be enforcement. Otherwise it is meaningless. That is true whether it is the environment or whatever it happens to be.

So many people will say to me, the law says this, but in reality, it does not mean anything. That is why I think it is so important that there be increased enforcement, and obviously there will not be unless we provide the money up front to hire the people to do the work. So I think that is crucial, and I appreciate the gentleman bringing it to our attention.

I yield to my colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Madam Speaker, I just want to share, I know the gentleman is here from the District of Columbia, and I was appalled to see the condition of our schools here in the District of Columbia. It is embarrassing to the Congress and it should be embarrassing to all of us, because that is one school district that we are held responsible for and obligated to have to provide resources for. I am ashamed that we still have those conditions.

The gentleman talked also about our schools throughout the United States. One responsibility we have is to make sure that we provide that construction money to make sure that we allocate those resources. A lot of those schools, in all honesty, were built prior to the microwave. If anyone lives in an old home like I do, they know they have to go back and redo the wiring, if nothing else. So there is a real need for us to reinvest in our infrastructure as it deals with education. So I am very pleased that the President is pushing forward on new construction.

I also want to add a little bit in terms of the importance of the digital divide. The administration, President Clinton has been in the forefront in allowing additional resources for new technology. Without that technology, a lot of our youngsters in our country would also fall back. There is a real need for us to prepare ourselves, not only our students but our adults, our mid-management throughout the country, to make sure we are well-trained in the new technology.

I know a lot of resources are needed for us to go back to school. That includes a lot of the Congressmen, to make sure we can work with the new computers. But doing that is going to be key in order for us to compete as a country. I think it is going to be very important that we allocate some resources in that technology and that we prepare our youngsters. Part of that is having access.

□ 1415

Most of our poor communities throughout this country do not have a computer at home. But if they could, we could provide it to them in our libraries, in our schools, in our universities; and we have started to do that, but a lot more needs to be done. We still have a lot of schools that are not computerized and do not have the new technology, and I think that that is one of the things that we need. Not only do we need it in terms of ourselves, but I really see, as a way of leading this world, if we are going to continue to be the leading country, we are going to have to be in the forefront.

One of those indicators is going to be the level of our education. I sit on the Committee on Armed Services; and when it comes to our national defense that should be our first priority, making sure that we educate our constituency, making sure that everyone is well prepared. Because that is part of our defense, and that is part of a showing that we are going to be in the forefront when it comes to economics. So I am hoping that we will continue to do that with President Clinton in his last year.

Mr. PALLONE. Madam Speaker, I agree with the gentleman from Texas. I was thinking when I saw the gentleman from Washington, D.C. (Ms. NORTON) there that I remember, I do not know if it was 6 months or a year ago, the memory fades now, but there was an occasion when she asked us, and we marched from the Capitol to a nearby school, it was within walking distance of the Capitol, and I cannot remember the name of the school, and we had a march.

When we went there, she showed us this very innovative public school within the District of Columbia. I could not believe the enthusiasm that existed in that school. One of the things that they had, which I think is somewhat unique, is that all the kids were wearing school uniforms, which is something that I know that the President has proposed. I do not mean to just dwell on that. But there was just a lot of excitement in that place.

But one of the things I kept thinking about is we keep talking about innovation, and one can put school uniforms in schools and one can come up with other things, but one cannot function, one cannot be very innovative if the place is falling apart literally.

I think it is incumbent upon us to provide the resources so that schools are modernized. Modernization and the President's program for modernization is not just bricks and mortar, it is also for the Internet and for the electronic and the technologically innovative things that the infrastructure for those kinds of things are included in that modernization program as well.

As my colleague says, what good is it? We cannot expect kids to use the Internet if they do not have the computers. They are not going to be able to have the money to do it at home, so we

need to make sure that it is available in the schools. The school modernization program deals with that as well as providing the funding so that the town can build it, put a new roof on the school as well.

I was amazed. I went to a school district, a school a few years ago in New Brunswick, which is one of the urban towns that I represent. Their roof was leaking. The walls were crumbling. It was unbelievable. I think a lot of people think that the school buildings generally are in good shape. But if they take a look and they go to some of the schools where these kids are being educated, they would be surprised, even the parents sometimes, to learn how bad it is.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Madam Speaker, sometimes people do not realize, also, that the demographics have changed. Just like we needed a lot of construction, a lot of new schools in the 1950s and 1960s because of the baby boomers, now we are experiencing what we call, what I like to call, the baby echo. That baby echo is a larger number. So there is a need, also, for additional classrooms because of that large number of youngsters in our schools.

So there is a real need for us to go back and do what these individuals did back in the 1950s and 1960s, and that was invest in our kids. We need to do the same. We need to invest in our future by investing in our kids and also investing in our adults. I really feel very strongly that we need to come up with new technological centers so that people in mid-management and people that are 40, 50 can go back to school and learn about computers and be able to go forward.

I also wanted to take this opportunity, if possible, to talk to my colleague, and I know he is well aware of the issue of safety in our schools. We have experienced a lot of violence, and we have had some difficulty. There is a need for us to kind of look at the issue of safety. I know that when we look at the violence that is occurring, there is a need for us to reach out.

The President does have a program that he is going to be looking at promoting safe schools. I recall when I did my town hall meeting with school safety I had someone stand up and say, "Congressman RODRIGUEZ, you cannot even control our prisons, and you expect to control our schools?" There was a lot to be said when that was indicated.

Our prison systems, the way they are run now, if one goes in there, unfortunately, if one is white, one better join one of the white supremacist groups there. If one is Mexican, one better be part of the Mexican Mafia.

I recall the individual who committed that atrocity in Texas that dragged that African American. I remember people talking about that young man. They used to say, when he was in school, he never indicated or

showed that he was that kind. But after he had come out of prison, he had come out worse. In so doing, we have got to make sure that our society does not even perpetuate more of that.

So we need to reach out to those schools and do whatever we can to make sure that those youngsters feel safe, and part of that is through counseling, part of that is through having social workers reaching out, because I feel real strongly that schools are only a reflection of our community.

If there are gangs or problems, those gangs exist in those communities. That is why we need to reach out and work, and those resources in our schools are drastically needed to making sure that we can provide that education. Because if the child is not safe, they are not going to learn.

Again, I want to thank the gentleman from New Jersey for allowing me this opportunity to be here with him.

Mr. PALLONE. Madam Speaker, one of the things that I want to mention, because sometimes I think that when we talk about these national education initiatives, that some of our constituents worry and say, well, education traditionally has been locally based, and the Federal Government has not really taken that much of a role, and what does all this mean if the Federal Government gets involved.

I just want to stress we are really not changing anything in terms of local control of education. I mean, we are not suggesting in any way that the Federal Government dictate what teachers are hired or what textbooks are used in the classroom or what their curriculum is. All we are really doing with this school modernization initiative, the school safety initiative, the gentleman from Texas mentioned the effort to provide more money to hire teachers so that class sizes can be reduced, all we are really doing is helping the local towns afford some of these things because they cannot afford them now.

I am sure the gentleman has the same situation in Texas that I face in New Jersey, where the funding for education is primarily locally based. The towns just cannot afford these things anymore. Believe me, it does not matter if they are an urban area or if they are a suburban area. They cannot keep raising the local property taxes to put up the new school, to put in to hire people to monitor the hallways for safety reasons, to hire extra teachers, to reduce the class size.

By providing funding for these types of things, which is what the Democrats want to do, all we are really doing is helping the local taxpayer. Because either they are going to have to bond for these things and will not have the money to do it or going to have to raise taxes, which is very difficult and creates more problems.

So all we are really saying is we want to take some of the Federal dollars and send it back to the towns for these pur-

poses. We are not dictating to them what they do. They have to apply for these things. But we are making it easier for them to fund it.

I do not know a town, no matter how affluent in my district, that is not in favor of that. Every mayor, every board of education tells me that they would love to see some of this happen.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Madam Speaker, when I started politics, I started on the issue of school finance and the fact that the only money one has to build one's schools is from one's local community. So if one lives in a poor community, one is going to have less resources. If one lives in a rich community, there is going to be a lot more resources to educate one's child. That is why I got involved in politics, because I saw the disparity.

The gentleman from New Jersey is right. Most Americans a lot of times do not realize that the construction of that campus comes from only local resources. Just in the last few years has the State of Texas decided to help out a little bit. Prior to that, every single building in the State of Texas was only through local resources.

So it varies from district to district, from county to county in terms of how much they have and whether they can build more classrooms or not. Some decide to splurge and do things that they should not be doing.

But the reality is, yes, a lot of communities throughout this country need assistance. They need new technology. They need new wiring. I think it is going to be important for us to be there in the forefront to provide that technology and that infrastructure that will pay for the next generation and our future for this country.

Mr. PALLONE. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Texas. I think we are running out of time so I want to kind of summarize and say that and I see that some of our colleagues are getting ready already for the State of the Union Address here tonight. But the bottom line is, with the State of the Union, is there is a real opportunity for us to work on a bipartisan basis on some of these issues.

I just hope that this year, unlike last year, we see the cooperation of the Republican majority in the Congress working with the President and with the Democrats to get some of these things done. Because if we do not, I think that the American people are going to be very disappointed.

They clearly want HMO reform. They want a prescription drug benefit for Medicare. They want the Federal Government to do more to help those who do not have health insurance. They want us to work on some of these education initiatives.

If we do not come through, we only have ourselves to blame. I am just really doing nothing more, as I am sure the President will do tonight, but to call on the Republicans and the majority in the Congress to work with us this year

and not have the negative attitude towards the President's proposals that, unfortunately, we had in the last year.

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RETURN ELIAN GONZALEZ TO HIS FATHER

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. Madam Speaker, I recently returned from Cuba with the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) and had the chance, while in Cuba, to talk with many people regarding Elian Gonzalez.

As a trained social worker, as a mother, and as a grandmother, my concern is that the child be in a loving environment, free of abuse. My concern is for his well-being, his mental and physical health and that he has a stable family environment.

We met with Mr. Juan Gonzalez, Elian's father, and his great grandmother and other members of his family. This meeting and discussions with many people in Cuba who know the family have convinced me unequivocally that Elian does have a loving, fit, and equipped family, and that he should be returned to his father immediately.

There is no way that a child should not be with his or her parents because of material things that we value in this country. In our own country, for example, 18.9 percent of our children under 18 live in poverty. In Florida, 22.3 percent of the children live in poverty. In my own home state of California, over 23 percent of California's children live in poverty. I say this to say that we cannot evaluate Elian's situation in material terms because there is nothing more valuable than the love of a father and the support of a family unit.

Now, I am greatly concerned that, in addition to the traumatic experiences of losing his mother, being shipwrecked, and nearly losing his own life, that Elian is now caught in an international custody battle. The constant barrage of questioning, interviews, protests, and the relentless exposure to the media, that has really only exacerbated the already extremely stressful and disorienting circumstances. Elian's health and his welfare must be our first priority. We must consider the potentially damaging and adverse impact of all of this negative activity.

I urge for Elian's expeditious return to his family, his father, his community, and his familiar environment. It is my fear that the longer that this battle continues, the more Elian and his family will be harmed emotionally. The decision of whether to return Elian to his family in Cuba should not be a political decision. It should be a decision that exclusively supports the best interest of the child and his need to be reunited with his father.

The time that I spent with Elian's father and his family has assured me in

no uncertain terms that this reunification is a moral imperative and the right thing to do. I am appalled by the manner in which the rights of Elian's father, Mr. Gonzalez, continue to be threatened. To continue this policy which excludes Elian's father from participation in his son's life in his home sets a very dangerous precedent.

□ 1430

In no way would we allow our young people who do not have a lot of material things at home to be placed in homes that have more wealth. That is just unacceptable.

Please, let us do the right thing for Elian and please let us send him back home to his father and his family.

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PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, tonight, as I sit in the Chamber with our colleagues, it will be my 14th opportunity and honor to sit in this room as the President of the United States delivers the State of the Union address for this Nation for the year 2000, the beginning of the new millennium.

I have had the pleasure of sitting through speeches by Ronald Reagan, by George Bush and, most recently, by President Clinton. We are going to hear a lot tonight, and I want to talk tonight about some of the things that we will likely hear and will not hear, and I want to talk about some foreign policy issues relative to a trip that I had the pleasure of leading with a bipartisan delegation of Members in November of last year to Russia.

Madam Speaker, what we know we are going to hear tonight, because of the huge surplus that is being generated with our economic upturn and the balanced budget that we are now in the midst of securing, we are going to hear the President basically recreate Christmas all over again. The American people will hear litany after litany of new programs, new ideas, new ways to spend money that has been generated because of our surplus.

And, believe me, Madam Speaker, there is going to be something for everyone. There will be a new program for everyone in the country. And Madam Speaker, it kind of amazes me because the American people have to understand, they can send us any amount of money they want, and we will find a way to spend it in Washington. But is that really what we are here for? Is our goal here to find new ways to create new programs with fancy sounding titles, with new bureaucracies, that are for the most part run by political appointees that are going to better tell the people locally

how to run their lives or better solve the problems locally than if we gave the money back to the American people and then let them make those basic and fundamental decisions?

Believe me, tonight, if there is one thing we know we will hear it will be a Christmas tree list of goodies that the President wants to give out all across this Nation. And he will try to hit every group in America there is. Every group.

Madam Speaker, we have done some good things over the past 6 years. And, yes, many of them have been with the bipartisan effort in this body and the other body. But, yes, some of the times we have had to fight the administration every step of the way.

I can recall when the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KASICH), our distinguished Committee on the Budget chairman, first proposed balancing the budget 6 years ago. The President got caught and he did not know what to say. In fact, I remember the famous commercials where he would say we are going to balance the budget in 8 years, 7, 6, 5, 4. He really did not know because he had no plan. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KASICH) stuck his neck out and said we will submit a plan for a balanced budget, when no one else believed him, including some on the Republican side. The gentleman from Ohio persevered and eventually we accomplished what many thought was impossible.

Now, the President will take credit for the balanced budget. But in fact if we look back over the past 7 years, I can recall a couple of years where the President's budget he submitted to us got no votes in the House. Not one vote. Because no Member from either side would support the President's budget plan. Yet tonight President Clinton will take credit for the balanced budget that we are now enjoying which has helped to promoted our economic success.

Our Congress, our leadership here, with the support of some Democrats, has tried to give back as much money from the surplus as possible to the American people. But here the President has fought us every step of the way. He has rather desired to keep the money in Washington where the bureaucracy can better decide how to spend funds than allowing the American people to get that money back for themselves. There are some in this city who think that the money we collect from the taxpayers of America really is our money as opposed to their money.

Here tonight we will hear the President talk about welfare reform. What we will not hear about tonight, Madam Speaker, is the President saying that he made a mistake twice and vetoed the welfare reform bill. Because two times over the past 7 years the Congress, bipartisan, Democrats and Republicans, passed welfare reform in both bodies. Two times. And in both of those cases the President vetoed welfare reform.