

“Submission of Concurrent and Senate Resolutions.”)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the minority has 1 hour under their control. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. I thank the Chair.

COMMITMENT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, first of all, I rise to express appreciation to our leader, Senator DASCHLE, who has over the period of these recent weeks and months been working with many in our caucus and I know will be working closely, as well, with those on the other side of the aisle who are really interested in this Nation's commitment to the young people of this country in the field of education.

I think all of us who have had the opportunity to travel through the country, certainly in my travels around Massachusetts over this last year—no matter where we traveled—heard the concerns that parents had about access and availability in areas of education as one of the paramount issues.

The President has addressed those concerns by recommending a tax credit, also a \$1,500 tax deduction, and some \$10,000 that will be helpful to working families. Also included in the Daschle proposal are recommendations that we consider the interest on the debt for education in the same way that we would consider interest on the debt for machinery or the manufacturing industry assets, in being able to provide some deduction for those expenses as well.

That effectively, Mr. President, is to respond to the President's commitment to the American people to make the next two grades beyond the 12th grade—13th and 14th, the first 2 years of college—accessible and available to the young people in this country, so that future generations will be able to say that we, as a nation, during this Congress, have committed this Nation to the next two grades in the area of education.

I think this is a bold commitment. I think it is a dramatic enterprise. I think it will take the best judgment of all of us to achieve and accomplish this. But, nonetheless, as we understand it, the President's budget that will be submitted in the next 2-week period will demonstrate the funds that will be necessary to achieve it, and we will be able to say, in effect, when we actually legislate these proposals, that they are effectively paid and paid in full. That will be very, very important and a significant commitment to the young people of this country.

Included in the education proposal, Mr. President, are a number of other items which I think all of us should be able to embrace and endorse, and these have been outlined by Senator DASCHLE, I have been informed, earlier during the course of the day.

There will be commitments in terms of additional new technologies for our

young people in schools across this country, to make sure they are going to be able to take advantage of the latest in technology and also resources to make sure we are going to be able to train teachers so that they will be able to be well-trained and able to impart to the younger people of this country the skills that young people will need to be able to use these technologies.

It will be a modest program, but an important program, that follows the leadership of CAROL MOSELEY-BRAUN, to try and give focus and attention to many of the schools in local communities across the country that are in very dilapidated conditions. That is true for most of the older cities of this country. It is true in my own city of Boston. It is true in many of the older communities of my State—Lowell, Lawrence, New Bedford, Fall River, Springfield, Worcester, and many others. It is equally true in many of the large urban areas.

This is a very modest program, but a very innovative and creative program about leveraging limited financial resources to address those particular needs in a modest way. Hopefully, we will be able to bring additional support for continuation of that program into the future.

A very important continuing commitment to literacy and expanding the opportunity for children to read in our society so that we can achieve the goal that children who have reached the third grade will be able to read in a rather creative way is using the funding that will be allocated in the various competitive grants in ways that the young people of this country are going to be able to read and to really challenge the young people in our Nation, many who are going to schools and colleges, to help and assist with that undertaking, and to challenge American people, in general, to help and assist young children in this country.

These are some of the elements of it. There are a number of others which are important, but I have summarized it, Mr. President. I hope that we will be able to move ahead in the area of education. It is extremely important.

At the end of the last session, we did move forward in terms of funding various programs. We are going to have to find the funding for these programs and also for the increased number of children who will be going to high school. We are seeing an increase in total student enrollment, and we want to make sure that their particular needs are going to be attended to, as well. I think that is very important. That is something I know Senator DASCHLE has addressed, and I know that the President's program will address it.

Hopefully, we will have broad, broad bipartisan support. For so many years in this body, the support for education was broad-based and bipartisan. It is bipartisan and broad-based in the country, and we should try and find ways to maintain that in the Congress and Senate.

Second, Mr. President, is an area that I consider of enormous importance and that is to address the needs of 10½ million children who are uninsured today. Ten and a half million will be uninsured over the course of a particular year. The leader has outlined approaches to addressing this issue.

There is a rather dramatic definition of who those children are, Mr. President. Children are the fastest growing segment of the uninsured population. It is a rather dramatic phenomenon. They are the ones who are being dropped from coverage in the current insurance system. Nine out of ten of the 10.5 million children who are uninsured have parents who are working.

We have the Medicaid Program which addresses the poorest children in this country. I welcome the fact that the administration is going to try and be more creative and imaginative in terms of reaching many of those children who are eligible for Medicaid. These children are desperately in need of a healthy start and are not receiving it today. But we are talking about the next level; that is, the sons and daughters of working families. These are men and women who go to work every day, they play by the rules, 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year making America work. They are the backbone of so much of what is right in our society, but their children are being left out and being left behind.

The figures and statistics are a fierce indictment of what is happening in our society. As one of the major industrial nations in the world, we still have one of the highest infant mortality rates. We are 17th among the industrial nations of the world.

More than half of all uninsured children with asthma never see a doctor, with all the implications that has, in terms of a child's future development and growth. As the father of a son who now happens to be a Congressman who had chronic asthma when he was a child, it is unbelievable to me the difficulties that he had in terms of coping with the problems of asthma. I do not know how he would have coped unless he had been able to get important medical attention.

We know one out of three uninsured children who have recurring ear infections never see a doctor. There are significant increases in the number of ear infections and the number of children who are going deaf in our society from preventable diseases. And the list goes on.

The final point that I want to make in this area, Mr. President, is that expanding coverage for children is wise economic policy.

We are always going to have to come back to justify this from economic means. We all know for every dollar that is invested in immunization, the savings are \$5 to \$6. That is true in terms of the investment in children's health. It is true certainly in terms of providing the kind of prenatal care that would be included in this program

for expectant mothers. That is an exceedingly wise investment.

There are different ways of funding this proposal, Mr. President. My principal interest and I believe all of ours is to get the job done. I will introduce legislation that will ensure that all working families can afford to purchase private health insurance for their children. I support an increase in the tobacco tax to cover this cost because of the relationship between tobacco and children's health. A number of our States are moving forward in terms of addressing the issues of children's smoking and all of the implications that has as a gateway drug. The States know that curbing smoking among young people is a sound and wise way to proceed.

But there are alternative ways to fund this program. I have every intention of working with our leader and those on the other side of the aisle to try and find alternatives.

Our principal interest is getting the coverage for these children. If we achieve very little else in this Congress we should cover our children. We should move in those areas, and also move in the areas of coverage of pensions for working families. We need to make steps in the area of pensions when we realize that close to 60 percent of all working families do not have any pensions at all and that there is an increasing number of working families that do not have pensions.

We are all thankful about Social Security. We know we have challenges that have to be addressed in the areas of ensuring its financial integrity over the period of the years but that is basically a program to prevent people from living in dire poverty. What we are talking about are those working families that have a standard of living who have been participants in our society, in so many instances served in the Armed Forces, want to be part of a pension system, and are not part of it because of various complications that have existed out there. We ought to make it easier for them to participate, encouraging employers as well as employees.

I would say in this area, Mr. President, no one has a greater interest in this area of pension coverage than women in our society. They are the ones that often are the part-time workers. They enter and leave the work force to meet various family needs and family requirements. And they are the ones, if you identify any group, are the ones that are left out and left behind in terms of a national pension system.

We have to be more responsive to their particular needs. And I commend the work that has been done on this by Senator BOXER and CAROL MOSELEY-BRAUN and DIANNE FEINSTEIN, PATTY MURRAY, BARBARA MIKULSKI, and many in our caucus that have provided important leadership in this very important area.

Finally, Mr. President, I want to mention one area that working fami-

lies are very much concerned about. These themes are all related to security for working families. What is more important for working families than they are going to be able to make sure that their children are going to get covered? What is more important for working families than making sure that their children are going to be able to continue in the areas of education? What is more important for working families than if they are going to be able to look to the future with some degree of hope and opportunities and some degree of security with the pension reforms?

I just mention, finally, unfinished business as part of our immigration law last year. We are working to ensure protection for American workers, for American jobs that are being replaced by foreign workers who are displacing those American workers, not being paid the adequate kind of salary, given the decency in terms of benefits. They are replacing an American worker in the first place and then because they are doing that at much less of a wage, much less benefits, being able to be competitive to the disadvantage of other Americans with whom they might be competing in producing widgets, for example, and therefore seeing other Americans that are going to lose their jobs.

There are two basic and fundamental concepts that underlie our basic problems with the issues of immigration—one is addressing the needs at the border in terms of halting illegal immigrants that are coming here and, second, addressing the magnet of jobs—the magnet of jobs.

If you look at the Jordan study, if you look at the Hesburgh study on what is the key issue in terms of attracting immigrants, illegal immigrants, immigrants that are going to abuse the immigration system, you will find out it is jobs. Unless we are going to make sure that Americans are not going to have important jobs, and we are talking about hundreds of thousands of jobs a year in many instances—we have really failed on the other extremely important effort in terms of immigration reform. We had important provisions in the immigration bill last year that Senator SIMPSON supported, many of us supported. Those were dropped in the conference. We will come back to that particular issue in this year.

HEALTH CARE IN THE 105TH CONGRESS

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, if we act on health care in a spirit of bipartisanship this year and build on the accomplishments of last year, the new Congress can be the Health Care Congress.

There are several significant health care goals that this Congress can and should accomplish:

We should expand health insurance coverage for children and the unemployed.

We should deal with the serious problem of abuses by HMO's by adopting needed patient protections and standards for care.

We should put Medicare on a sound fiscal footing for the next decade, without dismantling the program or adding to the already high health care costs that burden senior citizens.

We should protect Medicaid, as we did last year, against any attempts to undermine protections for children, senior citizens, and the disabled.

The final months of the last Congress were a period of considerable accomplishment. We finally broke the long stalemate over health care reform. We passed a health insurance reform act. We made a start toward long-overdue parity for mental health coverage. We put an end to the insidious practice of drive-through deliveries, by guaranteeing newborn infants and their mothers a 48-hour stay in the hospital if they need it.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ends some of the worst abuses in the current insurance system. It guarantees that, as long as you faithfully pay your premiums, your insurance cannot be taken away—even if you become seriously ill, or change your job, or lose your job. In addition, insurance companies can no longer impose new exclusions for pre-existing conditions, as long as you do not let your insurance lapse.

The legislation on mental health parity was a first step toward the day when those who suffer from mental illness will receive the care they need and deserve. The ban on drive-through deliveries is a wake-up call to unscrupulous health plans that exalt profits over patients' needs.

Now, we have a new Congress and a new opportunity to build on these achievements. The crisis that put health care on the front-burner of public policy has not gone away. In fact, it has become worse. Between 1990 and 1994, the number of uninsured Americans rose from 34 to 40 million, and it continues to climb.

A quarter of the uninsured—over 10 million—are children. One in every seven children in America today have no health insurance. Almost all of these children have parents who work. Cutbacks in employer coverage are worsening this problem, as more and more employers decide to cut costs.

Many firms are shifting from full-time to part-time employees. Others are contracting out work to firms that typically don't provide benefits. Large employers with generous benefits are reducing the number of employees eligible for the benefits. Other employers are dropping coverage for early retirees, or even all retirees. Cost-sharing is going up, and coverage of spouses and children is going down. Every 35 seconds another child loses private insurance. Parents should not have to live in fear that their employer's failure to provide coverage will deny their children good health care.