

many families that would like to adopt children and just plain cannot because of the cost involved. We have changed the tax code so there is now a \$5,000 adoption tax credit to help those families that would like to adopt children.

In summarizing, we have come a long ways in a few years. We are through those broken promises of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings I and Gramm-Rudman-Hollings II, the budget deal of '90, the budget deal of '93. That stuff is in the past. Raising taxes to get to a balanced budget, that is in the past. That is not what is going on out here any more.

Controlling the growth of Washington spending, slowing down how fast spending is growing in this government. I would like to see this get down to a zero at some point. So we have a long ways to go. But by slowing the growth of Washington spending, coupled by a strong economy, we have actually reached a balanced budget not in 2002 as promised, but rather 4 years ahead of schedule.

We are about to make the first payment, and here is our vision for the future, we are about to make the first payment on that debt. And over a period of time we have the plan written to pay off the Federal debt so our children can receive this Nation absolutely debt free. As we pay that debt off, Social Security is restored. The money that has been taken out is part of that debt, so we pay that money back into Social Security and Social Security is solvent for our seniors.

The third part of the vision is that we continue to lower taxes on American workers because we know the tax rate in this country is too high. That is where we are going.

So as you listen to the State of the Union tonight, I think it is very, very important that we understand that if you hear the word "expansion," that means more Washington. And just temper your reaction to these new good programs with an understanding that expansion means the American people send more money to Washington so Washington can decide how to spend that money as opposed to Washington spending less money, leaving it in the pockets of the American people for them to decide how they can best spend their money in their families.

DEMOCRATS UNITED BEHIND PRO-FAMILY, PRO-CHILD MESSAGE OF PRESIDENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I must say that I do not intend to use all of the time this evening. I will be joined by the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) and we wanted to briefly, if we could, talk a little bit about the Democrats' unity behind the pro-family and pro-child message that we know

will be an important part of the President's State of the Union address this evening.

I think it is fair to say that for the last few years, and certainly in this past year in 1997, the Democrats have stressed the need for measures that basically help the family, help the average family in this country, particularly those who have children, and a big part of that has been affordable health care.

We all realize, and Democrats in particular realize, that more and more people in this country do not have health care insurance. And even if they do have health care insurance, a lot of times they are not getting the quality of care or they do not have the access to all the procedures that they should have.

In addition to that, there is a real problem in this country in terms of the availability of child care for America's working families.

And also pensions. Many of my constituents have complained to me about lack of adequate pensions, people that were promised pensions, or thought that when they retired that pensions were going to be available to them and all of a sudden find out that they are not.

So tonight the President will be stressing this Democratic pro-family, pro-child message, and there are just four points that I wanted to highlight. One is the need for more affordable and accessible health care for what we call the near elderly, those seniors aged 55 to 65 that have a greater risk of losing employer-based health insurance but yet are not eligible for Medicare.

Democrats are proposing a targeted and self-financing proposal which will enable Americans ages 62 to 65 to buy into Medicare by paying a premium. And they will also provide coverage to displaced workers over 55 through Medicare and COBRA coverage for those whose companies renege on their commitments to provide retiree health benefits.

Also, Democrats are very conscious of the fact that there are problems with managed care in this country, and we are going to work, and the President will talk tonight about high quality health care through a consumer Bill of Rights that he has proposed. No patient should be denied high quality care. Care should be based on medical needs and not financial ones.

So a big part of the Democratic agenda this year will be managed care reform and basic consumer protections for individuals in HMOs or managed care organizations.

Also, Democrats want to invest in child care for America's working families. The President will announce a historic initiative to improve the quality and availability of child care for all parents. Democrats are working to ensure that parents no longer have to make choices between work or not working that basically revolve about whether or not they have access to child care.

And lastly, Democrats want, and the President will talk tonight about the effort to achieve secure and comfortable retirement. For more than 50 million American workers, there is no pension coverage. And Democrats will work to promote pension plans among small businesses.

I do not want to take up a lot of time. I want to yield to my colleague from Texas, who has been so much involved over the last year, in 1997 and before, in bringing this pro-family, pro-child message to the floor of the House of Representatives. I would yield to her at this time.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. I thank the gentleman from New Jersey for his leadership and for allowing us to have an opportunity through a special order to address the American people and to emphasize the Democrats united message.

For many of us returning to Washington, we were certainly asked what would be the focus of this next year, and I am very glad to say that we have not strayed away, with the leadership of the President, from what are really truly important issues to this country, and that has to be more affordable and accessible health care.

I could not have been more pleased when the President announced more than 2 weeks ago the idea that individuals 55 to 65 had a greater risk of losing health insurance or coverage, and that he wanted to stand on the side of those hard working Americans who might have fallen on hard times because of downsizing and with an inability to have health coverage, that they would be eligible for Medicare. That is not a throw-away of good dollars, that is a providing an enhancement of dollars, and I think that is extremely importantly.

□ 1600

I also want to say that I could not be more enthusiastic about a consumer bill of rights as it relates to health care.

I have experienced it personally. I know how families sometimes are subjected to difficult decisions; and, therefore, when they need a consumer bill of rights most, it is when they need medical care, and decisions have to be made. We need to be able to ensure patients that the patient-doctor relationship is a sacred relationship. It will not be tampered with because of financial concerns and because someone has to save money moving people from one hospital to the next, dumping people out of hospitals. I think that is extremely important.

I would like to add two other points about the importance of the State of the Union and unity of Democrats leading out in this country along with my colleagues who are thinking along the lines of making this economy better but also working with people who need our help most, that is America's working families, child care.

Chairing the Congressional Children's Caucus, I had the pleasure of

being with the First Lady when she had the Child Care Symposium just before we left in the late fall of 1997 for our district work session. And everywhere I have gone, the working families, men and women, single parents, two-parent families, have talked about the big chunk that child care takes out of their paychecks. We need to find a way to be catalytic, to be helpful in making sure that we have a child care system that works.

My colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE), mentioned something very, very important and that was the pension system, or Social Security. For some reason or another, people think that because Democrats helped bring about Social Security that we don't know how to fix it or to work with some of the problems. Our position is, let us not eliminate it; let us not accuse it of the wrongs; let us make sure we emphasize the rights of Social Security. It has given people the privilege of being secure in their old age without the big company pensions that many people have had the pleasure of having but a lot of working men and women in America have not had the pleasure.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I did not mention Social Security. But I know that the President is going to emphasize it tonight.

I think that the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) brings up a very good point; and that is, the Republicans I think want us to forget or want the American people to forget that Social Security works. It has been working. People have gotten their checks. They have gotten their COLA on an annual basis.

It does bother me, I have to say, to some extent to hear these constant references to the fact that the system is broken or that we need to find alternatives to Social Security and different private-sector options that are out there.

I am not saying that we should not study those things. But I think there has been a concerted effort on the part of our Republican colleagues and the Republican leadership to give the impression to the American people that the Social Security system is broken and it cannot be fixed. That is simply not the case. Everyone gets a Social Security check. People have gotten a COLA on a regular basis.

It is true that we need to study what needs to be done to make sure that in the future that Social Security is there and is intact, and Democrats are certainly a big part of that and have been emphasizing that there does need to be some attention paid to that. But, what is the expression, let us not throw out the baby with the bath water?

Social Security works, and we need to emphasize that. Too often I hear from the other side that somehow it is broken or we need to replace it. I do not want our colleagues on either side of the aisle or the American people to think that that is the case. It is not, and it is simply not true.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) very much for yielding.

Let me say that I would be very hesitant, very hesitant and quite concerned if we were to take on the cry of fire in a crowded theater with respect to Social Security, when it has worked for years and years and years.

Let me conclude by mentioning some other very important items that I see, at least at this juncture, in this State of the Union that we can be very proud of. That is why Democrats are unified around the President's message.

Do we realize that the President is offering to present to the American public 100,000 new teachers for grades 1 to 3, a school construction plan that generated out of the work? As I see the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS), chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, a lot of work went into this whole idea of school construction. And I see, I think, my good friend, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY), as well, who is coming to join us. These are important issues that we must deal with in the State of the Union and, as well, in looking to a program forthright.

So I think that we have a lot to be proud of. We have a mentoring program that the President is going to be offering; and I would say to anyone who walks past a school, if they can take 5 minutes to go inside and say something to a student, they are going to see the fruit borne on that over and over again.

Then they have the continue moving people from welfare to work, which is a very important part of his message, as well as three points: an increase in empowerment zones for those of us in urban areas, community development banks, providing tax incentives for low-income housing. And, of course, he is going to continue, as we just celebrated and commemorated the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, the race initiative.

So I think we have a lot to share this evening, a lot to celebrate. Because we are on a new vision, a new path that continues, but we are still moving in a direction that helps those people who need the help most. And I am very glad to join my colleague here on the floor to speak about some very important items that will be raised tonight in the President's State of the Union.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman; and I yield to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY), who has for several years now been talking about the need for this school construction program.

Mrs. LOWEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I was just walking by and I heard my distinguished colleagues referring to the important initiatives that are going to be discussed in the State of the Union, and I wanted to thank them

because these issues are what people really care about. We all are coming back today, and most of us have had discussions in our district with seniors, visited schools, had many meetings, hearings on Medicare, on child care, on issues of concern to real people. My constituents wanted us to come here and solve problems. That is what this is all about. We are here to solve problems.

My colleague referred to the terrible conditions of some of our schools. We talk about educating youngsters. We talk about standards. We talk about more teachers. But if the school buildings are falling apart, then it is pretty difficult to focus attention on the agenda in those buildings.

I have visited some schools where there is plastic on the ceiling holding up the walls. These roofs have been leaking for years. And children are sitting in classrooms under conditions that I certainly do not think most of us would want our children to be in.

So I was particularly pleased that, after all of us have been working many, many years to build support for partnership with local governments on school construction, that the President is taking a strong position to assist local governments to repair our schools.

Again, this is a partnership. The Federal Government is not just going to go in and say, here you are, here is the money. These are partnerships. And if we can develop partnerships in highways and prisons and a whole myriad of uses, then it seems to me we should be investing in our school construction. I was very pleased to see that in the President's initiatives.

Also, when it comes to child care, many of us understand that if we are going to put people to work, we have a responsibility to be sure that our children, our future, are well-taken care of. And, again, I want to congratulate this administration in putting forth the proposal to really invest in child care and making sure there are enough slots for the children in all of our communities and also to be sure that there are regulations in place so a mother who put her child in child care or a father who puts his child in child care knows that those children will be safe. So child care is another proposal that we all have to rally around.

And Medicare extension. This is a problem that is brought up to me all the time. Why should people not be able to buy into Medicare to be sure that they have the health care that they need? This is brought up in the senior centers, in casual meetings, in the supermarkets. People are worried about health care, and this is a very important proposal. I was very pleased that my colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE), that he tried to quiet the fears of many people that Medicare is going broke.

We have reformed, we have strengthened Medicare since its founding in the 1960s. Yes, we have to make changes.

We have to be sure that Medicare and Social Security are solid programs when the baby-boomers come of age. But Medicare and Social Security are not going broke in 1 year or 5 years or 10 years.

We have to address the challenges ahead, make sure there are programs for our baby-boomers so we can give them the benefits of these great, great programs. But let us not frighten seniors. They are worried and they are worried for the children and for the children's children.

So I know my colleague is committed and I am committed and we are committed to work to continue to strengthen Medicare, to strengthen Social Security. But let us not set off the alarm. I am very concerned that there are people on the other side of the aisle that are doing just that. Let us maintain our solid positions that these are important programs, but we have to move ahead constructively and not set the alarm bells.

So education, child care, health care, these are all things that people care about; and that is why I am so enthusiastic about the State of the Union this evening. I look forward to hearing it. We just talked about a few of the proposals. But food safety, genetic discrimination, this is a State of the Union message that is solid, and it is dedicated to the people of this country.

I want to thank my colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE), again for discussing the State of the Union. I know we are committed to making sure that this will be a productive session, that we are here to focus on what really matters to real people to solve their problems, and this is a good kickoff to an agenda that matters to real people.

I thank my colleague again for leading this special order.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY) again. I think she really summed up what tonight is all about, and that is trying to help the average American, the family, the children. That is what my constituents and I am sure all of our constituents are telling us; and, also, we are doing it in the context of this balanced budget.

The President keeps saying over and over again, look, we passed the Balanced Budget Act this past summer in 1997. We are meeting the guidelines of that. Even within that we can still help with some of these other pro-family measures. Many of them, as my colleagues know, either cost no money or very little money and in the long run actually saved the Federal Government money. He keeps stressing that.

I think that is important in the context of what he is going to state tonight. But I think it is a very auspicious beginning for 1998; and we have to work hard, as Democrats, to make sure that the pro-family, pro-child agenda gets passed and that we can bring our Republican colleagues along.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 8:40 p.m. for the purpose of receiving in joint session the President of the United States.

Accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 12 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until approximately 8:40 p.m.

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AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at 8 o'clock and 55 minutes p.m.

JOINT SESSION OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE HELD PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS OF HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 194 TO HEAR AN ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The Speaker of the House presided.

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms, Mr. Bill Sims, announced the Vice President and Members of the U.S. Senate, who entered the Hall of the House of Representatives, the Vice President taking the chair at the right of the Speaker, and the Members of the Senate the seats reserved for them.

The SPEAKER. The Chair appoints as members of the committee on the part of the House to escort the President of the United States into the Chamber:

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARMEY);

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY);

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BOEHNER);

The gentleman from California (Mr. COX);

The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. DICKEY);

The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HUTCHINSON);

The gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT);

The gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BONIOR);

The gentleman from California (Mr. FAZIO);

The gentlewoman from Connecticut (Mrs. KENNELLY);

The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY); and

The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. SNYDER).

The VICE PRESIDENT. The President of the Senate, at the direction of that body, appoints the following Senators as members of the committee on the part of the Senate to escort the President of the United States into the House Chamber:

The Senator from Mississippi (Mr. LOTT);

The Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. NICKLES);

The Senator from Florida (Mr. MACK);

The Senator from South Carolina (Mr. THURMOND);

The Senator from South Dakota (Mr. DASCHLE);

The Senator from Kentucky (Mr. FORD);

The Senator from Maryland (Ms. MIKULSKI);

The Senator from Louisiana (Mr. BREAUX);

The Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. KERRY);

The Senator from Nebraska (Mr. KERREY);

The Senator from New Jersey (Mr. TORRICELLI);

The Senator from Nevada (Mr. REID);

The Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER);

The Senator from North Dakota (Mr. DORGAN); and

The Senator from Vermont (Mr. LEAHY).

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced the Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, His Excellency Roble Olhaye, Ambassador of the Republic of Djibouti.

The Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and took the seat reserved for him.

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced the Chief Justice of the United States and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States.

The Chief Justice of the United States and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and took the seats reserved for them in front of the Speaker's rostrum.

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced the Cabinet of the President of the United States.

The members of the Cabinet of the President of the United States entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and took the seats reserved for them in front of the Speaker's rostrum.

At 9 o'clock and 9 minutes p.m., the Sergeant at Arms, Mr. Wilson Livingood, announced the President of the United States.

The President of the United States, escorted by the committee of Senators and Representatives, entered the Hall of the House of Representatives, and stood at the Clerk's desk.

(Applause, the Members rising.)

The SPEAKER. Members of the Congress, I have the high privilege and the distinct honor of presenting to you the President of the United States.

(Applause, the Members rising.)

THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The PRESIDENT. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of the 105th Congress, distinguished guests, my fellow Americans, since the last time we met in this Chamber, America has lost two patriots and fine public servants.