

In a bill that I will introduce today, the Options for Excellence in Education Act, we are going to give incentive grants to states and school districts that demonstrate exceptional educational progress and practices that translate directly into better student performance. The bill will also build upon a very successful program to place military veterans who wish to teach into schools where there is a need for qualified teachers by expanding the concept to include civilian professionals. Under the program, individuals with special skills and experience will be given stipend while they seek teacher certification under a streamlined state process so that they can translate those skills into benefits for students. We are going to give help to expedite certification so that if a retired military or civilian professional has the ability, for example, to speak Russian or French or has experience in computer science or math, and the school district has an unmet need for teachers with those skills, those professionals can enter the classroom much more easily and cheaply than they could otherwise.

And then we want to grade the ability of the schools through the ability of the children. If those schools that are in the bottom part of the achievement levels don't come up, we want to give more educational options for their students. States will be able under the bill to use federal funds for a variety of school choice options, including allowing students to attend another public school in their area, the expansion of charter schools, magnet schools, or even private school choice if that's what the state wants to do to give kids trapped in failed schools the chance to succeed.

Finally, the bill addresses the need for the construction of new schools that so many of our school districts are facing by giving tax incentives for the private construction or renovation of public schools in low-income and high-growth parts of our country. So that is what my Options for Excellence in Education bill that I am introducing today will do.

We in Congress must also address the issue of economic opportunity. More people in this country are paying more taxes than ever before in our peacetime history. Thirty-eight percent of the average American's salary goes to pay taxes to some government entity. Well, I want to give more of the money people earn back to them to spend as they wish. So one of our key priorities is going to be tax cuts. We are going to propose a 10-percent across-the-board tax cut for every American.

We are also going to supplement that by doing away with the marriage tax penalty. Why in the world do we have tax laws that say to people, if you get divorced we are going give you \$1,400? That is essentially what we have today. Twenty-one million American couples pay \$1,400 more, on the average, just because they got married.

So I am introducing two bills today to grant marriage tax penalty relief. The first will allow a married couple to split their incomes right down the middle, if doing so would be better for their bottom line tax liability.

The other option for married couples I am proposing to alleviate their tax penalty for having said their vows to just double the standard deduction. Today, the standard deduction for a married couple is \$7,100. Instead, we would double the single exemption so it would be \$8,500. These are things we can do to equalize the tax burden for those who choose to be married and those who choose to stay single. So certainly in the area of economic opportunity, tax cuts have to be our very first priority.

So we are going to try to do these things and also at the same time make sure that we have a strong national defense. Security for our country as a whole is the No. 1 responsibility of Congress. So we are going to immediately propose legislation to raise military pay.

I will also soon introduce a bill that will go beyond the important issue of pay, and address one of the critical quality of life factors facing our service men and women and their dependents—the quality of health care for military personnel and retirees. One of the biggest complaints that I get when I visit bases in Texas or bases overseas, when I am talking to our troops, is they worry about the health care of their families. They worry that their families are not getting the quality health care that they were promised, that they deserve, and that they must have. Beyond that, they worry about what will happen to their health care and that of their families if they make a long-term commitment and retire from the military.

So I am introducing a bill that will give more choices to our military families so that they can receive quality health care for themselves, and for their families, so that we can retain the best people in the military. We need to recruit better; we need to retain better. To do that, we must pay them a wage that is fair, more competitive with the outside civilian life, and we need to make sure they and their families have quality health care.

On top of that, we want to give them the equipment they need to do the job.

Senator WARNER, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, is going to have a comprehensive bill that increases the spending on the equipment and on the technology for the future. The main technology that we want to deploy immediately is a missile defense system for our country. Senator THAD COCHRAN has introduced a missile defense technology bill in this Congress. Last year, he lost that bill twice by only one vote. He is going to be up front and center with an absolute priority for our missile defense technology, to go forward at the earliest moment that we can because we don't

have a ballistic missile defense not only for our own country and our own shores, but we don't have an effective missile defense for our troops to protect them in the field wherever they might be in the world. That is not acceptable for the world's greatest superpower.

Mr. President, you can see that our priorities for this Congress are fairly simple: enhance the security and expand the educational and economic opportunities of all Americans. Security and opportunity. Security for America through a strong national defense. Economic security for every American to have more of the money they work so hard to earn, to give them more opportunities for retirement security, for better Social Security, and more pension options, and economic opportunity so that every child in America can fulfill his or her potential with a quality education. That is what sets us apart from every other country in the world—a universal, quality education system, which ensures that every child who works hard can reach his or her full potential.

We are eager to move forward with this agenda for security and opportunity for our country. We believe we have a solid agenda with good bills to back it up. And we are starting today. We are going to focus on the people's business. We are going to make sure that at the end of this year we can say we have given more Americans the money they earn back in their pockets, better retirement security with Social Security reform, and the feeling that they can be secure in the quality of both their national defense and educational systems.

I appreciate very much the opportunity to start talking about our agenda today, to introduce our bills, to get them into committee and to get started on the people's business.

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, in recent weeks, I have made clear that the Senate would proceed, full speed ahead, with the people's business. Today's legislative action is an important part of that business.

Today, by mutual agreement of Members on both sides of the aisle, we begin the actual introduction of bills and resolutions. Following tradition, Republicans will introduce the first five bills. Senator DASCHLE will then introduce the following five bills.

Of course, this is an occasion, not just to introduce major legislation, but for both parties to explain to the American people the principles behind their bills, and the values that shape them. That is what I would like to do today.

Today's Americans want the same things our people have always sought. They want a better life for themselves and for their children—better, not just in personal economic or financial

terms, but also in terms of their community. They want a healthier environment, and decent neighborhoods where children can play without fear or danger.

They want to be able to plan for their own future, while ensuring for their elders the security they want for themselves.

They want a just social order. That means a society that rewards labor and thrift, punishes those who harm others, and cares for those who cannot care for themselves.

Those goals form the great common ground on which the American people stand united. Whatever our many differences and disagreements, we share a commitment to opportunity, to security, and to personal responsibility.

Put the three of those together—opportunity, security, and responsibility—and you have the formula for freedom.

Freedom, after all, is the one overarching concept for which our country stands. It is what the word "America" has meant from the very beginning—and not only to those who were blessed enough to live here, but also to the millions of people around the world who lived, and often died, in the hope that someday they might share in that freedom.

But freedom is not a negative commodity.

It is not just the absence of oppression that allows every individual to do whatever he or she wants to do. True freedom is a positive force that turns responsibility into a creative energy that can empower individuals, lift their families, and improve their communities.

That is why the starting point for the Senate Republican agenda is freedom. Not as a slogan, but as the sum total of everything the American people, day by day, work for and hope for: broader opportunity, enhanced security, and stronger personal responsibility.

From that starting point come the first five bills of the 106th Congress. They address both educational opportunity and economic opportunity, because the two are really interdependent. And they deal with issues of security—retirement security, community security, and national security—as fulfillments of our ideal of freedom.

Our first bill deals with one of the most pressing concerns of the American people: Social Security. We are strongly committed to preserving and protecting Social Security for future generations.

Many in the Senate, like RICK SANTORUM and JUDD GREGG, have shown great leadership on this issue. We want this bill to carry the symbolic title of S. 1, even though its substance will not be introduced today. We will hold the number for a while. That is a highly unusual procedure, and I should explain why we are using it in this case.

Over the last several weeks, I have repeatedly urged the President to sub-

mit to the Congress and the Nation his own bill to save and strengthen Social Security.

I repeated that plea as recently as this weekend, in a joint letter that Speaker HASTERT and I gave the White House. In that letter, the Speaker and I promised to arrange an unprecedented joint meeting of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee to receive and hold hearings on the President's bill.

I have made clear that, if the President will give us his proposals in legislative form, I will introduce his bill here in the Senate. Today, I pledge to honor the President's bill by introducing it as S. 1.

But first, he must send us his bill. That is the way Presidents do business. It is part of presidential leadership. It is part of his job.

I continue to hope that the job will get done. And as a token of our good faith in the Senate, and our willingness to work in a bipartisan spirit, to make sure that Social Security is there for both our parents and our children, I will withhold introducing of S. 1 and reserve that title for the President's bill on Social Security. I hope he will send it to us soon.

The second item on the Republican Senate agenda is education.

Here we have a dilemma: an overabundance of great ideas. Starting today, and in the weeks to follow, Republican Senators will be introducing many bills dealing with education. They will all have one common goal: To make sure this country has the world's best schools.

I won't attempt to offer a comprehensive list of those proposals, because there are so many of them. One consistent theme is to shift decision-making out of Washington and back to parents, teachers, and local officials. In short, the folks who know the kids best—and who know what our schools need to succeed.

That's the principle behind Senator BOND's "Direct Check," Senator HUTCHISON's "Options for Excellence," Senator HUTCHINSON's "Dollars to the Classroom," and Senator GORTON's stalwart campaign to renew and empower State and local education systems.

The same principle—that excellence in education begins at the State and local level—has shaped what will be one of the most important bills of the 106th Congress. It's called Ed-Flex, for Educational Flexibility, and it is not a partisan initiative. It has been jointly advanced by Senators FRIST and WYDEN.

It is strongly supported by all the Nation's Governors. It should be something we can consider and pass quickly.

If we want the 106th Congress to be known as the Education Congress, Ed-Flex is a great way to start. Right off the bat, with virtual unanimity, we can give the States the leeway they need to use their share of federal dol-

lars to meet the needs of students. Around this flag, we should all rally.

A second principle of Republican education reform is consumer choice.

We believe that what is right and productive in every other sector of the economy is equally right—and will be equally productive—in schooling. So we renew our commitment to consumer rights and choice in education: whether through Senator COVERDELL's tax-free education savings accounts, or Senator MCCONNELL's expansion of tuition savings plans; or through Senator SESSION'S Class Act extending those plans to non-government colleges; or through Senator KYL's plan to provide parents financial breaks to supplement their children's educational needs; or through the Emergency Scholarships and other lifelines we should extend to low-income families.

A third principle of Republican education reform is equality teaching. Senator MACK's bill on teacher testing leads the way in that regard, along with our other proposals for teacher training and merit pay.

Those three principles, and the issues to which we apply them, come together in the largest education bill that will come before the 106th Congress: the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, universally known as the E.S.E.A.

In the cafeteria fare of education bills, this one is pizza with the works, even the anchovies. Over the last 33 years, we have spent more than \$120 billion through the ESEA. Its reauthorization during the 106th Congress will be our opportunity to assess what has gone right, or wrong, in that process—and to adjust the ESEA to meet the challenges of a changing society in a new century in an unpredictable world.

Senator JEFFORDS, chairman of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, will introduce the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as the second bill of the 106th Congress.

Our third bill, S. 3, is a tax cut, introduced by Senator GRAMS, Senator ROTH, and others. To be precise, a 10-percent reduction in personal income tax rates. Hence the bill's title: the Tax Cuts for All Americans Act.

Whatever justification this may need in the Congress, it requires no explanation to the American people. They are overworked and overtaxed to meet the demands of government. Senate Republicans want them to keep more of what they earn.

We believe it is wrong—morally wrong—to make the American family pay more in taxes than it spends on food, clothing, housing, and transportation combined. So we propose to reduce their tax burden while making government smaller, smarter, and more efficient.

Our fourth bill, S. 4, is the Soldiers' Bill of Rights, to be introduced by Senator WARNER and his Republican colleagues on the Armed Services Committee. This bill represents the determination of Senate Republicans to rebuild America's national security by restoring the readiness and morale of our Armed Forces.

In other words, it is a small symbol of an enormous commitment.

At the end of the last Congress, the administration proposed to deal with military retirement by robbing the military's readiness funds. That was a terrible idea. It made no sense to offer our servicemen and women a little better retirement while depriving them of the wherewithal to defend themselves and their country. So we blocked that dishonest ploy, and we promised to address the problems of inadequate military pay and retirement early in 1999. Enactment of this bill, S. 4, will fulfill that commitment.

I caution, however, that this legislation must be only the beginning of a larger effort to reverse the decline our Armed Forces have suffered under the current administration. That's going to be a tough job, and a long one, both in the appropriations process and in authorizing legislation. But we owe it to our country—and we owe it to the men and women in uniform—to start that job now, in the 106th Congress, so that America can enter a new century with renewed strength and security.

Crucial to that effort will be the actual deployment of a missile defense system that will protect this country from attack.

President Clinton's opposition frustrated our efforts on this in the 105th Congress. This time around, I hope he will work with us to enact Senator COCHRAN's National Missile Defense Act.

The fifth bill on our agenda, S. 5, deals with the personal safety of the American people. But in this case, the threat to their security comes from within.

The danger is the plague of narcotics. It has become a clear and present danger to our families, our neighborhoods, and even to the security of our Nation.

To combat that danger, Senators DEWINE, ABRAHAM, ASHCROFT, GRASSLEY, and HATCH will introduce the Drug Free Century Act. That title says it all. Our goal is nothing less than laying the groundwork for the day when our country will be free of the curse of drugs. Some will think that is too high a goal, and that Senate Republicans are unrealistic in pursuing it. We are not unrealistic; we are undaunted.

For more years than I like to recall, the federal government has tried to reduce the drug plague. And indeed, there was some success, specifically during the Reagan and Bush presidencies.

But its one thing to trim the claws of the narcotics monster, and quite another thing to break its loathsome back.

That is what we propose to do, step by step, with a bill that deals with vir-

tually every aspect of both the domestic and the international fight against drugs. It will impact the operations of most of the federal government, from the Justice Department to the Pentagon, from the State Department to the Coast Guard. It addresses some of the most pressing questions on national drug policy, including the sentencing differential between powder cocaine and crack.

Drug traffickers and their allies in certain foreign countries will not like this bill, nor will the creeps who peddle drugs to school kids. But parents, teachers, and law enforcement officers will cheer it. For its passage will be a clear signal, throughout this country and around the world, that we are serious about winning the war on drugs.

Mr. President, these five pieces of legislation—four introduced today, and one awaiting a draft from President Clinton—lead the Republican agenda for the 106th Congress. But they are not the whole story.

They set the foundation I mentioned earlier—the foundation of opportunity, security, responsibility, and freedom—and we are going to build on that foundation in many ways.

Along with the Drug Free Century Act, we will be moving against juvenile crime, following the lead of Senator HATCH and his colleagues on the Judiciary Committee. And in tandem with the House, we should consider legislation that will prevent Federal judges from turning loose hardened criminals in violation of their own sentences.

On another front, we will soon—by March 1 at the latest—receive the recommendations of our Bipartisan Medicare Commission, and we hope to act on that report.

Even sooner, I will bring to the Senate floor the first major reform of the budget process since it was established in 1974. Our reform package will put an end to the threat of Government shut-downs and stop the abuses of what is dubiously called "emergency spending."

We hope to schedule early action on a vital piece of legislation, the Water Resources Development Act, under the leadership of Senator CHAFEE, chairing our Committee on Environment and Public Works.

We will move ahead with a Patients' Bill of Rights that will protect individuals without undermining the integrity and efficiency of our health care system.

And we will continue to uphold the right to life, by advancing again a ban on partial-birth abortions, as proposed by Senator SANTORUM and the Child Custody Protection Act, proposed by Senator ABRAHAM.

To the legislation I have already outlined must be added a score of other matters, from bankruptcy reform and financial services reform to export expansion and trade reform, especially with regard to agricultural products.

And we intend to build upon our landmark welfare reforms by strength-

ening families, communities, and religious institutions. We should undertake nothing less than the renewal of civil society.

It will take both compassion and common sense to revitalize those areas of our country where the American dream has been no more than a slogan. One approach is to foster the public-private partnerships that can best address the real needs of our communities and enable them to overcome crime, drug abuse, poverty, and educational decay.

That is an agenda of hope and dignity that acknowledges that the solutions to America's problems will ultimately come, not from the Congress or the White House, but from the people.

Granted, the renewal of civil society will be a heroic enterprise, but Americans are equal to it. Today, on behalf of the Republican Members of the Senate, I pledge that we will do our part to make the 106th Congress, not so much the finale to the troubles and trials of the 20th century, but the threshold to a new American era.

1999—THE YEAR OF AVIATION CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED IN 3 MONTHS

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, last year the Senate passed S. 2279, the Wendell H. Ford National Air Transportation System Improvement Act of 1998. The Ford Act promised to bring much needed air service to under served communities throughout the Nation through policy changes and market-based incentives. Unfortunately, the Ford Act was not passed into law by the last Congress. I believe that Congress has an obligation to enhance the development of America's smaller air service markets. That is a promise that this Congress can fulfill. It is a promise that this session of Congress will fulfill.

The First Session of the 106th Congress will prove to be critical for our Nation's air passengers. The top aviation policy priority remains a full FAA reauthorization—not just a quick extension of this important agency and the Airports Improvements Program (AIP). A full reauthorization—money plus policies. Commerce Committee Chairman MCCAIN's aviation legislation, submitted this morning, reflects the bipartisan, fundamental provisions for rural air service built in the Ford Act.

Last year, the FAA bill's informal conference was able to reach a consensus on almost all issues. I encourage my colleagues to continue the good work in addressing aviation policies by resuming where the 105th Congress left off. If the provisions that were agreed upon late last year are adopted, Congress will be able to clear this bill before the March 31 deadline and guarantee a smooth, clean continuation of AIP funds.

Mr. President, there is talk of an increase in airline user fees through the passenger facility charges (PFCs). I'm