that are less crowded—learning to read, learning to write, and learning the basics with fewer discipline problems. They are working with a trained professional. Research shows they are going to have higher graduation rates, higher grade point averages and a higher likelihood of pursuing higher education.

They are going to be successful because of the work this Congress did one year ago. And the President has a right to insist on it. We as Democrats have a right to insist on it, and—as a Senator in this body—I am here to insist on it.

Now is the time to keep our commitment. Now is when the decisions are being made. Now is when we have to stand up for smaller classes. If we have to wait until after all budget deals have been cut, until after all the money has been spent, we will have failed those teachers, we will have failed those parents, but most importantly, we will have failed those children.

Mr. President, it is a national priority to reduce class size so kids can learn the basics and so discipline can be restored in the classroom. It is a promise we made last year and we need to put the money behind it, wherever it is appropriate.

A few weeks ago, I met with a teacher in Tacoma, WA, named Kris Paynter. Last year, there were 30 kids in her first grade class. This year there are 13 because of this program. That makes a huge difference for those kids. I saw a disciplined classroom where kids could learn the basics. Next year, we don't know how many kids will be in Ms. Paynter's class. And we can't even guarantee those 29,000 teachers hired last year will keep their jobs.

Mr. President, putting all of these process questions aside, what really matters at the end of the day is that kids have smaller classes. The teachers and parents in this country care that we do it. Period.

The millions of children who are now in smaller classes aren't wondering ''has this been authorized?'' or ''is this in the budget?'' or ''does the President have the constitutional authority to reduce class sizes?'' What really matters is that we fulfill our promise to parents, teachers, and students that we made last year in a bipartisan process.

Mr. President, I hate to say it, but at every turn, this Congress has put special interests ahead of the interests of real families. This is the last opportunity we will have to do something significant for kids. We didn't address the loopholes that still allow kids and criminals to get their hands on guns. We didn't make schools safer after the Columbine tragedy. We didn't provide health insurance to more kids. This is the last chance we have in this Congress to do something for out kids, fix a problem we know exists. And I am here to say that we cannot let this chance pass.

We need to keep our commitment to reducing class size. We need to be able to tell those teachers they will have jobs next year, and we need to be able to tell those kids they will have small classes next year. Let's stand behind our commitment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin is recognized.

THE HAGEL PROPOSAL ON CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I come to the floor to briefly comment on a significant development in the fight for campaign finance reform. This morning, a bipartisan group of Senators, led by the Senator from Nebraska, Mr. HAGEL, announced a new campaign finance reform proposal. Let me say that I and the Senator from Arizona, Mr. MCCAIN, warmly welcome the heightened participation of this new group of Senators, which includes the Senator from Louisiana, Ms. LANDRIEU, who has been, from the day she came to the Senate, a strong supporter of campaign finance reform. I also note that it includes five Republican Senators who have previously never voted for a campaign finance reform measure that includes limits on soft money.

As I predicted last week on the floor, the wall of protection for the current system of unlimited soft money contributions to the political parties is rapidly crumbling. While I am pleased by this development, I am not surprised. The soft money system is indefensible. I think we saw that during our abbreviated debate last week. Opponents of reform didn't defend soft money; they tried to divert our attention from it. They actually questioned whether there is anything corrupting about unlimited contributions from corporate and union treasuries to the political parties.

As the chairman of the Global Board of Directors of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu wrote in the New York Times when he heard about these comments on the floor:

> You could almost here the laughter coming from boardrooms and executive suites all over the country when Senate opponents of campaign finance reform expressed dismay that anyone could think big political contributions are corrupting elections and government.

I think the new initiative, led by the Senator from Nebraska, recognizes the opponents of reform have now retreated to an untenable position. They are defending the indefensible. To say there is nothing wrong with unlimited contributions to the political parties, that this is somehow the ''American way,'' is to live in a fantasy world the American people simply will not accept.

The public knows soft money is wrong. The public knows soft money is corrupting. And the business community knows it, too, as the Global Chairman of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu so well expressed.

While the Hagel proposal does not ban soft money completely, which I believe is an essential element of an acceptable campaign finance reform bill, it does limit it significantly. So what you have here is a whole new group of Republican Senators, as well as some Democrats who are obviously saying it is not unconstitutional to limit soft money. In fact, they are obviously seeing the abuse of $300,000 or $500,000 contributions and they want to do something about it. So I am looking forward to working with Senator HAGEL and the others to reach common ground.

When campaign finance reform left the floor last week, we had a total of 55 Senators who had voted in favor of reform. Now, with this new initiative, there are five more Senators who apparently are prepared to vote to change this system. I think that is very significant, as I am sure my colleagues know, because what is 55 plus 5? It is 60. If we can bring all of these Senators together on a package they can all accept, we can break the filibuster. What we need now is real hard work, bipartisan work. We need to bridge our differences. If we can do that, we can defeat the defenders of this corrupt system and give the people a cleaner and fairer campaign finance system for the new century.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is now closed.

AFRICAN GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to the consideration of H.R. 434, which the clerk will report.

The legislative assistant read as follows:

> A bill (H.R. 434) to authorize a new trade and investment policy for sub-Sahara Africa.
>
> Pending:
>
> Lott (for ROTH/MOYNIHAN) amendment No. 2325, in the nature of a substitute.
>
> Lott amendment No. 2332 (to amendment No. 2325), of a perfecting nature.
>
> Lott amendment No. 2333 (to amendment No. 2332), of a perfecting nature.
>
> Lott motion to commit with instructions (to amendment No. 2333), of a perfecting nature.
>
> Lott amendment No. 2334 (to the instructions of the motion to commit), of a perfecting nature.
>
> Lott (for ASHCROFT) amendment No. 2340 (to amendment No. 2334), to establish a Chief Agricultural Negotiator in the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the trade bill which is before us, and to register some disappointment with the path the leader has chosen to pursue because at this point the leader has indicated that he is not going to permit amendments to this trade bill. He has brought the bill to the floor, but he has what we call around here ''filled the tree.''