

it increases funding for early reading programs, a 12 percent increase over just last year. The President knows that if you can catch a child early, you will be able to correct that child's reading problems and allow that child to absorb the education that allows the child then to reach his or her full potential. The budget helps 5 million students pursue postsecondary education by providing \$12.9 billion in Pell grants, an \$856 million increase.

He is fulfilling his promise to increase the funding for historically black colleges and universities, minority-serving institutions, by 30 percent, \$394 million by 2005. That is this year's budget. It provides \$57 billion in direct and guaranteed student loans to postsecondary students and reforms higher education student aid by raising loan limits for first year students, expanding options to offer courses online and increasing loan forgiveness for those teaching certain subjects in high poverty schools, a great trade, a win for everyone. If we can put teachers in schools that have teacher shortages and forgive student loans, we will make up the interest that would be paid on those student loans by giving more children a chance for a quality education.

So how can one say the President is not doing right by education when he is focusing on the increases in spending in education that will fund No Child Left Behind, the act we passed to try to increase options for education so that our public school education can compete with private school education and give parents all the choices they could possibly need to do the best for their children?

We know every parent has the dream for his or her child that that child will be able to get a great education and send that child off into America, into the world, fully ready to earn a living, raise a family, and have a good life.

Let us talk about health care. Let us talk about what the President's priorities are in the budget in health care. The President expands health care coverage by making it more affordable for small businesses to purchase coverage for employees through association health care plans. It is very important that we lower the number of uninsured Americans. We can do that by making health care coverage available to small businesses that want to cover their employees and help their employees but they cannot afford the premiums if they are a small business. If we can pass association health care plans, as the President has requested us to do, we can take millions of Americans off the uninsured rolls. That is what we are asking our colleagues to help the President do.

It implements the prescription drug discount card to give immediate discounts of 10 to 25 percent to cardholders. In the next couple of months, our seniors will be able to take those prescription cards and buy drugs with a 10 to 25 percent discount. So that is im-

mediate help. That is while we are also building up a system that will give even better choices and more options for prescription drug coverage to our seniors. The President's budget will give \$600 annually in immediate assistance to low-income individuals to pay for prescription drugs. So the low-income people are going to get that \$600 direct, immediate assistance. And then the drug benefit plan should be implemented by 2006.

The President does provide incentives in his budget that will provide immediate help for our seniors for prescription drug discounts now, and to work toward the options that will provide real help for a prescription drug benefit for our seniors.

Environment: The President has several things in his budget to enhance the Nation's supply of clean, affordable energy by increasing funding for clean energy resources, by trying to have more research into hydrogen and fuel cell research and development. He wants a zero emissions coal fuel powerplant and he wants to fund development of that in this budget he is presenting.

He presents the President's Healthy Forests Initiative to prevent the catastrophic wildfires we saw raging through western America. It was just horrible to see what was happening in California this last year, the forest fires that were raging and taking people's homes as well as their property. The President has a \$58 million increase to remove excess wood and brush that fuel these fires.

He would accelerate the Great Lakes cleanup by providing \$45 million, a fivefold increase over previous levels to clean up the Great Lakes.

He tackles the remaining Superfund sites. We all know the toughest sites to clean up are these Superfund sites. But he is willing to take this on and increase, by 50 percent, the funding for Superfund cleanup so we will be able to get a handle on the worst environmental hazardous areas that we have in our country.

I have heard all the talks on the Senate floor today that have criticized the President's budget. I think the President has a balanced budget. He is prioritizing where we need to prioritize. He is providing for the national defense for our country. He is providing for the homeland security of our country. He is putting the money in education. He is putting the money into job creation and job training, and he is helping to meet the health care costs of our senior citizens and people who work for small businesses.

Our President presented to Congress a balanced budget. Everybody can find something to criticize, something they would not prioritize the same way. But the President is leading and the President has presented us a budget that will cut the deficit in half in 5 years while maintaining the homeland security and defense our people have asked him to provide. I think we should work

with the President to pass this budget and have some budget authority that will keep us from overspending and increasing the deficit further.

Mr. President, this should be a team, not a critical debating society. We should be teaming together to help America get through the war on terrorism, fund our priorities, cut the deficits, and be responsible to the people who elected us, as the President is trying to do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I will have a few remarks at the close on what has been a difficult day, but very positive in many ways as we have come together and faced the challenges before this body and have been able to conduct very productive and very useful business over the course of the day in spite of a major distraction on the outside that was magnified and illustrated by the fact that three Senate office buildings closed and people do not have access to a lot of the papers in their own offices. In spite of that, we are continuing the Nation's business in a very productive way.

COMMENDING A FLORIDA IMMIGRATION OFFICER

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I thank the leaders for giving me this time. I want to have the Senate recognize an American citizen who, very likely, prevented the entry into the United States of what is suspected as the 20th hijacker. I want to tell you this story about this immigration officer, who is at the Orlando International Airport. His name is Jose Melendez Perez.

Mr. Melendez, a little more than a month before the attacks on September 11, 2001, denied entry into the United States at the Orlando Airport of a Saudi national who had arrived at the airport from the Middle East by way of London. Federal authorities now believe that this man, Mohamed al-Qahtani, was the missing 20th hijacker. He was later captured in Afghanistan. He is now being held in Guantanamo Bay, a place I have just visited with our four-star general, General Hill, just before Christmas to have Christmas dinner with our troops who are conducting that operation there.

This story is quite an interesting story. It is beginning to get a flurry of recognition, and that is just recognition for this great American. The fact is, he was just doing his job, but he was so expert in it that he stopped the entry into the United States of this person. He alertly denied al-Qahtani entry into the Orlando Airport based on a combination of indicators that suggested he was up to no good. Mr. Melendez's experience, training, and instincts served our Nation very well.

It is interesting that what he told me, when I met with him last Friday to congratulate him, was that he just got

a feeling about this guy as he was referred to Mr. Melendez for secondary questioning, since he did not speak English. After questioning al-Qahtani and discovering many holes in his story—holes about why he was there, how long he was going to stay, who was going to meet him—and it is thought, very possibly, that it was the hijacker pilot of the first plane that went into the World Trade Center who was the guy upstairs to pick him up—Mohamed Atta. We don't know that for sure. But also there was the fact that he didn't have a return ticket or enough cash to purchase one.

After having that uneasy feeling about none of these answers and a very belligerent manner, by the way, by the man being questioned, Mr. Melendez put it into his own hands to make the decision that he was going to have him arrested, put into detention, and sent back the next day on a plane. By refusing al-Qahtani entry into the country, Mr. Melendez very well may have helped save many additional lives on September 11.

So this is a proud professionalism in the Immigration Service which so often gets nothing but complaints. I think it is time for us to stand up and salute Mr. Melendez and his service. He modestly protested to me last Friday that he was only doing his job. But we know because of the replicated actions of folks like him being done every day, not only in our Border Patrol and other immigration activities, but in the State Department and in decisions being made as to whether or not to grant a visa in embassies around this country, and with all of our intelligence services as they are making these decisions day by day, hour by hour, it is working to protect us.

Mr. Melendez has shown us what correct protection of our borders looks like. Now we want to rededicate and congratulate all of the hard-working colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security. We want to provide them with the resources they need to protect our borders and the ports of entry. Dedicated security personnel are not there to make travel more difficult; they are there to make us safer. Mr. Melendez in this instance apparently prevented the compounding of a national tragedy on September 11, 2 years ago.

Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity that I could recognize a wonderful American, an American who spent 27 years in the U.S. Army.

When Mr. Melendez retired, he decided to continue his Federal service, in this case with the Immigration Service. He is a wonderful American who has a big family centered in Orlando, with nine grandchildren spread over several cities and some back in his native Puerto Rico.

I am very proud today to share his story so our colleagues in the Senate might also recognize his brand of modest heroism.

I thank the Chair.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

ANGEL ARELLANO

• Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I am pleased to recognize Angel Arellano's efforts in raising funds for the Chaffee Zoo in Fresno, CA.

On Thanksgiving Day, after listening to a family conversation about the Chaffee Zoo's financial struggles, Angel Arellano, a 9-year-old girl from Fresno, CA, wrote a letter to the editor of the Fresno Bee. Her letter contained \$1.00 and urged all Fresno residents to match her donation to help pay for the Chaffee Zoo's much needed repairs. Miss Arellano's letter expressed her anguish at the animals' precarious future. She wrote that the animals deserved food, water, and a warm home. Her plea sparked a movement to save the zoo. Her heartfelt letter caught the attention of past and present Fresno residents, inspiring thousands of individuals to send donations, ranging from \$1.00 to \$10,000.00. Currently, total pledges and donations have reached nearly \$180,000.00 and have come from as far away as Great Britain.

Angel Arellano's concern motivated people in Fresno and around the world to help save a Fresno institution. Her letter conjured memories of past visits to the zoo and reminded people of the joy felt by children when visiting with family while spending a Sunday in the sunshine, enjoying one of Fresno's treasures.

Angel is a wonderful example of one person making a difference. To her, I say thank you. She has set a great example for all of us.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Evans, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 9:48 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House insist upon its amendment to the bill (S. 1920) to extend for 6 months the period for which chapter 12 of title 11 of the United States Code is reenacted, and ask a conference with the Senate on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon. Ordered, That the following Members be the managers of the conference on the part of the House:

From the Committee on the Judiciary, for consideration of the bill and the House amendment, and modifications committed to conference: Mr. SENSENBRENNER, Mr. HYDE, Mr. SMITH of Texas, Mr. CHABOT, Mr. CANNON, Ms. HART, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. BOUCHER, Mr. NADLER, and Mr. WATT of North Carolina.

From the Committee on Financial Services, for consideration of sections 901-906, 908-909, 911, and 1301-1309 of the House amendment, and modifications committed to conference: Mr. OXLEY, Mr. BAUCUS, and Mr. SANDERS.

The message also announced that pursuant to section 11054 of the Antitrust Modernization Commission Act of 2002 (15 U.S.C. 1 note), and the order of the House of December 8, 2003, the Speaker appoints the following members on the part of the House of Representatives to the Antitrust Modernization.

Commission: Mr. Donald G. Kempf, Jr., of New York, New York; Mr. John L. Warden of New York, New York.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-6027. A communication from the Auditor of the District of Columbia, transmitting, a report entitled "Fiscal Year Annual Report on Advisory Neighborhood Commissions"; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6028. A communication from the Auditor of the District of Columbia, transmitting, a report entitled "Audit of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3C for Fiscal Years 1999 Through 2003 as of March 31, 2003"; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6029. A communication from the Executive Director, Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Corporation's 2003 Annual Report; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6030. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of D.C. Act 15-238, "Comprehensive Housing Strategy Act of 2003" received on January 13, 2004; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6031. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of D.C. Act 15-239, "Nurse Staffing Agency Act of 2003" received on January 13, 2004; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6032. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of D.C. Act 15-240, "Authorization of the Spending of the Commercial Trust Fund Temporary Act of 2003" received on January 13, 2004; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6033. A communication from the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of D.C. Act 15-241, "Freedom Forum Newseum Real Property Tax Exemption and Equitable Real Property Tax Relief Temporary Act of 2003" received on January 13, 2004; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.