

Critical to our long-term competitiveness is an educated and skilled workforce. Chairman ENZI will introduce legislation today grounded in essential core principles.

We will improve our Federal education and training programs by setting high expectations and raising achievement for all students. We will demand accountability for results. And we will support learning opportunities for students at all stages in life.

It is time that health care followed the rest of our economy and join the Information Age of the 21st century.

Our health care system is a model of spectacular inefficiencies: high and rapidly rising health care costs, growing ranks of the uninsured, chasms in quality and health care disparities.

In order to transform this system, we must agree on a guiding principle: all Americans deserve the security of lifelong, affordable access to high-quality health care.

The focus of a 21st century health care system must be the patient. The system must also be responsive primarily to the consumer, rather than third-party payers. In a transformed system, we must reestablish the doctor-patient relationship, and utilize technology to promote efficiency and provide care.

I am pleased that we will be introducing legislation that begins to build on these principles, utilizing the work of Senator GREGG and the Republican Task Force on the Uninsured. We will address rising costs, increase coverage and expand access to care.

We are also a Nation that values community, family, and compassion. We will work to build on the success of our welfare laws which have helped over 7 million people move from dependency to the dignity of work.

But in doing so, we will recognize the need to support those who do the hard work of compassion—caring for those in need. Our tax proposals will support these private efforts while also helping those who are raising children and ending the discrimination against marriage in the law.

We will also continue our efforts to promote and defend marriage, and to support parents as they seek to guide their children in difficult times. Today, Senator ALLARD will introduce the marriage protection amendment which I hope will be sent to the States for ratification.

Last Thursday, we had the opportunity to celebrate the enduring value of a free people exercising their right to self-governance. But with each new political beginning, we have the responsibility to answer to the people we serve. I believe that we have such an opportunity, and I have great faith in my colleagues in the U.S. Senate to dutifully answer that call.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

INTRODUCING DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP BILLS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in the beginning of each session of Congress, the majority and minority introduce their bills. The first 10 bills are those of the majority. That is the tradition of the Senate. The distinguished Republican leader has worked hard, as have I, putting forward the bills that represent the majority. I have worked hard putting forward the bills that represent the minority, and I with Senator DURBIN, Senator STABENOW, and Senator SCHUMER today in the Lyndon Johnson Room presented our bills to the public.

The promise of America is a simple one. It is a promise that says if one works hard and plays by the rules, they can build a stronger, brighter future for themselves and their family. This promise has lived on for generations in this great country of ours. It is one that I have lived personally.

As a result of hard work and the generosity of people who helped me with my education, I received a good education, and in the process many doors were opened. After completing my education, I was able to go into business and now have what I believe is the best job in the world—a Member of the Senate representing the people of the State of Nevada.

My story is not unique. As many know, I was born and raised in Searchlight. Searchlight represents many places throughout this country. It represents countless individuals whose lives have been blessed, as mine has. I am sorry to say that these stories about a young boy or girl from a place like Searchlight are becoming fewer and fewer. We now have crumbling schools. The average school in America is 50 years old. We have schools such as those in the southern Nevada area, the Las Vegas area, that are being built at a rapid pace. As many as 18 in 1 year have to be dedicated to keep up with the growth of Las Vegas. The superintendent of public education has become a superintendent of public construction. School districts need help with their schools, in inner cities and in rural communities.

Good-paying jobs are giving way to jobs that, no matter how hard one works, just don't pay the bills. There are 45 million people without health care. That means there are too many Americans who are not getting the care they need to live healthy and prosperous lives.

This is the America we live in today, a country whose founding promise is slipping further away from reality for far too many American families, a country where a kid like me from Searchlight finds it harder to get ahead, despite the generosity of people in the community, the good will of teachers, and a work ethic, which is important.

Why do we find ourselves in this state today? Why is the promise of America, the promise that led me and others to this great Chamber, not still

alive and well for all of us? In part, it is because we have a Government that simply does not live up to the values upon which the promise was made. We have leaders whose poor planning and mismanagement have sent young men and women into battle overseas, some say without the equipment and support they deserve to succeed in the battlefield.

Some way, and I certainly underscore this, there was a plan to win the war but not a plan to win the peace. We have a Government that by any measure fails to do all it can to make our country safe and secure. We have leaders who love to create crises when they do not exist, such as Social Security, which will be funded for many decades into the future, some say as far as the year 2055.

Some say there is a crisis with judges. This morning someone asked: What happens if you do to President Bush this next 4 years what you did the first 4? I say, well, he should jump with joy. That would mean 408 judges he would get approved and 20 disapproved.

The Constitution has in it a clause that deals with advise and consent. If the oath I took just a few weeks ago to uphold the Constitution means anything, certainly that part of the oath that says I must live up to the Constitution, it says the Senate of the United States has an obligation, legal in nature, to give advice and consent to the President of his nominations. I will continue to do that. I believe that is a role we have.

There are real crises. I have talked about some of them. I talked about others: education, health care, the environment that we do not talk about much anymore. Energy is a crisis we have in this country. The staggering deficit we have developed these past 4 years is a crisis. I believe there are real crises that are crippling our economy, hurting the large and small businesses, and pricing too many families out of quality health care. That is what our legislation we introduce today deals with. We have a Government that has forgotten who it is responsible to, one that has become content with feeding tens of billions to the special interests while failing in its commitment to tens of millions of seniors.

America's promise will not stay alive if America's Government betrays it, and that is why at the outset of this Congress Senate Democrats are committed to restoring the promise of America by pursuing an agenda that honors the values behind it, the values of security, opportunity, and responsibility. These values are at the core of America's promise.

The ten Democratic bills which I will introduce today deal first with America's security. For example, we need to work to increase our Special Operations Forces by 2,000 individuals. We need to expand the pace and scope of programs to eliminate and safeguard nuclear materials and enhance efforts to prevent radioactive and other deadly