

and strengthen the economy. It's working because of the changes that were made in the loan program by Congress a few years ago. And it's working because more and more young people are taking advantage of a college education and then taking the opportunity to be responsible in paying their loans back.

Now, as we begin this second term, I just want to reiterate my commitment to ensuring that every person in this country has the tools that he or she needs to make the most of their own lives, that we open the doors of college education to everyone. The core of my second term efforts to build a bridge to the 21st century will be dramatic advancements in education. The fact is that some people who want to go to college still can't get there, so our first step should be to provide more opportunity. We can do that through the HOPE Scholarships tax cuts that I have proposed. They would allow Americans to deduct from their tax bill, dollar for dollar, the cost of the typical community college tuition for up to 2 years, to make the first 2 years of college as universal as a high school diploma is today. They would allow the typical family to deduct up to \$10,000 a year from their taxes for the cost of any college tuition. They would allow a family—I mean more families, many more families to save through IRA's and then to withdraw from those IRA's penalty-free if the money is being used to finance a college education.

Especially now that more and more students are taking responsibility for their own education, we simply have to do more to open the doors wider. The HOPE Scholarship tax cuts would make college affordable for every person in this country willing to work for it, especially when you couple that with the availability of the loans and the work-studies. America needs these tax cuts to help America pay for college, and I hope Congress will help us to pass them into law.

Let me also point out one of our other proposals that I've had on the table in Congress for 4 years now, which I am determined to get passed in this next Congress, is the "GI bill" for America's workers. A lot of people in the work force need to go back to school. There are now scores of different training programs that we propose to consolidate and send a skills grant to people who lose their jobs or people who are dramatically unemployed and let them

make the decision to use this skills grant in the same way, to finance a college education.

And let me finally say that while we can make sure that everyone can go to college, it's also important that everyone be prepared to go. We have to set the highest standards for public education in this country so that highly trained teachers demand peak performance from students. We should require that students pass tests that actually test whether they learn what the standards say they're supposed to know before they go on from grade to grade. We should reward teachers who do well and make it possible for local schools to remove those who do not. We should expand public school choice and improve and expand on charter schools run by teachers and parents that survive only if they produce results. We should make sure every child can read independently by the third grade, and I hope that we'll have another 100,000 young people helping in that million-person brigade of volunteers we're going to need to teach our young people to read. And we should finish the job of connecting every classroom to the Internet by the year 2000.

If every 8-year-old can read, every 12-year-old can log on to the Internet, and every 18-year-old can go to college, America will enter the 21st century with every person able to have the skills that he or she needs to succeed in building a good life.

So let me say that these young people here—they're a shining example of opportunity and responsibility—give me the hope that we will succeed. And I thank you, Fiona, and I thank all the others and all of them like you all across America today who will be watching this and who will be building our future.

Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Secretary.

#### *Legislative Agenda*

*Q.* What do you think is the chance of getting these through Congress?

*The President.* Well, I think they'll be very good. You know, we've worked very hard on our budget, and our OMB Director, Frank Raines, has begun conversations with Members of Congress already. I have spoken, obviously, on many occasions with Senator Lott and Senator Daschle, Speaker Gingrich and Leader Gephardt. And if the atmosphere—I can now only add to what I've already said—if the atmosphere of this Congress reflects what happened in the last 2 months of the last Congress, I