

here in the valley and other areas of America, the unemployment rate is still unconscionably high. One of the biggest reasons is that too many young people who live here drop out of school. Many leave for good reasons, as I said earlier; they want to help their families by working. But in a global economy, the best way for a young person to help his or her family is to stay in school, set yourself on a college path early, and complete at least 2 years of college. People who at least have a community college degree have a very good chance of getting a job with stability and prospects of a growing income. People who do less than that in a global economy where we depend more and more on what we can learn every day and the new skills we can apply, are playing Russian roulette with their future. That is why we have worked very hard with dedicated Members of Congress like Mr. Hinojosa to reduce the dropout rates and to reward people who stay and learn.

And let me tell you what I meant when I said there's a guarantee for people who go on to college now. Last year in the balanced budget, we put in place a college opportunity agenda that literally had the largest investment in helping people go to college since the GI bill was passed when the soldiers from the valley came home 50 years ago.

Here's what it means to the people who live here. First, we created HOPE scholarships and an education IRA; they started on January 1st. HOPE scholarships will basically use the tax system to reimburse families for up to \$1,500 a year to pay for the first 2 years of college. That means schools like South Texas Community College will be virtually free to virtually all Americans. With education IRA's, parents will now be able to set money aside for their children's college education and let it grow, and then withdraw from the fund later without paying any taxes on it.

The second thing we've done is to create lifetime learning credits, tax cuts worth up to \$1,000 a year to students who go to the 3d and 4th years of college or who go to graduate school, and those are available to adults who go back to school or to training programs because they have to change careers or they need to upgrade their skills.

The third thing we did is to increase Pell grant scholarships for nearly 4 million low and moderate income families. And finally, we made student loans easier to get and easier to pay

off as a percentage of your income, so that no one ever has to fear borrowing money to go to college because they're afraid they will go broke trying to pay the loan back. Now you can get the loan at lower cost and less time and pay it back as a percentage of your income when you get out of school.

We are also offering young people more opportunities to do community service through the AmeriCorps program and earn money to go to college; 100,000 have taken advantage of it.

Now, there is one other thing I want to talk about. A lot of people have to work their way through school, like I did, and usually those of us who do think we're the better for it. Sometimes, if you have to work a little, you even are more disciplined with your time and you wind up studying a little more. The balanced budget I will submit to Congress next month will include a record 1 million work-study positions for college students. That represents an increase of nearly 50 percent during the last 3 years alone. It's not just about increasing financial aid, that's about increasing the circle of community service and the winner's circle of opportunity for the future.

For example, work-study students at more than 800 colleges in America today are helping to make sure that we reach one of our education goals, that every 8-year-old can read. Through the America Reads challenge, tens of thousands of college students are earning money for college while going into our schools to tutor young people to make sure that they don't get out of the third grade without being able to read independently; and now we'll have a million people doing that kind of work.

Let me just say this to all the young people here in this audience: We can create opportunities, but you have to seize it. I am determined—whenever I come to South Texas, I leave more determined than ever to find some way to better reward the energy, the patriotism, the commitment, the vision of the people here. We can do more to build on the empowerment zones and to do other things to help you to grow your economy, to preserve your environment, to create more jobs. But nothing—nothing—will matter in the end unless the young people who live here are committed to developing their own minds and keeping their visions high and believing in themselves and their futures. That is the most important thing. You have to believe that.