

I am grateful that last year the Congress agreed with me to set aside the surplus until we save Social Security. Now it is time to actually save Social Security for the 21st century and to strengthen and secure Medicare for many more years. Medicare is a great legacy of Congressman Dingell's father. It is a great program. A lot of people depend upon it. It needs some support. And there will be some money involved.

We have the ability now to deal with the challenges of the aging population. And as you know, I also proposed a few days ago a tax credit to help people pay for long-term care. If we can save Social Security for the 21st century, if we can strengthen and secure Medicare for the 21st century, if we can help families to deal with the challenges of long-term care, we will have gone a long way not only to make sure that the older years of people will be more secure but to alleviate one of the principal worries that people of my generation have, which is that our retirement, because we're such a big group, will be so costly that it will undermine our children's standard of living and their ability to raise our grandchildren. None of us want that, and we have to take this surplus and this opportunity and deal with these challenges. And we ought to do it right now, this year, with no excuses.

Now thirdly, we must do more to continue to close the investment gap for our young people and our people in their working years. For more and more, the income gap in America is a skill gap. We've made dramatic progress in opening the doors of college to all Americans, in hooking our classrooms up to the Internet, in raising standards in our schools and promoting more school choice and charter schools, in putting 100,000 new teachers in our schools to deal with the growing student population, which we began to do last year and we must continue this year.

In my upcoming State of the Union Address, I will propose further reforms and improvements in our public schools, and I will also advance a new training agenda to give the American people the assurance that they will be able to get the skills they need for a lifetime of competition in the global economy.

Fourth, at this time of turmoil in the international economy, we must do more to make the world economy work for all our people and, indeed, for ordinary citizens throughout the

world. I want to press forward with open trade; I have always believed in it. It would be a terrible mistake, at this time of economic fragility for so many of our friends and neighbors and democratic allies, for the United States to build walls of protectionism that could set off similar responses around the world and lead us into a sustained global recession. That would be a mistake. On the other hand, if we expect the American people to support open trade, we must be prepared to bring the full force of our trade laws to bear upon any and all unfair trade practices.

Just yesterday I addressed such a practice when I sent a comprehensive action plan to Congress outlining our response to the dramatic increase in steel imports into the United States, especially in the area of hot-rolled steel, where the prices are below what anyone believes the reasonable cost of production is anywhere in the world.

Let me be clear: I am especially concerned about the dramatic surge of steel imports from Japan. But there are problems elsewhere, too. If these imports do not soon return to their pre-financial-crisis levels, my administration is willing to initiate forceful action under our section 201 surge protection laws and under our antidumping laws. An open, fair, rule-based system is essential to American prosperity. I cannot go to the Congress and ask for expanded trading authority, for an Africa trade initiative, for a trade initiative for our neighbors in the Caribbean, unless the American people know that whatever the rules are, we intend to play by the rules, and we expect others to play by the rules, as well.

I would also tell you that this question of whether ordinary working people are benefited by expanded trade is an even more deep question in other countries than it is in the United States. I went all the way to Switzerland a few months ago on the 50th anniversary of the World Trade Organization, to argue for changes in the world trading system for the 21st century, changes that will make sure that the competition never becomes a race to the bottom, changes in labor protection, consumer protection, environmental protection. We should support more free trade, and we should support more input from and consideration of those sectors. We should be leveling up, not leveling down.

Strengthening the foundations of trade also means we have to stabilize the architecture of