

Similar sentiments are heard in other fire's-edge towns. In Ormond Beach, on the Atlantic Coast, Tim Curtis has turned his restaurant, Houligan's, into a veritable arcade for firefighters, offering everything from massages to haircuts.

Here in DeLand, firefighters are astonished at the massive outpouring.

"I've never been to a place where their towns are burning down and they're worried about us," said Mike Caldaro, a firefighter from western Florida just back from a 23-hour workday.

He is one of 200 firefighters staying at Stetson University, which opened its dormitories for firefighters. His colleague, Edward Osborne, fought fires so hot they melted his thermal boots. When he went to Wal-Mart to buy more, the cashier handed back his money.

"She gave me my boots and she gave me a hug. I needed both," Osborne said.

Mark Puhl, a firefighter from Nelsonville, Ohio, who arrived in DeLand with a relief crew Saturday night, got an early taste of the appreciation.

"Usually response like this comes through toward the end of a job," he said. "But we had people in the airport thanking us in advance."

His colleague, Lea Ann Parsley of Granville, Ohio, understood. The wildfires she typically fights are in sparsely populated areas out West.

"We're usually protecting timber," she said. "Here we're protecting people's homes. It hits home a lot more."

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I am very pleased that the President of the United States is going to Florida today, meeting with the victims and thanking the firefighters for their valiant effort.

Mr. President, I have lived in Florida for more than sixty-one years.

In that time, I have never observed wildfires as widespread and unmanageable as those that have plagued our state for the last forty-four days.

On behalf of over 14 million Floridians, I offer my deepest thanks to the thousands of Americans who have voluntarily left their homes and risked their lives so that our state's fire victims might not lose theirs.

They are true heroes, and all of us who proudly call Florida our home are forever in their debt.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. JEFFORDS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I yield to the Senator from Kentucky for the purpose of a unanimous consent request.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I thank the Senator from Vermont.

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. 2282

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this agreement has been cleared on both sides.

I ask unanimous consent that at 2 p.m. today the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. 2282, which is at the desk, and it be considered under the following agreement:

Two hours on the bill to be equally divided between myself and Senator

BIDEN, or our designees; that no motions or amendments be in order except those agreed to by both managers; and that following the conclusion or yielding back of time, the bill be advanced to third reading and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill, all without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I thank the Senator from Vermont.

Mr. DODD addressed the Chair.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I will proceed as I started earlier. I apologize to my colleagues for the minor interruption. I wanted to make a correction on that unanimous consent agreement.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION AMENDMENTS OF 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, There are few pieces of legislation as important to American families as the bill we take up today—the Higher Education Amendments of 1998.

I have been pleased and honored to work with the chairman and the ranking member of the Labor and Human Resources Committee, and with Senator COATS of Indiana to put this bill together over the last year. I appreciate the tremendous effort of Senator JEFFORDS, Senator KENNEDY and Senator COATS on this bill, which is going to move I think rather expeditiously. There will be some amendments, but it is a tribute to the efforts of the membership of this group and their staff that we have reached a point where we have this very, very important piece of legislation that has achieved as much harmony as it has. So I begin these brief remarks by commending them and the staff members who have put this bill together. And, together, we bring to the floor today a strong, bipartisan bill—a bill that American families need and deserve.

Mr. President, America has long been known as the land of promise. We take great pride in that as Americans. Those words are used at every national holiday—"a land of promise." I think the foundation of that promise has been, during the more than two centuries of our existence as a nation, education. A democracy as complicated, as sophisticated, and as subtle as ours could not succeed without an educated population. Education is also the root of our economic strength. Without an educated population, you cannot remain on the cutting edge of industry and business.

I think any successful national endeavor you talk about, Education is a critical factor in its success. It is the central theme that has created the kind of opportunity and success this Nation has enjoyed for so many years—particularly, I would add, higher education. This is no secret. Parents recognize that their child's success is, in

no small measure, dependent on his or her educational achievement. Statistics bear this out. A person with a college degree earns twice as much as one with just a high school education.

But this issue is not only a concern of families. Higher education has also, as I said a moment ago, defined and shaped America's economy in the post-World War II era. Our economy has grown on the strength of knowledge-based, highly skilled industries and workers. This would not have been possible without our unparalleled network of universities and colleges and our Federal commitment to ensuring access to these institutions of higher learning.

Since the GI bill, millions of Americans have been able to attend college because of the assistance of their Federal Government. Today, in fact, 75 percent of all student aid is Federal.

Unfortunately, families increasingly worry that college is slipping beyond their grasp as college costs rise and student debt mounts. Studies suggest that even with the nearly \$35 billion of Federal aid available each year, affordability is a significant factor for those at all income levels. For middle-income families, college costs are shaping students' decisions about where to attain their higher education and what type of careers they intend to pursue. For the neediest of students in our country, affordability of education is already affecting the fundamental decision of whether to attend higher education at all.

We cannot discuss the Higher Education Act, which is centrally about ensuring access to higher education, without discussing cost. I firmly believe that the choice of an institution, the choice of a career, and the choice of whether to attend college at all should not be based alone on the issue of cost—and for too many families today, it is.

Let's face it. Families are increasingly unable to cope with the cost increases that we see in higher education. According to a survey conducted by the American Council on Education, the public worries a great deal about the cost of attending college. They believe that college is too expensive, and they think that the cost can be brought down without affecting academic quality.

When asked what concerned them most about their children's well-being, respondents across this country in all income groups ranked paying for college as the second biggest concern. Their largest concern was use of illegal drugs. But right behind that was the cost of a higher education.

Today, 4 years at one of our Nation's leading colleges can easily total well over \$120,000. Estimates are that the family of a child born today who might enter college at age 18 in the year 2016 could easily be looking at a cost of well over \$250,000 for 4 years of college education at one of our nation's leading universities. In nearly all families, a