

disaggregation of data on dropouts. That would make it much harder for us to help vulnerable students or even to discover which students need help. With the right policies we can reduce the dropout rate. In fact, that is why last summer I introduced S. 1554, the Pathways for All Students to Succeed, or the PASS Act. This bill will reduce dropouts and help us close that achievement gap.

My bill, the PASS Act, does three things. First of all, it will help students to learn to read and write by providing \$1 billion to help our schools hire literacy coaches. Second, my bill ensures our students are taking the classes and getting the support they need to finish high school, and it provides \$2 billion for academic and career counselors to ensure all of our students have a personalized plan for completing high school and then going on to college.

Finally, my bill provides extra help to schools that need it the most by providing \$500 million in grants to help improve our low-performing schools.

I hope the Senate will pass the bill this year. These are critical steps we could be taking if this Congress were to finally focus on improving the lives of our students.

Let me turn to the Federal role in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Nearly 30 years ago, the Federal Government made a commitment of equal opportunity to our Nation's children with disabilities. With that commitment, again we gave the promise the Federal Government would pay 40 percent of the average per-student cost for every special education student. Today, however, the Federal Government is paying less than 19 percent of the costs. Over the past 4 years of fiscal crisis, Federal funding has fallen \$40 billion short of that 40-percent promise. This hole in special education funding not only hurts our disabled students, it also hurts all of their classmates because in order to make up for Federal funding shortfalls, many districts have been forced to take money from their general education budgets and that affects all students.

Over the past couple of years, IDEA has received increases in Federal funding levels. However, according to the Congressional Research Service, at increases of \$1 billion each year the Federal Government will never fulfill the promise of funding at 40 percent. And even if increases were \$1 billion plus inflation, we would not reach the promised level of 40 percent until 2035. That is another 30 years from now.

Last week the Senate passed a reauthorized version of IDEA. Yet, despite clear support, the Senate did not pass an amendment by Senators HAGEL and HARKIN to fully fund IDEA through mandatory funding.

Education must be a priority for our country if we want a stable economy and a brighter future. We need to focus not only on funding Federal mandates but on access to quality early child-

hood education and postsecondary education.

This year, Congress is working on reauthorizing the Head Start law. I can tell you as a former preschool teacher, I know firsthand how these critical first early years are for our children's future learning, yet this year the President's budget barely allows Head Start to keep up with inflation. That amount is not nearly enough, especially in a year where we are examining new requirements for this program. Without a substantial increase in funding, these programs will have to shut the door to needy at-risk children who will then fall further behind before they even reach kindergarten.

What troubles me more is this President's clear intention is to end this critical program. We all know proposals to block grant programs will eventually lead to decreased funding for the program. Block granting Head Start is not only supported and pushed by the President but also by the House of Representatives. I know I will continue fighting to protect this very critical Head Start Program that has made such a huge difference in the lives of millions of low-income children.

Public education is the bedrock of our democracy. It helps create good, active citizens and it gives our families the tools they need to put food on the table and a roof over their heads. It also ensures each generation of Americans will have more opportunities than their parents and their grandparents did. There is so much at stake in making sure we are moving education forward for all of America's students.

I turn back to the question I posed at the start of my remarks. Are we better off than we were 4 years ago? Sadly, the answer is no. Our students deserve better. Our country deserves better. I am going to keep fighting here in the Senate to ensure that all of America's children get a good education.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Washington for her statement relative to education. I believe the theme, the question she has led off with, is one we will be returning to over and over again.

I know how much the Presiding Officer respects Ronald Reagan and how much he looks back on his Presidency and even candidacy as defining moments in the history of our Nation. President Reagan, despite my differences with him politically, had a way of saying things very directly. He was one of the best communicators we have ever had in the White House. He could, in a few words, convey a message so directly and so simply.

This statement of candidate Reagan is one that is a hallmark now of American politics. Not a campaign goes by that someone doesn't say:

Well, as Ronald Reagan once said, "Are you better off than you were 4 years ago?"

It is a very simple question. It is a question that must be asked each time the American people face an important election, and this may be one of the most important in history.

What we hear back from the American people when we ask this question is a resounding no. They say in overwhelming numbers, America is going in the wrong direction. We need a new direction in this country. We need a strong leadership that not only protects America but also creates opportunity in America. You have heard repeatedly from my colleague from Michigan how this has a direct impact when it comes to the health care costs of families; how it has a direct impact—the Senator from Washington made this point—when it comes to educational costs. I think honestly what they have said is demonstrated by a few charts I have here.

This is one that I think tells the whole story about the last 4 years of the Bush administration. During this period of time, average weekly earnings for families have gone up 1 percent. President Bush can point to the fact that over 4 years, average income for Americans has barely increased. But what has happened to the expenses faced by Americans in the same period of time? The cost of gasoline, up 25 percent. My friend, Senator WYDEN of Oregon, will address that, as he has time and again on the floor of the Senate in the next part of this morning business time.

Look at the cost of college tuition. It has gone up 28 percent in the 4 years President Bush has been in office; the cost of family health care premiums; some 36 percent.

Now we will take a closer look at the family health care premiums as an illustration. When the President took office, the average health care premium paid on an annual basis was \$6,348. Now look at the number: \$9,068. The President can send out a check for \$100, \$200, or \$300 and say to middle America: Here is your tax cut; go out and go crazy. Then take a look at this and say: Wait a minute, that tax cut just disappeared. More and more workers and families are paying more and more for health care premiums.

Take a look at this chart. Who really is better off? The average weekly earnings show no increase over the same period of time.

Look at the HMO profits. The profits of the health insurance companies have gone up 50 percent in terms of growth. The CEO compensation for the people who run the HMOs and other corporations is up 61 percent.

Working families, struggling to get by, have seen little or no increase in their income, while those who are profiting from HMOs and from other corporations are doing quite well, thank you.

I remember when Warren Buffett came to say hello to us. He is one of

my favorites. His annual report is a must-read for anyone who follows common sense in American business. Warren Buffett, the second wealthiest man in America, said to some Senators: Many people say our policies are class warfare in America today. He said: I have news for you, my class is winning.

He is right, because, quite honestly, the disparity of income in America is worse than it has ever been. This President, with his tax cuts and his policies, has made it worse.

So 4 years later we go back to the same basic Ronald Reagan question: Are you better off now than you were 4 years ago? The answer, quite honestly, for most working Americans, is a resounding no.

Let me address two particular issues that hit most families. I talked about the increase in college tuition costs. You do not need to remind families that if their son or daughter is lucky enough to get into a good school, they will probably be in a position 4 or 5 years later where they are deeply in debt. I have seen it in my family and many others have seen it in theirs. Young people starting out not only have a challenge of finding a good job and a career opportunity but are challenged by what to do with this mountain of debt.

There was a time when the Federal Government helped. There was a time when we had scholarships and loans and grants to help students along so they would not end up more deeply in debt when they graduate from college than many of us were when we bought our first home many years ago.

Over the course of higher education and its cost, we see the gap between the haves and the have-nots is increasing. Over the course of their career, the difference in income between an 18-year-old high school graduate and a 24-year-old college graduate is now more than a million, so it is certainly worth going to school, but college tuition is out of reach for too many American students.

According to the College Board, the 13-percent inflation-adjusted real increase in tuition at public colleges last year was the highest in 30 years. In my State, it is going up. With the weak economy, with the limited resources coming from Washington, with the struggle that many States are having with this recession, which continues to linger, fewer and fewer dollars go into State treasuries and fewer and fewer dollars go from those treasuries to colleges and universities, so they raise tuition.

We are in a recession, losing jobs. Real income is going down and the cost of education is going up. That is a fact. Private school tuition has gone up even higher. Federal assistance has fallen far behind.

In the 1970s, the maximum Pell grant for low-income and working-class families covered about 40 percent of the average cost of going to school. In the 1970s, Pell grants and others helped

cover 40 percent. Today, it covers 15 percent. So even the most deserving students from low-income families find the Federal programs are a shadow of what they used to be. They do not provide them the help they need. That means that 48 percent of low-income high school graduates who qualify for college do not go to a 4-year school because they simply do not have the money.

From 1987 to 1999, completion rates on college prep courses for the Nation's poorest students grew by 20 percent. So it means more students are ready for school; they just cannot afford to go to school.

When you look at what we have done on a Federal level time and again, this administration has not provided the helping hand to college students and their families. This President proposed to freeze Pell grants at \$4,050 a year for the third year in a row, even though we know the cost of education continues to go up in a double-digit pace. His budget calls for a \$823 million increase that merely holds the line on existing grant award levels. He proposes to freeze campus-based aid, cut Perkins loans, and eliminate the LEAP grants. In total, 78,000 students in America will lose grants because of the Bush budget policies, meaning the cost of education is higher and the helping hand from the Federal Government is not going to be there.

Are those families better off today than they were 4 years ago? Is the Bush policy, the budget policy on financing and education, for struggling students, from lower income families, better than it was 4 years ago? By almost every measure, the answer is a resounding no.

We need to get our priorities straight in this country. If we are going to have an American century in the 21st century, as we did in the 20th century, we better focus on students and education. We better make sure that deserving students who want to realize the American dream, many of them the first in their family to be able to go to college, have that chance. They cannot have a chance when the college education has been priced at a level where they cannot afford it, or even worse, graduating with heavy debt. Many of these students cannot pursue the career choice they really want.

How many students graduate wanting to be teachers, good teachers in grade schools and high schools, will be able to realize that dream if they face a mountain of debt? Starting off as a high school or grade school teacher at \$30,000 a year, with a pretty limited take home pay, is almost impossible if you have to pay back a mountain of student loans in the process. So they try other things that might make more money and we lose the teacher we need to inspire the next generation.

So when the President makes a decision on budgets to cut back in helping students pay for a college education, it has a ripple effect all the way down the

line in terms of new jobs and opportunity, in terms of tomorrow's teachers and nurses, in terms of those who we need to make America the strong nation it needs to be.

Let me also address an issue which is hitting Americans in the pocketbook. Take a look at what has happened to the price of gasoline between when President Bush took office and what it is today. A gallon was \$1.47 in 2001 when President Bush came to office. Now it is up to an average of \$2.01.

Now look at what is happening with the oil companies that are selling the gasoline. It has been a pretty good year for the oil companies. If you think you are getting pinched at the pump, take a look at what is happening here: For British Petroleum, a 165-percent profit increase; Chevron Texaco, 294 percent; ConcoPhillips—what has happened here—only a 44-percent profit increase. They are falling behind; Exxon Mobil, 125 percent.

Take a look at gas prices in the city of Chicago, which I am proud to represent. They are well over \$2 a gallon in downtown Chicago. In California, I understand they are bumping up against \$3 a gallon.

So you ask yourself: What can we do?

First—and Senator WYDEN will spend some time on this issue—why are we filling this Strategic Petroleum Reserve at a faster clip now than ever when the price of petroleum that we are putting into it is at record levels? The second question I need to ask, obviously, is, When is this President going to confront these oil companies about their record profits at the expense of families and businesses? The third and obvious question is, Candidate Bush, candidate George W. Bush, said if he ever faced this, he would get on the phone to OPEC and tell them to stop squeezing American consumers and families and businesses. I guess the telephone line is dead between the White House and Riyadh. He is not calling Saudi Arabia to tell them they have to release more oil to the United States. The President as candidate said he would do it. The President as President refuses to do it. Why? Haven't we done enough for the Middle Eastern nations and the OPEC countries, putting hundreds of thousands of American lives at risk for stability and security in the Middle East? And the President will not pick up the phone to say to them, for goodness' sake, you put our economy at risk when you hold back oil. And that is exactly what they are doing. We need Presidential leadership.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SMITH). The Senator from Oregon.

GASOLINE PRICING

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I have come to the Senate floor this morning to state, in accord with my policy of publicly announcing any hold that I