

I would argue that teacher pay is the most important area of all education. Yet our teachers work in sometimes deplorable conditions and for little pay. Public school teachers in America today make an average of \$43,335 a year. One would assume that about half of the States have teacher salaries above the national average and the other half have teacher salaries below that level. But actually, only 12 States, plus the District of Columbia, have salaries that are higher than the national average. The other 38 States are below the national average. In fact, the dollar gap between the lowest and the highest average salaries varies greatly from a low of \$30,265 in South Dakota to a high of \$53,281 in New Jersey.

Sadly, our teachers have even lost financial ground over the past few years. In the past decade, teacher salaries rose only one-half of 1 percent when inflation is taken into account. In many States, teachers actually lost ground to inflation.

Today in this Nation, teacher salaries account for a smaller proportion of total education spending than they did 40 years ago. In 1960, the average education expenditure devoted to teacher salaries was 51 percent. Today it is 36.7 percent, the lowest percentage since records have been kept.

As a result, many of the best and brightest of our young people today steer away from the classrooms to join the ranks of better paying professions. It has become clear that unless we in Congress take some drastic action, and take it soon, this disparity will only get worse because on the horizon ominous storm clouds loom darkly. We must hire 2 million more teachers in the next decade to keep up with new students who are entering our schools. Where are we going to get all those new teachers? Where?

Enrollment at our colleges of education is down 30 percent. Among those who are willing to try teaching, 40 percent leave the profession before the end of their fifth year. In some States, almost 20 percent leave after just 1 year. Most, of course, leave to pursue better paying careers. And who can blame them? It is a hollow message when we constantly tell our teachers how invaluable they are and then pay them so little.

What can we do, and what can we do quickly, to stop this brain drain from our schools? How can we make teaching more competitive with better paying professionals? I will tell you how we could have an immediate effect. Let our teachers keep more of their hard-earned money.

I will be introducing a bill to give our teachers an immediate pay raise in the form of a tax cut. Simply put, teachers would keep more money in their pocket each payday and send less of it to the IRS. They need this money back home more than we need it up here. And I guarantee you they will spend it more wisely than we will. Hard-earned money always goes further in a house-

hold than it does in a rathole. I call it the Thank You Teachers Tax Cut. Here is how it would work.

It would include every full-time teacher, public and private, in every prekindergarten and K through 12 classroom. This tax cut would start immediately and would increase the longer the teacher stayed in the classroom.

Teachers with fewer than 5 years in the classroom, about 900,000 teachers, would get a tax cut equal to one-third of their Federal income tax. Teachers with 5 to 10 years of experience, also about 900,000 teachers, would get to keep two-thirds of what they would normally pay in Federal income tax. Teachers with more than 10 years' experience—about 1.8 million teachers—would have no Federal income tax at all for as long as they stayed in the classroom.

The Thank You Teachers Tax Cut would mean immediate pay raises of between 5 and 15 percent. It would put more money into teachers' pockets each and every payday. It would immediately give some equity to this noble profession. But it would be more than just more money. It would be a tangible show of our respect and our gratitude to this profession that is all too often taken for granted.

So it would be a huge tax cut, more than \$16 billion a year at a minimum—probably more, according to my very rough math. But when we are talking about a projected budget for 2003 of \$2.085 trillion, \$16 billion is not even 1 percent of that budget. Don't tell me we cannot tighten our belt that little to help our teachers.

We all know our teachers are not paid adequately. They are not in my State and they are not in your State. Some need more help than others. Mississippi has the lowest average salary for teachers in the South and South Dakota has the lowest paid teachers in the Nation. I would plead for the leaders of both parties in this Senate to support this tax cut.

I also think our Nation's Governors would like this proposal for two reasons: First, it does not interfere with the States' rights to set teacher salaries. But it does boost the bottom line for every State's teachers, and that is what is important.

Our Governors will also like it because today, and especially in the next few years, that Pacman called Medicaid is going to gobble up State revenues as never before. I warn you, that will leave a much smaller pot of money available at the State level for teacher pay raises.

I realize there are shortages in other important professions that have low salaries and bad working conditions, and I have great sympathy for those workers, too. But the long-term security of this Nation is wrapped up in our schools, and that is why this tax cut for teachers is such an important one now.

This tax cut is a chance to really help our children by making sure we

put good teachers in their classrooms and keep them there. It is also a chance to help our deserving teachers. It is the fastest, surest way to put more money into their pockets immediately.

Finally, this is a chance for the Senate, for the entire Congress, to say thank you to our teachers.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Kansas is recognized.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. ROBERTS. Madam President, thank you very much. This is one of those speeches I had not intended to make. I have to make it, but I would just as soon not make it.

I rise today to provide a few comments on the situation we are facing regarding the farm bill and the possibility of an assistance package this year. My colleagues are working very hard in the conference. I don't mean to perjure anybody's intent. These are friends of mine, and I know we have strong differences of opinion. But we are in pretty rough shape for the shape we are in, in farm country, and we need assurance that there will be an assistance package as of this year.

For several weeks now, I have been warning that we need to either get a farm bill finished and apply it to this year's crop or pass an agriculture assistance package, and then pass a new bill that goes into effect for the 2003 crop. The thinking behind that is it is better to pass a good bill than simply disagree on a bad bill and try to expedite that.

Prior to the Easter and Passover recess, I introduced an assistance package that I said was a placeholder if a bill could not be passed almost immediately after the recess period. Well, it is now April 17. We still have not passed a bill. In fact, the negotiations did break down yesterday, unfortunately.

It seems clear that a bill will not be passed as of this week. Madam President, the clock, if not expired, is certainly ticking. It is the 11th hour and 59th minute. It is time for us to admit what farmers and ranchers already know: It is too late to pass a bill that applies to this year's crop.

Consider these facts:

The 2002 wheat crop was planted last fall and harvesting in the far southern region will begin next month.

Several crop reports in recent days have said that 9 percent of the Nation's cotton crop is planted, including 37 percent in Arizona, 35 percent in California, and 13 percent in Texas, with the rest of the States starting to plant.

Corn planting is 59 percent complete in Texas; 25 percent in Tennessee; 3 percent in North Carolina; 26 percent in Missouri; 17 percent in Kentucky; and in Kansas—yes, we grow cotton—11 percent.

Another article said corn planters were already in the field in eastern

Iowa. And 43 percent of the sorghum crop is planted in Texas and 18 percent in Arkansas. Rice: Texas, 85 percent planted; Louisiana, 69 percent; 10 percent in Arkansas.

Our producers and our bankers, lenders, must make planting and lending decisions. We cannot continue this game of Charlie Brown, Lucy, and the football. This will not work in farm country.

Our producers have been told that the bill could be completed prior to Christmas, the bill could be completed right after the first of the year, the bill would be completed by Easter, and the bill would be completed by April 15.

Quite frankly, we have people who crawl out of train wrecks faster than the farm bill conference is proceeding in regard to the tough amendments they must reconcile. My producers do not believe any predictions they hear at this point. They now need to make decisions forced by their lenders.

I want to make it clear to colleagues that if we pass a new bill for this year's crops, we are setting ourselves up for another disaster or supplemental bill this fall—even after spending \$73.5 billion in new funding for agriculture. Unfortunately—and this is the one I want all farmers, ranchers, and agribusiness to pay attention to—you are going to discover that in both House and Senate farm bill proposals, there will be no supplemental AMTA statement, no market loss payment in September, as producers have grown accustomed to.

Instead, under the countercyclical proposals in the two bills, producers and farmers could receive a portion of their countercyclical payment for wheat in December, while other crops would receive no assistance until next spring.

To put it another way, none of this countercyclical assistance, after all the talk we have heard in the last years as to the current farm bill—about the lack of a safety net and the need for countercyclical assistance—none of this assistance for the 2002 crop will even go out until the spring of 2003. When farmers discover this, there is going to be an outcry. That is why, in a recent poll, 70 percent of the farmers said about the supplemental in this crop bill: Put the new farm bill under 2003.

We are receiving indications that any agreement on the farm bill will include much higher loan rates—most likely at the expense of direct payments or the countercyclical payment.

It was 97 degrees in Dodge City 2 days ago. That is pretty hot for Dodge. Nearly 50 percent of our Kansas wheat crop has been rated at below favorable conditions and getting worse. My producers who may have no crop to harvest—and that is the condition in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska, moving north—will gain nothing from higher loan rates. Loan rates don't help if you don't have a crop.

This is a blueprint for disaster. We cannot continue down this path. It ap-

pears the farm bill will not be completed this week. We still have 8 or 10 contentious amendments. They probably should not be part of the commodity title.

I am putting colleagues on notice that as soon as the procedural situation allows, I will either ask unanimous consent that S. 2040—the supplemental bill I just referred to, which I previously introduced—be pulled up and, hopefully, passed by the Senate or I will offer it as an amendment to any bill under consideration by the Senate.

Madam President, it didn't have to go down this road. I hope my Senate colleagues serving on the conference—good men and women all—can reach some accommodation by the end of this week and break this logjam or we are going to have to go this route because we will be in a world of trouble in farm country. We already are.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

SECRETARY POWELL'S MIDEAST TRIP

Mr. SPECTER. Madam President, I have sought recognition to comment briefly on the trip to the Mideast by Secretary of State Colin Powell.

At the outset, I compliment President Bush for his initiative in sending Secretary Powell to the region, and I compliment Secretary Powell for his strenuous efforts, even though they have not achieved a cease-fire. As I listened to Secretary Powell on his live newscast this morning at about 7 a.m. eastern standard time, it seemed to me that his trip was worthwhile and progress had been made, although it is difficult to quantify progress in the Mideast because of the difficult and complex problems that are faced there.

I believe Israel has acted in self-defense in moving into Palestinian territories. It is the fundamental duty of a nation to protect its citizens. When Israel has been faced by almost daily suicide bombings, that action is necessary, as viewed by the Israeli authorities.

The President did call upon Israel to withdraw several days ago—almost 2 weeks ago—and Israel has to make its judgments and decisions as a sovereign nation. I do not think it should be viewed as a rebuke to President Bush that Prime Minister Sharon and the Israeli Cabinet saw it differently. President Bush made the judgment call he did as he saw the interests of the United States and the interests of the world community. I am sure he was considering Israel's interests in that mix. However, the judgment is up to Israel as a sovereign nation. It is understandable that when they have virtually daily suicide bombings, they see it differently so as to protect their citizens.

This morning, Secretary Powell referred to an international conference,

and it is my hope that such a conference would be convened at an early time. It is my view that the so-called moderate Arab States have to become involved, representing Palestinian interests, because of the difficulties of relying upon anything Chairman Yasser Arafat has to say.

On March 26, 2002, I visited Israel and talked to General Zinni, Prime Minister Sharon, and Chairman Arafat. On that day, the three were in agreement that they were very close to coming to terms on the so-called Tenet plan on security arrangements. The very next day there was a suicide bombing in Netanya at the Passover seder killing 27 Jews at prayer and wounding approximately 200 others. The whole situation has deteriorated.

In the intervening three weeks, evidence has come to light, purportedly bearing the handwriting of Chairman Arafat, that he personally was involved in paying terrorists. I have asked the State Department for an analysis and the verification that, in fact, it was Arafat's handwriting, but on this state of the record, it appears that was the case.

It is no surprise that Yasser Arafat is a terrorist. He was involved in the murder of the United States charge d'affaires in the Sudan in 1974. He was involved with the murders of Israeli athletes. He was involved with the murder of Leon Klinghoffer who was pushed off the *Achille Lauro*. It was hoped that a new page had been turned with the Oslo agreements.

I was present on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, when Arafat was honored at the White House. I had grave reservations about seeing this known terrorist honored at that time, but I watched as President Clinton put his left arm around Arafat and his right arm around Prime Minister Rabin, and the two shook hands. Then, Foreign Minister Peres shook hands with Arafat. It seemed to me that if the Israeli leaders were prepared to shake Arafat's hand, where Israel had been the principal victim of the terrorism, that was something we might move ahead with and try to deal with Arafat.

I have had occasion to talk to Chairman Arafat on a number of occasions over the years. Again, when I met with him on Tuesday, March 26, I urged him to make a clear-cut, definitive statement denouncing terrorism and denouncing suicide bombings. Chairman Arafat said he would, but of course he has never done so.

It is a very difficult call to have U.S. negotiators or the Secretary of State or anyone meet with Arafat because of the outstanding evidence that he is still involved in terrorism, but that is a call the Secretary of State had to make, and I respect that. It seems to me that if the peace process is to go forward, it is very difficult for Arafat to be a major player or a major participant because he is, simply stated, untrustworthy.