

of education savings accounts to include elementary and secondary education. And I want to take a few moments to make three brief points about that.

First, I think it is important to point out that we are not talking about a new subsidy for private or parochial schools. To the contrary, we are talking about allowing families to keep more of what they earn—after all, it is their money—to send their children to the elementary or secondary school of their choice.

We already go far beyond what would be allowed by this bill when we provide federal financial assistance to students at the college level, including students who attend private or religious institutions. No one argues that such choice harms public colleges or universities. In fact, it is choice and competition that has made our nation's colleges and universities the best in the world. So I am perplexed why anyone would fear giving parents more choice and control at the elementary and secondary levels, as well. That is where the real crisis in education exists today, and it is where choice and competition will do the most good.

Second, the people who stand to gain the most from this legislation are those of more modest means who might not have the same choice or opportunity without the help that the Coverdell bill would provide. Of the people opting for Catholic schools, for example, 68 percent have annual incomes of \$35,000 or less. Wealthier people obviously have the means to send their children to the school of their choice whether they receive a tax break or not.

Third, providing families with tax incentives for education savings will not decrease federal or state funding for public schools by a single dime. The fact is, Congress is likely to approve increases in funding for education in addition to the incentives that would come with the Coverdell bill.

Frankly, Madam President, I think it is a big mistake to assume that public schools cannot compete successfully with other institutions. Many public schools have very well-regarded programs—programs that meet or exceed what is offered to students elsewhere—and it is likely that these schools would not only retain their current student body, but add to it with barriers to choice removed. And with additional enrollment would come additional funds for their budgets.

It is true that failing schools would be forced to improve or face declining enrollment. But is it really our goal to force students with few financial resources to remain in a failing environment? Should they not have the same options that others have to find a school that better meets their needs?

In recent Senate hearings, low-income parents questioned why the schoolhouse door is often closed to their children—why they are kept from moving their children to schools that

can better meet their children's needs? Why their children cannot attend safer schools? They are right to ask these questions. They deserve—their children deserve—access to a quality education.

In my opinion, the single best thing we could do to improve the quality of education in this country is give parents more choice and control over where they send their children. It is an idea with broad support among the American people. A 1997 poll conducted by the Center for Education Reform found support for school choice among the general public at 82 percent. The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies reported support among African Americans at more than 70 percent. It is an idea whose time has come.

I support the Coverdell legislation.

DEATH KNELL OF THE PANAMA CANAL?

Mr. HELMS. Madam President, I commend to the attention of my colleagues a significant book entitled, "Death Knell of the Panama Canal?", by Capt. G. Russell Evans (USCG, Ret.).

In this, his second book on the subject, Captain Evans sets forth the facts and his analysis of the skullduggery that led to the ill-conceived 1977 Panama Canal Treaties.

The Panama Canal Treaties were a foolish giveaway of a critical waterway built with U.S. taxpayers' dollars. I vigorously opposed the 1977 treaties, and to this day I regret that the United States Senate approved them—by one vote.

Madam President, the Panama Canal is essential to the continued economic and strategic health of the United States and many of our allies. In his introduction to the book, distinguished former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas J. Moorer (USN, Ret.), writes that "about 95% of our routine logistics support goes by sea."

These military vessels, like their commercial counterparts, rely on the Canal to move quickly between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Since the United States began to hand over the Canal and its operations to Panamanian authorities, the maintenance of the Canal has slipped noticeably. The Canal is showing the effects of the neglect, and is now in a shocking state of disrepair.

This essential maritime passage, a vital connection for international trade, is falling apart, and I fear that the deterioration of Canal facilities will increase as the Clinton Administration, following in the misguided path of the 1977 treaties, continues to hand over the Canal to Panamanian authorities.

In light of the Panama Canal's critical importance, the United States simply cannot afford to squander the opportunity to secure access to facilities in the Canal Zone for our military to

carry out essential missions and defend the security of the Canal.

It is clearly in the best interests of both the United States and Panama to maintain a U.S. military presence there. The people of Panama consistently show, through opinion polls, that they do not want the United States to abandon its military bases. Without a U.S. presence, the Canal will be left undefended, this cannot be allowed to happen.

Today, many former Carter Administration officials who engineered the Panama Canal giveaway in 1977 are serving in the Clinton Administration. Nevertheless, I will continue to press the Administration to reach a new agreement with the government of Panama to secure a U.S. military presence in that vital area.

On September 5, 1996, the Senate approved my legislation, Senate Concurrent Resolution 14, urging the President to do just that.

As Admiral Moorer states succinctly, "the clock is ticking," and I believe Senators will find Captain Evans' book an invaluable reference to understanding the importance of the Canal—and the risks we run should the Canal fall into the wrong hands—or into disrepair.

U.S. FOREIGN OIL CONSUMPTION FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 13TH

Mr. HELMS. Madam President, the American Petroleum Institute's report for the week ending March 13, that the U.S. imported 6,636,000 barrels of oil each day, 1,213,000 fewer barrels than the 7,849,000 imported each day during the same week a year ago.

While this is one of the rare weeks when Americans imported slightly less oil than a year ago, Americans nonetheless relied on foreign oil for 50.8 percent of their needs last week, and there are no signs that the upward spiral will abate. Before the Persian Gulf War, the United States obtained approximately 45 percent of its oil supply from foreign countries. During the Arab oil embargo in the 1970s, foreign oil accounted for only 35 percent of America's oil supply.

Politicians had better ponder the economic calamity sure to occur in America if and when foreign producers shut off our supply—or double the already enormous cost of imported oil flowing into the U.S.—now 6,636,000 barrels a day.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Madam President, at the close of business yesterday, Tuesday, March 17, 1998, the Federal debt stood at \$5,536,663,723,483.42 (Five trillion, five hundred thirty-six billion, six hundred sixty-three million, seven hundred twenty-three thousand, four hundred eighty-three dollars and forty-two cents).

One year ago, March 17, 1997, the Federal debt stood at \$5,363,307,000,000

(Five trillion, three hundred sixty-three billion, three hundred seven million).

Five years ago, March 17, 1993, the Federal debt stood at \$4,214,956,000,000 (Four trillion, two hundred fourteen billion, nine hundred fifty-six million).

Ten years ago, March 17, 1988, the Federal debt stood at \$2,482,751,000,000 (Two trillion, four hundred eighty-two billion, seven hundred fifty-one million).

Fifteen years ago, March 17, 1983, the Federal debt stood at \$1,227,720,000,000 (One trillion, two hundred twenty-seven billion, seven hundred twenty million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4, (Four trillion, three hundred and eight billion, nine hundred forty-three million, seven hundred twenty-three thousand, four hundred eighty-three dollars and twenty-four cents) during the past 15 years.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I rise today to recognize March as "Women's History Month." It is appropriate that, at this time, we credit the countless women who have contributed so much to our society. In particular, I would like to draw attention to some of the women who have helped to shape the history of Utah.

From its beginnings, Utah has relied heavily on the strength of women. The first groups of American settlers that crossed the continent to establish their homes in what is now Utah consisted of both men and women. Besides the simple rigors of walking hundreds of miles across the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains, these courageous pioneer women braved many trials such as extreme winter cold, lack of provisions, and the death of loved ones. They struggled to provide for the basic needs of their families. Sadly, many women had to witness the burial of their children and husbands along the way. Upon arriving in the valleys of the mountains, these pioneer women toiled along with the men to establish farms, schools, businesses, and towns. Their hard work, and dedication are reflected in the character of our State even today.

Politically, Utah was a leader in recognizing the rights of women, and involving them in the process of government. Much has and will be said of the valiant efforts of women's suffrage activists such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Carrie Chapman Catt. This group of national heroes includes a Utahn by the name of Emmeline Wells. As an advocate for women's rights, Mrs. Wells worked to achieve a political voice for Utah women. She won her first battle in 1870, when the territorial legislature legally gave Utah women the right to vote.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Congress stripped Utah women of their voting rights in 1887. Undaunted, Mrs. Wells and others formed the Woman Suffrage

Association of Utah, the purpose of which was to reclaim their voting rights. These women finally succeeded in 1896, when Utah was admitted into the Union as a State with a constitution providing female suffrage. Emmeline Wells remained an active member of the Woman's Republican League and the National Suffrage Association, and kept up the suffrage campaign on the national level.

I am proud to say that Utah was ahead of its time in this respect. By the end of 1896, only Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, and Colorado recognized women's right to vote. No other States granted this right for another 14 years. Later in 1896, the people of Utah elected Martha Hughes Cannon to be their first female state senator. And, proving that the past is prologue, women continue to play significant, influential leadership roles in our State. In 1991, Deedee Corradini was elected mayor of Salt Lake City, Utah's largest city and the seat of State government. In 1992, Olene Walker was elected Utah's Lieutenant Governor, and two recent members of Utah's delegation to the U.S. Congress have been women.

Women have also added much to Utah's cultural heritage. A prime example is Alice Merrill Horne. She was an educator and prolific artist at the turn of the century. As a twenty-three year old in 1891, Alice was appointed chairperson of the Utah Liberal Arts Committee for the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. She published a book of poems composed by women for the exposition.

Alice Merrill Horne became the second woman elected to the Utah House of Representatives in 1898. As an elected official, she continued to encourage cultural development. She moved a bill for the State to create the Nation's first art institute, which would encourage the fine arts, hold an annual art exhibition, and start a state-owned art collection. As a memorial to her, the state collection bears her name.

Today's women continue the tradition of Mrs. Horne. In 1997, the Women's Center Advisory Board at Utah State University named a number of recipients of the Women Over 65 Achievement Awards. Among them was Ruth Call. Ruth became director of the Unicorn Theater in 1957. In this capacity she has brought beauty and happiness into the lives of children in Cache Valley by allowing them to participate in the performing arts. Since 1957, she has continued to influence children's lives through the theater, as a Girl Scout leader, and by her involvement in local art groups. Ruth Call is only one of the many modern unsung heroes who quietly enrich the lives of many.

Ever since Utah's earliest periods, women have contributed in many ways in the professional sector. Patty Sessions was a pioneer midwife and horticulturist who developed her own strain of plums. Singer Emma Lucy Gates founded an opera company. Before her election to the state senate, Martha

Hughes Cannon was a very successful medical doctor.

Now more than ever, women are an integral part of the State's business sector. According to the National Foundation for Women Business Owners, between 1987 and 1996, the number of women-owned firms along Utah's Wasatch Front increased by 87 percent. Thus, Utah is among the top 10 states in the Nation for growth of women-owned firms. The NFWBO also said that women-owned companies represent 38 percent of all businesses in the area, employ 21 percent of all workers, and generate 24 percent of all sales.

This is an exciting time for women's athletics as well. On the heels of Olympic gold medals for our teams in both the Summer and Winter Games, women's soccer, softball, basketball, and hockey have found a new popularity in the United States. This is combined with gold medals in more traditionally popular sports like figure skating, track and field, and gymnastics to showcase the athletic talent that abounds among our women. My State is very proud to be home to the Utah Starzz, one of the teams in the new Women's National Basketball Association. I'm a big fan.

We are also very proud of the many female college athletes in our universities. Several of my State's college teams have achieved great success. In particular, I want to draw attention to one native Utahn who is leaving her mark on history.

As a junior on the Brigham Young University track and field team, Tiffany Lott made 1997 a banner year. Set the world record in the 55-meter hurdles by running 7.30 seconds at the Western Athletic Conference indoor championships. This eclipsed the eight-year-old record previously held by the great Jackie Joyner Kersee. Tiffany also won the heptathlon at the NCAA Championships. En route to her victory, she scored the third-highest point total in the history of the women's pentathlon. These feats, among others, led Track & Field News magazine to name Tiffany Lott the female college athlete of the year.

I have only touched on some of the many important achievements of Utah's women throughout our history. However, I cannot begin to give enough credit to the women who have added the most to our civilization, those who have influenced each one of us in some way. I wish to salute the countless women who have borne, nurtured, raised, instructed, and loved their children. I cannot think of a more important responsibility than that of a mother. Ironically, those who have had the greatest impact on us as a people are also those who receive the least public recognition.

I invite my colleagues to join in celebrating Women's History Month by recognizing all that women have contributed to this Nation in both large and small ways. Much of the progress of America is owed to the perseverance, ingenuity, and dedication of women.