

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. MACK. Mr. President, I then ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in morning business.

#### ELIAN GONZALEZ

Mr. MACK. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce a bill granting Elian Gonzalez American citizenship.

What it means is that the most important decision in this young boy's life will not be made by a political bureaucracy—but by a family court.

Mr. President, neither the President of the United States, his Attorney General, nor the dictator ruling Cuba is qualified to decide the fate of this little boy. The United States is a country of laws, and we zealously believe in the rule of law. Elian deserves access to the legal protections of our family courts. These courts are in the business of considering family cases day after day. And they would consider “what is in the boy's best interest.” Today, the only concern of the INS is “who speaks for the boy,” not about his future.

The primary purpose of this legislation is to ensure Elian has access to America's family courts: a court that will consider the choice that his mother made when she gave her life for freedom.

Mr. President, we will continue this debate sometime later in the week and make no mistake, I believe that Elian should remain here in the United States where he can live in freedom. But it is not my purpose to make that decision; that is the function of a family court.

This bill is intended to allow a family court to settle this dispute based upon the best interests of Elian Gonzalez.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks time? The minority leader.

#### SECOND SESSION OF THE 106TH CONGRESS

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, let me again welcome our colleagues back. I had the opportunity this morning to discuss the schedule and the many mutual matters of concern with the majority leader. Let me again welcome back our staff and express heartfelt appreciation for the great job that so many of our people have done over the last couple of months while we have been gone. I welcome our colleagues back not only to a new session but a new year, a new century, and a new millennium.

As we begin this new year, Americans have every reason to be proud and optimistic. In the last decade of the last century, we saw freedom and de-

mocracy triumph around the globe. We saw Eastern Europe abandon communism and the Soviet Union disintegrate. We saw Nelson Mandela walk out of prison and into history as the first democratically elected President of the new South Africa.

Here at home we restored strength to America's economy. We started the last decade with the biggest budget deficits in our Nation's history, and we ended it with the biggest budget surplus. We have seen more than 20 million new jobs created in the last 7 years. Today we have the lowest unemployment in 40 years, and the lowest unemployment ever among African Americans and Hispanics. Americans are working again.

Finally, after 20 years, real wages for America's families are growing again. Family incomes are up, and inflation is virtually nonexistent.

We also made progress in the last decade on the many social problems that some people thought were intractable. Since 1993, we have seen a 48-percent decrease in the welfare rolls, the largest decline in our Nation's history. We put 100,000 new police officers on the street, and today the violent crime rate is the lowest it has been in a generation. We enacted the single largest investment in children's health since 1965 and the largest increases in higher education since the GI bill. Today our Nation is prospering, and we are at peace.

The question facing us as we begin this new session of the 21st century, is: How do we keep America moving in the right direction? How do we provide the leadership that will help continue the global march toward freedom and democracy?

Here at home, how do we keep our economy growing? How do we help ordinary Americans provide for their families and prepare for their future? How do we widen the circle of opportunity to include those who have been left out up until now?

There are many, frankly, who believe we will not answer those questions this year. They look at how little we accomplished last year and the fact that this is a Presidential year and conclude that little or nothing will happen between now and November. It does not have to be that way.

A month ago, a lot of people thought the Y2K bug might cause all kinds of chaos. Instead, almost nothing happened. When it comes to us, when it comes to this Congress, people expect nothing to happen this year. Why not surprise them? We have extraordinary opportunities to do significant work this year, and we should work together to seize those opportunities.

Let's not worry about who gets the credit. Let's worry about getting the job done.

If the best minds in this country could work together to kill the Y2K

bug, surely the best minds in the Senate can work together this year to protect Social Security, to modernize Medicare, and to pass a real Patients' Bill of Rights. We can work together to improve our children's schools. Working together, surely we can find new ways to help ordinary working families earn more and keep more of what they earn.

There are all kinds of reasons for inaction, but there is not one good excuse. Henry Ford once said, “You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do.”

You cannot construct much of an argument for governing either just talking about what you are going to do. Eventually, one has to act.

I believe there are essentially three challenges facing us this year. If we meet these challenges, I believe, frankly, that it will be good for both of our parties next November. Good policy, as they say, is good politics.

More importantly, if we meet these challenges, it will be good for America, for our economy, for our families, and certainly for our future.

Our first challenge is to maintain our fiscal discipline. Later this week, we expect new estimates from CBO and OMB about how large the surplus might be in the year 2010. We do not know today what their predictions will be, but we do know today that the best first use of whatever surplus we have is to protect Social Security and strengthen Medicare.

Now—when our economy is strong, when we have a surplus, when we still have time on our side—is the time to prepare for the baby boomers' retirement by extending the life of the Social Security trust fund. Now is the time to modernize Medicare and add the prescription drug benefit so people do not have to choose between filling prescriptions and paying utility bills. That is an essential part of maintaining fiscal discipline.

Maintaining fiscal discipline also means paying down our \$5 trillion national debt. Mr. President, \$2,200 is how much our national debt will cost every family in America this year. Think what a family could do with that much money.

My colleagues and I support tax cuts that help working families with real, pressing needs such as child care and paying for college and caring for sick and aging relatives. We support eliminating the marriage penalty tax for couples who pay a marriage penalty. We support tax cuts that help small businesses grow and make it easier to keep family businesses in families.

We want to work with our friends on the other side of the aisle to pass responsible, targeted tax cuts this year, but we all know what the best tax cut is. The best tax cut for America's families and America's businesses is to pay down the Federal debt.