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we ought to have that same kind of encouragement to invest in education, an even more important investment for the future. And I think that it is highly appropriate to adopt this device to achieve that goal.

Let me assure you, the Treasury Department is committed to working with the Department of Education and all of you to make this tax plan work. The IRS will not interfere with the affairs of educational institutions. We are committed to making this simple and straightforward for the academic community and especially for the students of every age. The plan will give families the power to choose the right education for themselves and the flexibility to decide the best way in which to pay for that education.

Now, just think about what this could mean. A young person who can't afford tuition or whose family can't afford it can now go down to a local community college right away and sign up if they meet the standards, because the HOPE scholarship will pay for it. Someone with a new family who is worried about college costs down the road can multiply his or her savings power by putting tuition money in an IRA tax-free every year while the children are growing up. Then, when they're 40 and worried they might need more education to move ahead but can't spare time off from work, not only can they withdraw from the IRA for the kids but the parents can go part time or at night. But all can go to college without tax consequences.

My plan is simple: $1,500-a-year tax cut for individuals to pay for college for 2 years; a $10,000-a-year tax deduction for families for any year of tuition after high school; an expanded IRA to help families save tax-free for education; plus the more and larger Pell grant scholarships for deserving students, 300,000 more work-study positions, AmeriCorps, the direct loan program.

This plan will throw open the doors of college and give every American the great chance to make the most of the world that we are moving into. College is opportunity for tomorrow. And creating that opportunity is our responsibility today.

I thank you again for your support of this plan. As we work in the weeks and months ahead to craft a bipartisan balanced budget, your endorsement today will be an historic element in making sure that this will be part of the ultimate budget plan. We need a balanced budget, but it has to reflect our values, and it has to pave the way to a better future.

Today we have committed to expanding educational opportunities by enacting the HOPE scholarship tax cut, the college tax deduction, the Pell grant increases, the work-study increases. I thank you for standing with us. You are standing for opportunity for generations to come in a way that will change America forever for the better.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:14 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Stanley O. Ikenberry, president, Michelle Tolela Myers, incoming chair, and Barry Munitz, outgoing chair, American Council on Education; Charles Knapp, incoming president, Aspen Institute, Washington, DC; and Eduardo Padron, president, Miami-Dade Community College.

Statement on the Death of Martin Slate

February 24, 1997

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Marty Slate. Marty has been a dear friend since our years at Yale Law School and was the quintessential public servant.

From his days as a Freedom Rider in Mississippi to his years as a senior civil servant at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Internal Revenue Service, Marty spent his entire life working to make sure our laws were fair and applied justly.

Four years ago, I was delighted when Marty answered my call to return to public service. As Executive Director of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, he brought a new standard of excellence to that agency. He improved the PBGC's level of customer service and its financial management, winning an Innovation in American Government Award from the John F. Kennedy School and several Vice Presidential Hammer Awards for Excellence in Government.

Marty fought successfully for important new legislation that brought renewed financial stability to the Corporation, expanded pension coverage, and ensured that millions of Americans' pensions were more secure.

Hillary and I will miss him greatly. Our thoughts and prayers are with Cookie and his family on this sad day.

Statement on the First Anniversary of the Downing of American Civilian Aircraft by Cuba

February 24, 1997

One year ago, four innocent civilians were killed when their aircraft were brutally shot down by the Cuban regime. Without warning, Cuban MiG's fired air-to-air missiles at two small unarmed planes in international airspace. Three U.S. citizens and one permanent resident were the victims: Carlos Costa, Armando Alejandre, Mario de la Peña, and Pablo Morales.

Today we join the families in honoring the memory of these men as we carry forward our efforts to seek justice for their deaths. An investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organization last June confirmed that the shootdown was unlawful and without any justification. The U.N. Security Council last February and again in June strongly deplored Cuba's illegal use of violence against the aircraft. The Castro regime, however, has consistently rejected the judgment of the international community. As we did one year ago, we call on Cuba to take full responsibility for its actions and provide assurances that an outrage like this will never happen again.

The shootdown and the Cuban Government's continuing repression of human rights activists and independent journalists underscore the need to continue working for a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. The United States continues to lead the international effort to achieve that goal, and over the past year, more of our friends and allies than ever before have joined with us to help bring democracy to Cuba.

On this anniversary, with the memory of the four victims in our prayers, the United States reaffirms its commitment to help bring democracy, respect for human rights, and prosperity to the people of Cuba, who have too long been denied these essentials of a decent life.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on the Enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

February 24, 1997

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Pursuant to section 1048 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, I transmit herewith a report on the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

For over 50 years, successive Presidents and Congresses have maintained a firm, bipartisan consensus that the security of Europe is vital to the national security of the United States. It remains so. NATO, even as it evolves and adapts to a changing world, remains the core of the transatlantic alliance that has served American interests for two generations.

Inclusion of new members into NATO's ranks is an indispensable element of a broader American strategy to create an undivided, democratic Europe for the 21st century. By extending the underpinnings of security beyond the arbitrary line of the Cold War, NATO can strengthen democratic and free market reforms for all of Europe, just as it has done for Western Europe in the decades since 1949. By admitting new states to the alliance, NATO will limit and help eliminate a potentially destabilizing vacuum in Europe, widening the circle of like-minded nations sharing common values and willing to