

U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee
Larry E. Craig, Chairman Jade West, Staff Director

April 12, 2000

A Dictionary of the Senate's Major Accomplishments
106th Congress, Second Session to Date

Affordable Education Act

Passed Senate (S. 1134)

Provides nearly \$8 billion in tax relief for education by allowing American families to contribute up to \$2,000 tax-free in Education Savings Accounts for the use of K-12 expenses, as well as for higher education needs. The bill also extends the termination date for the exclusion of employer-provided educational assistance provisions, provides tax-free withdrawals of state pre-paid tuition, and provides for enhanced school construction.

Agricultural Risk Management for the 21st Century Act

In House/Senate Conference (H.R. 2559/S. 2251)

Intended as a first step toward reforming the federal crop insurance program and making it a more effective risk management tool for America's farmers. Its provisions increase likelihood of producer participation, streamline program administration, encourage better risk management, and address problems with fraud and abuse. Offers insurance for the first time to ranchers and livestock producers, and expands coverage for produce growers.

Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century (AIR-21)

Public Law 106-181 (H.R. 1000)

Provides the Federal Aviation Administration \$40 billion through FY 2003 for operations, facilities and equipment, and the Airport Improvement Fund, thus promoting a competitive aviation industry and improving airline customer service and passenger safety during this time of ever-increasing demand for airport and airway usage.

Bankruptcy Reform Act

Passed House and Senate (H.R. 833/S. 625)

Provides much-needed and long-sought reform of the bankruptcy system to require those who can repay a portion of their debts to do so. Bankruptcies impose enormous costs on all consumers, and requiring repayment by those who can do so will save the American economy billions of dollars yearly in the form of higher prices and higher interest rates. Includes small business tax incentives.

Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Act

Public Law 106-177 (H.R. 764)

Provides additional resources for the prevention and punishment of crimes against children, such as helping states develop programs to deliver complete criminal history information to child welfare agencies and other organizations that are doing background checks. The Act also provides funding for law enforcement, prevention, and cooperative programs between law enforcement and the media. Provisions known as “Jennifer’s Law” help improve the centralized reporting of information on unidentified deceased persons.

Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform Act**Passed House and Senate (H.R. 1658)**

Protects the rights of Americans by shifting the burden of proof in asset forfeiture cases from the property owner to the government. Under current Federal law, the burden is on the property owner. The bill also makes other reforms that will help ensure that persons are not deprived of their property without due process of law while still allowing the seizure of criminal proceeds.

Computers in the Classroom**Amendment agreed to as part of S. 1134**

Amends the Internal Revenue Code to expand the deduction for computer donations to schools and allows for a tax credit for donated computers.

Date-Rape Drug Prohibition Act**Public Law 106-172 (H.R. 2130/S. 1561)**

Reclassifies GHB, the drug known as the “date-rape drug,” as a “Schedule I” drug under the Controlled Substances Act (where the most dangerous drugs are classified), making the drug more difficult to obtain and increasing the penalties for its abuse. The increasing use of this drug by sexual predators has been especially tragic. The Act also provides for related research, reporting, training, and education.

Electronic Signatures in Interstate Commerce**In House/Senate conference (S. 761)**

Assures the legal recognition of so-called electronic signatures for contracts and other electronic transactions conducted on the Internet. Technology already allows for the means to authenticate electronic signatures and the validity of electronic documents, but pursuits to expand digital commerce opportunities are hampered because state electronic signatures laws currently vary so widely. This bill temporarily would preempt those state laws until states enact uniform standards.

Food Stamp Electronic Benefit Transfer**Public Law 106-171 (S. 1733)**

Follows up on a 1996 law requiring that all states issue food stamp benefits under the electronic benefit transfer system by the year 2002. This new law would require a uniform standard (in all 50 States) to use the ATM-like electronic cards for food stamp benefits. By using electronic cards instead of paper coupons, food stamp recipients will gain the ability to use their card in any state, and taxpayers will save millions of dollars.

Iran Nonproliferation Act

Public Law 106-178 (H.R. 1883)

Takes steps intended to reverse the very dangerous proliferation problem whereby firms in Russia, China, North Korea, and elsewhere are transferring to Iran items to assist in its development of weapons of mass destruction and missiles capable of delivering such weapons. Among its provisions, the bill directs the President to twice yearly report to Congress on foreign persons who have transferred goods, services, or technology to Iran that could assist with nuclear proliferation.

Local Television Act of 2000**Passed Senate (S. 2097)**

While Congress in 1999 passed the Satellite Home Viewers Improvement Act, which allows satellite companies to provide local broadcast signals to their customers, the bill did not provide incentives for assuring that all rural viewers would gain access to local broadcasts of news and weather. This bill is intended to rectify the economic and policy conditions that make it costly to provide local television signals in rural areas, with the goal of assuring access to those areas which currently have no access or very limited access to local broadcasts.

Marriage Penalty Elimination for Education Savings Accounts and Loans**Amendment agreed to in Senate as part of S. 1134**

Takes an important step in ending a bias against marriage in our tax code by increasing the phase-out levels of the education loan interest deduction and education savings accounts for joint filers to eliminate the marriage penalty.

National Sustainable Fuels and Chemicals Act of 1999**Passed Senate (S. 935)**

Improves America's environment and strengthens its energy security by authorizing research to promote the conversion of biomass (plant- and tree-based energy sources) into energy and chemical products (e.g. ethanol). This will aid in reducing America's energy dependence on foreign sources.

Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act**Cleared for White House (S. 1287)**

Retains the existing policy of providing Yucca Mountain, Nevada as the permanent storage site for spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste, generated by either the commercial nuclear power industry or by the federal government. Without a permanent storage facility some nuclear generating plants may have to shut down. Nuclear power accounts for approximately 20 percent of the United States' electricity demand.

Poison Control Center Enhancement and Awareness Act**Public Law 106-174 (S. 632)**

Helps to establish and promote a nationwide toll-free telephone number to access regional poison control centers, which help American families deal quickly, safely, and efficiently with a poisoning emergency.

Republican Budget Resolution

Conference Report expected to pass House and Senate (H. Con. Res. 290/S. Con. Res. 101)

Continues the Republican commitment to a balanced budget and eliminating the federal debt, while protecting Social Security, reforming Medicare, and restraining the growth of federal spending. Provides for responsible tax cuts of \$150 billion over the next five years — sufficient to enact marriage penalty relief, health insurance deductions, and education tax credits — while increasing the federal commitment to education, law enforcement, and health care insurance.

Satellite Communications Competition and Privatization Act

Public Law 106-180 (S. 376)

Encourages privatization in the international satellite communications market and permits a merger between two major corporations. Importantly for consumers, the bill provides that international satellite organizations no longer will enjoy government preferences that insulated them from competition, regulatory authority, tax liabilities, and antitrust restrictions.

Senior Citizens' Freedom to Work Act

Public Law, 106-182 (H.R. 5)

For decades Republicans have been calling for repeal of this Depression-era provision of the Social Security law, known as the Earnings Limit, which penalizes Social Security recipients between the ages of 65 and 70 who have chosen to continue working. This bill fully repeals the earnings limit, allowing all those who've reached full retirement age to earn income with no reduction in their Social Security benefits. It's retroactive to the first of the year, so nearly 1 million senior citizens also will be receiving repayment for benefits lost since January 1, 2000.

Teacher Tax Relief

Amendment agreed to in Senate as part of S. 1134

Provides professional development deductions for teachers, as well as allowing an income tax credit for teachers who provide classroom materials.

Worker Economic Opportunity Act

Passed Senate (S. 2323)

Changes federal treatment of employer-offered stock options to ensure such benefits are available to hourly employees — not just executives. Stock options as part of employee benefits packages have been growing in popularity, especially within the high-tech sector, but a Department of Labor opinion issued last year put hourly employees in jeopardy of losing this benefit. This bill assures that it makes no difference if you work in the corporate boardroom or on the factory floor — everyone should be able to share in the success of the company.

Prepared by the Staff of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, 224-2946