



## 2008 State of the Union Wrap-Up

On January 28, President Bush made the last State of the Union address of his presidency. As in past years, the president used the address to the nation to lay out his plans for the upcoming year.

Going into the speech, the economy was expected to be a big focus—and it was. The president said that Americans can be confident about the nation’s economic growth “in the long run,” but acknowledged that economic growth is “slowing” in the “short run.” He asked Congress to quickly pass the “robust growth package that includes tax relief for individuals and families and incentives for business investment” that was developed in a bipartisan process with the leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives, including Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).

The president also spoke about education. He called the No Child Left Behind Act a “bipartisan achievement” that was succeeding. “We owe it to America’s children, their parents, and their teachers to strengthen this good law,” he said. He added that he and Congress must “work together to increase accountability, add flexibility for states and districts, reduce the number of high school dropouts, [and] provide extra help for struggling schools.”

Please see below for to see which of the other topics put forward in the Alliance’s 2008 State of the Union Viewer’s Guide (issued prior to the speech) were addressed by President Bush.

The Alliance has also created an answer key for the Bingo cards with endnotes that indicate at which point in the speech, if any, the president mentioned a specific word or phrase, or if a specific person was shown on television. The answer key is available at [http://www.all4ed.org/files/2008SOTU\\_BingoResults.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/2008SOTU_BingoResults.pdf).

[ X ] **The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB):** “Six years ago, we came together to pass the No Child Left Behind Act, and today no one can deny its results,” President Bush said. “Last year, fourth and eighth graders achieved the highest math scores on record. Reading scores are on the rise. African American and Hispanic students posted all-time highs. Now we must work together to increase accountability, add flexibility for states and districts, reduce the number of high school dropouts, provide extra help for struggling schools. Members of Congress: The No Child Left Behind Act is a bipartisan achievement. It is succeeding. And we owe it to America’s children, their parents, and their teachers to strengthen this good law.”

[ X ] **High School Reform:** In discussing improvements that must be made to NCLB, the president said, “Now we must work together to increase accountability, add flexibility for states

and districts, reduce the number of high school dropouts, [and] provide extra help for struggling schools.

[ X ] **Low Graduation Rates:** See “High School Reform” above.

[ ] **More Accurate Measures of Graduation Rates:** Not mentioned.

[ ] **Older Students Who Struggle with Reading:** Not mentioned.

[ ? ] **Education Spending Proposals:** In discussing his budget for FY 2009, the president said, “Next week, I’ll send you a budget that terminates or substantially reduces 151 wasteful or bloated programs, totaling more than \$18 billion. The budget that I will submit will keep America on track for a surplus in 2012. American families have to balance their budgets; so should their government.” In past years, a large percentage of programs for which the president eliminated funding fell under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Education.

[ X ] **Other Education Proposals:** The president called on Congress to support a new \$300 million program called Pell Grants for Kids. According to a supporting document issued by the White House, the program would “support state and local efforts to increase educational options for low-income K-12 students enrolled in the nation’s most troubled public schools,” which were defined as schools that “have not made adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind for five years, or that have a graduation rate of less than 60 percent.”

According to an article in the *New York Times*, the program was “denounced by top Democratic lawmakers as a national ‘voucher’ program that would only drain resources from urban public schools that in many cases are in need of money.” In a written statement, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) said, “The President didn’t commit the resources to expand educational opportunity. Instead, on top of a \$70 billion shortfall in funding for his own education reforms, he again proposed to siphon scarce resources from our public schools to create new voucher programs. Vouchers are not the answer for students, schools, or our nation.”

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia said, “The president, in last night’s State of the Union address, stated the problem straightforwardly; too many students are failing in our current education system. The dramatic case he makes calls for more than a limited action.”

“A new voucher program that merely allows a few students to transfer from failing schools to private ones leaves the bulk of America’s children behind in the same educational mediocrity. By focusing precious resources on systemic reform that improves entire schools, America can deliver a quality education to all its students. Instead of funding limited vouchers and renewing the funding each year at the whim of Congress, the president’s proposal for additional investment could be the start of real education reform that benefits ten times as many students annually and provides lasting economic benefits for generations.”

On February 4, President Bush will unveil his budget for Fiscal Year 2009 and provide more details on the programs and reforms that he proposed in his State of the Union address. The February 11 issue of *Straight A’s* will provide coverage of both.