

THE BUDGET MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT

The Budget I am proposing for 2005 is a reflection of this Nation's goals and purpose, and advances our three highest priorities. First, America will prevail in the War on Terror by defeating terrorists and their supporters. Second, we will continue to strengthen our homeland defenses. Third, this Nation is building on the economic recovery that began in earnest in 2003 with policies that further promote growth and job creation. In addition, we will continue to strengthen the domestic institutions that best express our values, and serve the basic needs of all: good schools, quality and affordable health care, and programs that promote hope and compassion in our communities. In meeting these priorities, the Government must exercise fiscal responsibility by limiting spending growth, focusing on the results of Government programs, and cutting wasteful spending.

In 2003, America made great progress in the War on Terror. Afghanistan, which once was ruled by the repressive Taliban regime, now has adopted a new constitution, taking a fundamental step on the path to democracy. In Iraq, the remnants of the Ba'athist regime are being systematically rounded up, and Iraqis are assuming responsibility for their own security and future government. Libya has pledged to disclose and dismantle all of the regime's weapons of mass destruction programs.

These victories do not change a fundamental truth: Our Nation remains at war. In this war, which began on September 11, 2001, our citizens are the strategic targets of our enemy. We have responded in two significant ways: First, we have taken the offensive to hunt down the terrorists, deny them easy refuge, identify and seize their secret finances, and hold them and their sponsors to account. Second, we have moved to secure the Nation's homeland. In 2003, the new Department of Homeland Security began operations in the biggest reorganization of the Federal Government in half a century. Over this past year, we have taken steps to reduce the terrorist threat to Americans here at home, and protect American interests overseas. This Nation has committed itself to the long war against terror. And we will see that war to its inevitable conclusion: the destruction of the terrorists.

Our Budget reflects the continuing importance of providing for the defense and security of the American people. We will continue to provide whatever it takes to defend our country by fully supporting our military, which is performing with great skill and honor in our battles overseas. We also are providing the necessary resources to our law enforcement and emergency personnel at home to meet the new threats posed by terrorists.

Just as we have taken much-needed steps to strengthen our national security, we have also pursued an aggressive agenda to promote our economic security. In 2003, we worked with the Congress to accelerate much of the tax relief that had been passed in 2001, so that Americans could keep more of their paychecks and so that businesses would have more incentive to invest in new jobs and new equipment. As a result, our economy is strong, and growing stronger. Economic output in the third quarter rose at its fastest annual pace in nearly 20 years. More manufacturers reported rising factory activity than at any point in the last 20 years. American homeownership reached its highest level ever. Employment is on the rise. By cutting tax rates on investment gains and dividend payments, we promoted saving, capital formation, and investment—and Americans' holdings in the stock market rose by almost \$3 trillion.

There is still more to do, however. We cannot be satisfied until every American looking for work has found a job. We must sustain the momentum of this recovery by making the tax relief passed in 2001 and 2003 permanent. We will continue to open markets abroad for American products. And as the economy improves, we will also confront the challenge faced by workers who must learn new skills to fill new jobs. As a Nation, we must help Americans develop the skills they need to succeed in a highly competitive, highly productive economy. And so this Budget continues to support high standards in our schools and proposes a Jobs for the 21st Century initiative to ensure older students and adults can gain the skills they need to find work now.

Economic growth and good stewardship of taxpayer dollars will help us meet another important priority: cutting the budget deficit brought on by recession and war. We must continue to evaluate each Federal program, to make sure that it meets its goals, and produces the desired results. I propose to hold discretionary spending growth below four percent, less than the average rate of growth of American family incomes. And spending unrelated to defense and homeland security will be held below one percent growth—less than the rate of inflation—while continuing to meet education, health care, and other priorities of this Nation. With this spending restraint and continued pro-growth economic policies, we can cut the deficit in half over the next five years.

Finally, this Budget addresses the needs of a great and compassionate Nation, whose values are strong, and whose institutions of hope are enduring. We are helping communities of faith pull the addicted out of dependency. We are lifting children out of a life of despair by making sure they have mentors, and we will continue to press for improvements in our schools, so that no child is left behind. We are extending hope and healing to millions suffering from the global epidemic of AIDS. We will begin to implement the benefits of our Medicare modernization and reform law, which will bring all our seniors coverage for prescription drugs. And we will make health care more affordable and extend the full benefits of our health care system to more Americans who currently have no health insurance.

Meeting these priorities will require hard work, skill, and the resources of a great Nation. Yet America has always risen to new challenges, and has always set new goals. Challenge and change have revealed the true strengths of this Nation and the enterprise of its people. And as 2004 begins, I am confident those gifts will serve us again, until our work is done.

GEORGE W. BUSH
February 2, 2004