

## PRESIDENT BUSH OUTLINES PLANS FOR 2004

January 21, 2004

*President Bush addressed Congress in his third State of the Union address Tuesday night, laying out the themes of his 2004 presidential campaign.*

The State of the Union is an annual address to Congress, mandated by Article II of the U.S. Constitution, in which the president assesses the condition of the country and outlines his goals for the coming year. George Washington personally delivered the first annual message to Congress on Jan. 8, 1790.

President Bush outlined his priorities for the coming year, but also defended his administration's policies, such as the war in Iraq and tax cuts, against recent attacks from Democratic presidential candidates.

"We have faced serious challenges together -- and now we face a choice," the president said. "We can go forward with confidence and resolve -- or we can turn back to the dangerous illusion that terrorists are not plotting and outlaw regimes are no threat to us. We can press on with economic growth, and reforms in education and Medicare -- or we can turn back to the old policies and old divisions."

As he mentioned specific items, members of Congress either stood up and clapped or sat quietly, depending on whether or not they approved of the president's actions.

### **International accomplishments**

President Bush began his address by focusing on the accomplishments made in Afghanistan, Iraq and the war on terror and called on Congress to renew key provisions of the USA Patriot Act, parts of which expire next year.

"Twenty-eight months have passed since September 11th, 2001 -- over two years without an attack on American soil -- and it is tempting to believe that the danger is behind us. That hope is understandable, comforting -- and false," he said.

The president defended his decision to go to war in Iraq and criticized those who disagreed with him.

"From the beginning, America has sought international support for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we have gained much support. There is a difference, however, between leading a coalition of many nations, and submitting to the objections of a few. America will never seek a permission slip to defend the security of our people," he told the audience.

### **Domestic issues**

From international concerns Mr. Bush turned to domestic issues. The president praised the nation's economic growth and linked that growth to his recent tax credits.

"Americans took those dollars and put them to work, driving this economy forward," the president said.

He praised the recent changes made to the government health insurance system for the elderly -- Medicare -- and suggested ways to help Americans pay for medical care, including tax credits for private insurance, computerized health records and reducing medical lawsuits.

To critics of his health care policy, he replied: "A government-run health care system is the wrong prescription."

### **Policies that impact students**

Of particular interest to students, the president defended his controversial educational reforms that make up the No Child Left Behind Act, including the regular testing in grades 3-8 that determines whether a school is failing or succeeding. He pledged more financial support for the nation's community colleges and proposed a series of measures called Jobs for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

"This program will provide extra help to middle and high school students who fall behind in reading and math, expand Advanced Placement programs in low-income schools, and invite math and science professionals from the private sector to teach part-time in our high schools," Mr. Bush said.

Citing the decline in high school drug use, President Bush proposed spending an additional \$23 million to help schools increase student drug testing. He also suggested doubling the federal government's contribution to abstinence-oriented sexual education programs.

President Bush is expected to make appearances this week in Ohio, Arizona and New Mexico, all hotly contested presidential states.

### **Reaction to the speech**

After the State of the Union, the other party -- in this case the Democrats -- gets to react. This year, Democratic leaders criticized Mr. Bush for his "go-it-alone" foreign policy that they said makes more enemies and drains resources from domestic priorities such as education and health care.

They said the president's tax cuts only really help the rich and his economic policies fail to address real problems such as the lack of jobs.

"Rather than a society that restricts its rewards to a privileged few, we need an 'opportunity society' that allows all Americans to succeed," said Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota in the formal Democratic response to the speech.

*By Annie Schleicher, NewsHour Extra*

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