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BUDGET RESPONSE

Good evening. I'm Bob Dole, the Senate Republican Leader.

I'd like to offer a few thoughts in response to the President, on behalf of Republicans in the Congress and around the country, and the millions of Americans who have waited so long for their leaders to rein in our runaway government.

There can be no higher priority for America, and the future of America's children, than to balance the Federal budget. Since Republicans won control of the Congress last November, I have thought a balanced budget had become a possibility. But we have lacked the necessary partnership with the President. Tonight I believe nothing can stop us. The will of the people, Republican majorities in both houses and now the willingness of the President to act have converged into a moment of powerful potential. This is a moment we must seize or forever bear the black judgement of history.

But I also offer a word of caution. As I listened to the President tonight I was concerned to ~~hear more apologies and~~ ^{still hear a} defense of the status quo -- recycled reasons why big government cannot become smaller, why programs cannot be cut, and why taxes have to be raised. As government has grown bigger the plight of poorer Americans has grown steadily worse. We have mortgaged our children's future to

pay for incompetence and decay. Why can't we return broad power and money to our states and our cities, our school districts and our communities and expect all Americans to be better off? We must not be so afraid of change that we cling to failure simply because it is so familiar.

While we Republicans accept with enthusiasm the President's offer to work with us on a balanced budget, my caution is this: the American people are fed up with politics as usual. Rhetorical ^Dalliances with their passion - strategies to engender fear, to pit classes of Americans against each other or to evade the shortest, most practical path - will evoke swift and sure punishment, ~~in the next election~~. The will of the people will not be denied and we will not participate in any attempt to do so.

Coming to agreement will not be easy. We Republicans have strong philosophical disagreements with the President on how to balance the budget. When the President sent us his budget this spring with no plan to achieve balance even in the long term, we decided to act on our own. We already have passed bills in both houses to achieve a balanced budget by the year 2,002 -- and those bills outline our philosophy and priorities.

we proven that
First, we ~~we~~ we can balance the budget and cut taxes for working families at the same time. Our tax cuts, by the way, serve two purposes. They reduce the

government's take of the people's wages – a goal worthy unto itself. But when also matched by cuts in government spending, as they are in the Republican budget bills, they have the added benefit of further limiting the sprawling, smothering growth of government. Anything that does that increases our chances for long-term prosperity.

Second, we have taken Social Security out of the discussion. It's off the table. It won't be touched.

And third, we've offered a way to preserve, improve and protect Medicare, a program teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, according to the President's own trustees. Let me be clear: Medicare is a legitimate function of government on which so many of our citizens rely. We must save it, and we will.

In fact, Republicans have already produced a strategy to balance the budget. Our budgets distinguishes between what is nice and what is necessary, between condescension and compassion, between redistribution of wealth and a return to the principles that created the American Dream. We believe we have outlined a path to prosperity America can rely on well into the next Century.

But tonight – with the President's entry into the process – a long-awaited national discussion finally begins in earnest. I invite the American people to listen closely. We are about to enjoin a debate of historic proportions about the strength of

our spirit and the character of our nation. The choices are fear or hope, dependence or self-reliance, more government or less.

May God help us act with a forthright faith in freedom and an unwavering trust in the American people.

Thank you, and good night.