

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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**BALANCED BUDGET
REPUBLICAN RESPONSE
REMARKS OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER BOB DOLE**

Good evening. I'm Bob Dole, the Senate Majority 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.

As I told the President when we spoke earlier this evening, there can be no higher priority for America, and the future of our children, than to balance the federal budget. Since you gave Republicans control of the Congress last November, I have known a balanced budget was at last within reach. But we have lacked the necessary partnership with the President of the United States. 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 judgement of history.

But I also offer a word of caution about what the President is saying. As I listened to him tonight, I was concerned to still hear a defense of the status quo -- recycled reasons why big government cannot become smaller, why programs cannot be cut and why agencies cannot be eliminated. As government has grown bigger, the plight of poor 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 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.

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. Strategies to engender fear, and to pit classes of Americans against each other, will not be tolerated. The will of the people cannot 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. When President Clinton sent us his budget just four months ago, it contained no plan to achieve balance even in the future. In fact, the President proposed increasing the deficit by \$1.2 trillion over the next five years. President Clinton's plan was defeated in the Senate by a vote of 99-0. Republicans were forced to act on our own. We passed bills in both the House and the Senate to achieve a balanced budget by the year 2002 -- and those bills outline our philosophies and priorities.

First, the Republican Congress has already demonstrated that 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 growth of government that smothers our chances for long-term prosperity.

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

And third, we've offered a commitment to preserve, improve and protect Medicare, a program teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, according to three members of the President's own cabinet. Let me be clear: Medicare is a legitimate function of

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government on which many millions of our citizens rely. We must save it, and we will.

As I said before, Republicans have already produced a strategy to balance the budget. Our budgets distinguish between what is nice and what is necessary, between a hand out and a hand up, 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 conduct 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 faith in freedom and an unwavering trust in the American people.

Thank you, and good night.

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