

low-income people buy health insurance. It adds funding for medical research, and it gives our men and women in uniform a \$1 billion pay increase.

My budget is also responsible. It pays down the national debt faster than any country has ever repaid its debt before. It establishes a contingency fund for unexpected needs, and it provides a reasonable 4 percent increase in discretionary Government spending; that is, 4 percent after we have paid every promised dime for Social Security and Medicare. Then, after meeting all these priorities, we return about \$1 out of every 4 in the surplus to the American taxpayer.

Some in Washington do not think a 4 percent spending increase is enough. They want Government to take a much larger part of the surplus. But think about it. For the past few years, average hourly wages have risen at a rate of about 4 percent. If the taxpayer can get by on a 4 percent raise, the tax collector ought to be able to make do with 4 percent, as well.

There's a lot at stake here. Last year Federal discretionary spending grew at a massive 8 percent. If this spending spree were to continue, we would drain the surplus by funding a permanently larger Government. This would be bad for the taxpayer and bad for the economy. It would

make significant debt reduction and tax relief much more difficult.

My budget plan doesn't slam the brake on spending; it slows the growth of spending. It makes our increases in spending more realistic and reasonable. All in all, my budget will provide the Government with 100 billion more to spend in 2002. Even by Washington standards, this is a lot of additional money, and it is enough.

This debate illustrates a point I've been making for a while: When money is left in Washington, there is a tremendous temptation for the Government to use it. The point is simple: If you send it, they will spend it. And this is why we need a balanced approach of moderate spending growth, debt reduction, and meaningful tax relief.

This is the plan the Congress is now considering, and I hope you'll give it your support.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:22 p.m. on March 23 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 24. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 23 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Exchange With Reporters in Kansas City, Missouri March 26, 2001

National Economy

Q. Are we in the middle of an economic downturn?

The President. We'll let the numbers speak for themselves. I'm concerned about our economy. I'm confident, however, if we do the right things, we can have economic growth, the likes of which we've had in the past. We'll watch the numbers carefully. The numbers will speak the truth.

The last quarter of last year was a very slow growth quarter, and we'll see how it is in the first quarter of this year. I think a lot of experts believe that it's going to be slow.

Q. Do you believe in Ari's formulation, that we're in the middle of an economic downturn?

The President. Pardon me?

Q. Do you agree with your spokesman's formulation, that we're in the middle of a downturn?

The President. It has slowed down, and we better do something about it. And that's one of the reasons I'm here in Kansas City, to talk about tax relief as part of an economic stimulus package. And by the way, you looked very sharp the other night. Where did you rent it? *[Laughter]*

Airline Labor Disputes

Q. Mr. President, are you going to intervene in the Comair strike?

The President. The National Mediation Board did not make—did not rule. In other words, they did not give me the right to move in on the strike. Therefore, the parties are going to have to settle it themselves.

Q. Are you still determined to prevent a season of airline strikes, sir?

The President. I am worried about what the airline shutdowns could do to the economy. I would urge that all parties come to quick resolution on the matters that—you know, on the table. Yes, I'm concerned about what airline strikes could do.

Q. But your hands are tied in this case?

The President. In this case they are, as you know.

Thank you.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:49 a.m. at the First Watch Restaurant. A reporter referred to Press Secretary Ari Fleischer. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to Employees of Bajan Industries in Kansas City
March 26, 2001

Elson, thank you very much for your hospitality. It was interesting, you said the name of this company is a reflection of his heritage, and that's true. But this company is also a reflection of the American Dream, as well. And I'm so thankful for the invitation to be here. I'm also thankful for your willingness to dream and to create jobs. This is what America is all about. This is what I call the lifeblood of the country.

I also took notice of the fact that you were quick to introduce your wife. *[Laughter]* Smart man. *[Laughter]* But I'm so thankful for you all to let us come. Senator, thank you very much for traveling with me. I appreciate Senator Bond's leadership. I believe he's got his priorities absolutely straight, and they include the people of—they include the good people of Missouri, right at the top of the list. And I appreciate being able to call him an ally.

Earlier today I was proud to travel with a newly elected Congressman, Sam Graves. We went to his district to say hello to folks in the district. And Sam, thank you for your willingness to serve. It's good to see Congresswoman Karen McCarthy. Thank you for your hospitality, Karen. And Congressman Dennis Moore—I've had a chance to visit with Dennis in the past, and I appreciate him at least giving me a chance to make my case. *[Laughter]* Mayor, thank you very much for your hospitality. Thanks for greeting me here today.

I want to talk about a subject that's on my mind—part of my job is to put it on your mind if it's not—and that's how to make sure we treat your money wisely in Washington and what do we do if we have any of it left over. First, let me talk about budgeting. Elson has to budget, and his plant manager has to budget. And one of the key components of budgeting is to set