

Mar. 23 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Statement on the Situation in Macedonia *March 23, 2001*

The United States joins its allies and the United Nations in strongly condemning the violence perpetrated by a small group of extremists determined to destabilize the democratic, multi-ethnic Government of Macedonia. The United States and its allies have a longstanding commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Macedonia.

The insurgents in Macedonia claim to be advancing the cause of the Albanian minority. They are not. In fact, their violent methods are hurting the long-term interests of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, Kosovo, and throughout the region. We support instead those political leaders in Macedonia and the region who have rejected violence and terror in favor of democracy and dialog as a way to achieve political change.

I strongly support the efforts of President Trajkovski and the Macedonian Government to uphold democracy and the rule of law. We encourage the Government to act with restraint and to work closely with elected representatives of the Albanian community to address legitimate concerns, while taking the necessary steps to prevent further violence.

The United States is working with its allies and friends in the region to assist the Macedonian Government in countering the violence perpetrated by the extremists. We support NATO's effort to assess Macedonia's immediate security needs. We are already providing surveillance information to the Macedonian Government, and our Defense Department is dispatching Predator unmanned aerial vehicles to assist in this effort. KFOR patrols have been increased along Kosovo's border with Macedonia in order to improve border security and curtail the insurgents' activities.

Macedonia is a close friend, a partner country of NATO, and a successful example of a democratic, multi-ethnic state in the Balkans. As the United States knows only too well, perfecting such a state—and addressing the legitimate concerns of minorities—is a continuous process. It can only be done through dialog and democracy—and never through violence. That is why we call on all those who seek political change in Macedonia to work through the democratic political process.

NOTE: The statement referred to President Boris Trajkovski of Macedonia.

The President's Radio Address *March 24, 2001*

Good morning. Just over 2 weeks ago, the House of Representatives passed a large part of my tax relief plan. Now the House is about to vote on my budget, the funding we provide for the needs and goals of our Government. I have sent the Congress a budget plan that reflects our values as a people.

My budget is compassionate. It dedicates \$238 billion to Medicare next year alone, enough to fund all current programs and to begin a new prescription drug benefit for low-income seniors. It protects all 2.6 trillion of the Social Security surplus for Social Security and for Social Security alone. It increases spending on education substantially. It provides tax credits to help

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?