

GEORGE W. BUSH'S SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS: THE GIFT OF WAR

GERSON DRAFT #23 (January 2005)

My Fellow Americans:

Four years ago I took the oath of office at a time of national crisis. Because so much has happened in the meantime, you may forget how deeply this nation had been injured by a scandal in the White House—a scandal that threatened to undermine and destroy forever the integrity, dignity, and decency of the highest office in the land: the presidency of the United States. By his reckless acts of self-indulgence in the very corridors of the White House, my predecessor had inflicted a nearly mortal wound on the honor of this nation. And if he had been followed into this office by his vice president, a man who had grossly abused his official telephone by using it to solicit political contributions on more than one occasion, I tremble at the very thought of the disaster that might have awaited us.

Fortunately, God in His everlasting wisdom spared us that fate. Through the wondrous instrumentality of our founding fathers, who devised an electoral system that protects us from the tyranny of the direct popular vote, and through the incomparable wisdom of our Supreme Court, which rightly ruled that Republican votes shall always count more than Democratic votes, we assumed the presidency for the first time four years ago. We then set out not just to restore America's honor and greatness but to ensure that this nation would be greater than ever before: responsible to no one but God in its mission to Christianize and democratize the world.

In the face of the bitter divisions that marked the presidential election of 2000, I pledged in my first inaugural to be a uniter, not a divider: to bind up and heal the wounds of this nation so that we might march firmly forward. I began, you will remember, by alleviating as well as I could the sufferings of the rich, who had

been literally staggering for many years under the burden of tax rates that made it virtually impossible for many of them to keep weekend chalets in Aspen, or even efficiency condos in Palm Springs. Firmly committed as I am to being a uniter, not a divider, I felt it was high time for the government to stop dividing these good people from so much of their money: money they and their accountants had earned by the long, hard work of turning major and tangible losses into spectacular paper profits. Now, four years later, these hard working, God-fearing, people are keeping more of their money, which is good for America because it's good for the Republican party to which they have contributed so much.

Now you may have heard nay-sayers complain about the cruelty of cutting government services, the recklessness of turning record surpluses into record deficits, the sheer irresponsibility of loading mountains of federal debt onto the backs of our children, our grand-children, our great-grandchildren. You know, Laura and I don't yet have any grandchildren. But when we do, here's what I'm going to tell them. We piled up these debts for you. We piled up them up so that you would live in a stronger America—because we knew you would have to be strong to pay off our debts. That is our gift to you.

To preserve its greatness, America must of course be strong not only at home but abroad, not only in peace but in war. America needs war, periodically, to test and nurture its greatness. The great tragedy of the ending of the Cold War is that it robbed us of a powerful enemy. It dissolved the threat that for so many years justified our spending billions on weapons systems that seldom if ever worked but nonetheless ensured that our defense contractors were the envy of weapons manufacturers around the world. The ending of the Cold War left us, as a nation, drifting into that stagnant, muddy, fetid pond known as diplomacy, where spineless negotiators cling like leeches to the body of this great nation, sucking its blood and draining its God-given will to fight.

But as every American knows, the catastrophe of 9/11 changed all that. It was a day of terror for all Americans followed

by weeks and months of mourning. Even now, Laura and I grieve anew with everyone who lost a loved one on that terrible day. But my fellow Americans, we must never forget that even as 9/11 ended the lives of nearly three thousand people, it gave new life to our nation. To replace the threat of Communism, which ended so regrettably and abruptly with the fall of the Berlin wall, it gave us a brand new threat that promises to last forever: terrorism.

Terrorism is not an enemy that can be conquered in a single battle, or even a single war. Terrorism can never be made to surrender or yield to the insidious blandishments of diplomacy because it never negotiates with anyone and could never be trusted to negotiate even if it agreed to do so. Terrorism is terrible, my friends, but it is also beautiful. Its great beauty is that we can find it wherever and whenever we choose to do so for the sake of launching a war, and since we can never defeat it altogether, we can go fighting indefinitely.

That is what we are now doing in Iraq, where a newly liberated people will—in just ten short days, my friends--exercise a right that is the birthright of every God-fearing American but that is now our brand-new gift to the Iraqi people: the right to vote. We know of course that this will not be a perfect election. We know that many thousands of Iraqis will be unable to vote, either because they have been intimidated by those few Iraqi terrorists who hate freedom and will do everything they can to oppose it, or simply because they have been accidentally killed or maimed by our own bullets and bombs even though we have done everything humanly possible to minimize the loss of innocent Iraqi lives and therefore don't bother to count the ones we take. But we must not and will not let the nay-sayers block the path of freedom. Even though half of all eligible voters live in areas too dangerous for the casting and counting of votes, we know that this will be a free and fair election: at least as free and fair as our own presidential election of 2000. It will be carefully monitored by international observers safely housed in nearby Jordan. It will give the long-suffering Shiite people a precious chance to take possession of their country

at last. It will ensure the election of a government that will allow America to keep all of its military bases in Iraq and to firmly control the supply of its oil. Most important, because the Iraqi insurgents have proven unrelenting in their opposition to Iraqi freedom, it will ensure that we may continue to fight in Iraq for years to come.

I know that across this great land of ours, many Americans grieve for those brave men and women who have died in the service of their country, for those sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters and sisters and brothers and husbands and wives who have given their lives for the sake of Iraqi freedom. I know too that a small number of you—a very small number of you—feel that your loved ones have died for a mistake because we never found any weapons of mass destruction or any link between Saddam Hussein and the terrible events of 9/11. But to you I say, my friends, that this war has been resoundingly justified. It is justified not only because the world is better off without the murderous dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. It is also justified because it provided all these brave young people a priceless opportunity to sacrifice themselves for the sake of freedom, for the sake of American greatness. That is my gift—that is our gift—to them all.

War, you see, like ever-mounting debt, is the gift that keeps on giving. That is why we must continue to fight and to spend even while cutting taxes still more deeply so as to ensure that our children and grandchildren may be strong enough to pay our debts. At this crucial moment in our great nation's history, we must not heed the nay-sayers and radicals who tell us that we cannot win the war in Iraq, that we must preserve Social Security rather than privatize it away, that we must choke the pharmaceutical industry by demanding drugs that are both affordable and safe, that we must start guaranteeing health insurance for all American children instead of simply criminalizing abortion, which I know is what God wants us to do.

The path that lies ahead of us is not an easy one. It will often be rough and steep; it will sometimes be treacherous. But with your help I will climb it fearlessly. I will strive again to justify the confidence that you have placed in me and my war. Together, as we fight on in Iraq and around the world, we will ensure that America stands tall in the saddle, fearless of enemies and justly disdainful of any would-be ally who would dare to question or criticize our war. Because God is my mentor as well as my judge, I am proud to say that I never made a mistake in my first term and will never make one in my second. And so I say, my fellow Americans, God bless America—and me.