

# Bush on the issues

President George W. Bush will battle Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts on the campaign trail, where they will face off on issues from Iraq to the economy. Here, we look at where Bush stands on the major issues facing the nation.

## Five significant achievements

**1 Tax relief.** Tax-cut packages in 2001 and 2003 reduced the tax burden on virtually every American. Economists generally agree that the tax cuts also helped stimulate a faltering economy. Critics contend that any benefit was more than offset by the long-term cost of growing budget deficits and inequities in the tax system.

**2 Prescription drugs.** On Dec. 8, Bush signed legislation that added prescription-drug coverage to Medicare. Beginning in 2006, seniors will be able to sign up for coverage, at cost of about \$35 a month, that is expected to cut the average prescription-drug bill in half. The new benefit is expected to cost the federal government at least \$334 billion over the next 10 years.

**3 War on terrorism.** In response to the Sept. 11 attacks, Bush launched a war on terrorism that dealt a significant blow to the al-Qaeda terrorist network and toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Working with Congress, the administration also created the Homeland Security Department in the largest reorganization of government since World War II.

**4 War in Iraq.** The war was controversial, as many people around the world believed that U.N. inspections were sufficient to contain the threat, but with war Bush succeeded in removing and ultimately capturing Saddam Hussein. Bush ordered the invasion on March 19, 2003. Just three weeks later, U.S. troops stormed into Baghdad. As it turned out, the war was the easy part. More troops have died since Bush declared major combat over on May 1, 2003 than in the war itself. No weapons of mass destruction have been found. Bush vows to develop stable democracy in Iraq.

**5 No Child Left Behind.** The education law that Bush made a top legislative priority requires annual math and reading tests for elementary-school students and seeks to hold failing schools accountable. Parents with children in poor-performing schools have the option of transferring to another school. Critics say the federal government has failed to follow through with funding to carry out the new law.

— Ron Hutchison

### ABORTION

Bush opposes abortion, but says the country is not ready to outlaw the procedure. He says his goal is to promote "a culture of life" that would help change public opinion. Meantime, he supports new restrictions on abortion, including the recently enacted ban on the procedure often called "partial-birth abortion." He said during the 2000 campaign that he would not make abortion a litmus-test issue for any Supreme Court nominee.

*"During the past three years we've made real progress toward building a culture of life in America. ... Working with the Congress, we have refused to spend taxpayers' money on international programs that promote abortion overseas. We're opposed to the destruction of embryos for stem-cell research. And last November, it was my honor to sign into law a ban on the brutal procedure of partial-birth abortion." (Telephone call to "March for Life" in Washington, D.C. Jan. 22, 2004)*

### DEATH PENALTY

Bush favors the death penalty and authorized more than 150 executions when he was governor of Texas. He believes that it deters future crimes. He supported expanding the federal death penalty to include terrorism-related crimes.

*"I support the death penalty because I believe, if administered swiftly and justly, capital punishment is a deterrent against future violence and will save other innocent lives. ... The threat of being put to death might deter someone from taking another life." (From "A Charge to Keep," Bush's 1999 autobiography)*

### DEFICIT

Bush inherited a \$237 billion federal budget surplus that has turned into a record \$521 billion deficit, thanks to an economic recession, the aftereffects from Sept. 11, the war with Iraq, the stock market tumble, increased government spending and tax cuts. He promises to cut the deficit in half within five years with a plan that relies heavily on his belief that the improving economy will bring a big increase in tax revenues. He also wants to impose spending limits on Congress. Bush and his advisers downplay risk from the deficit by arguing that it is not so large as a proportion of the economy.

*"The reason we are where we are, in terms of the deficit, is because we went through a recession, we were attacked, and we're fighting a war. And these are high hurdles for a budget and for a country to overcome, and yet we've overcome them. ... And as the economy gets better, it enables us to send up a budget to the Congress that does cut the deficit in half." (The White House, Feb. 2, 2004)*

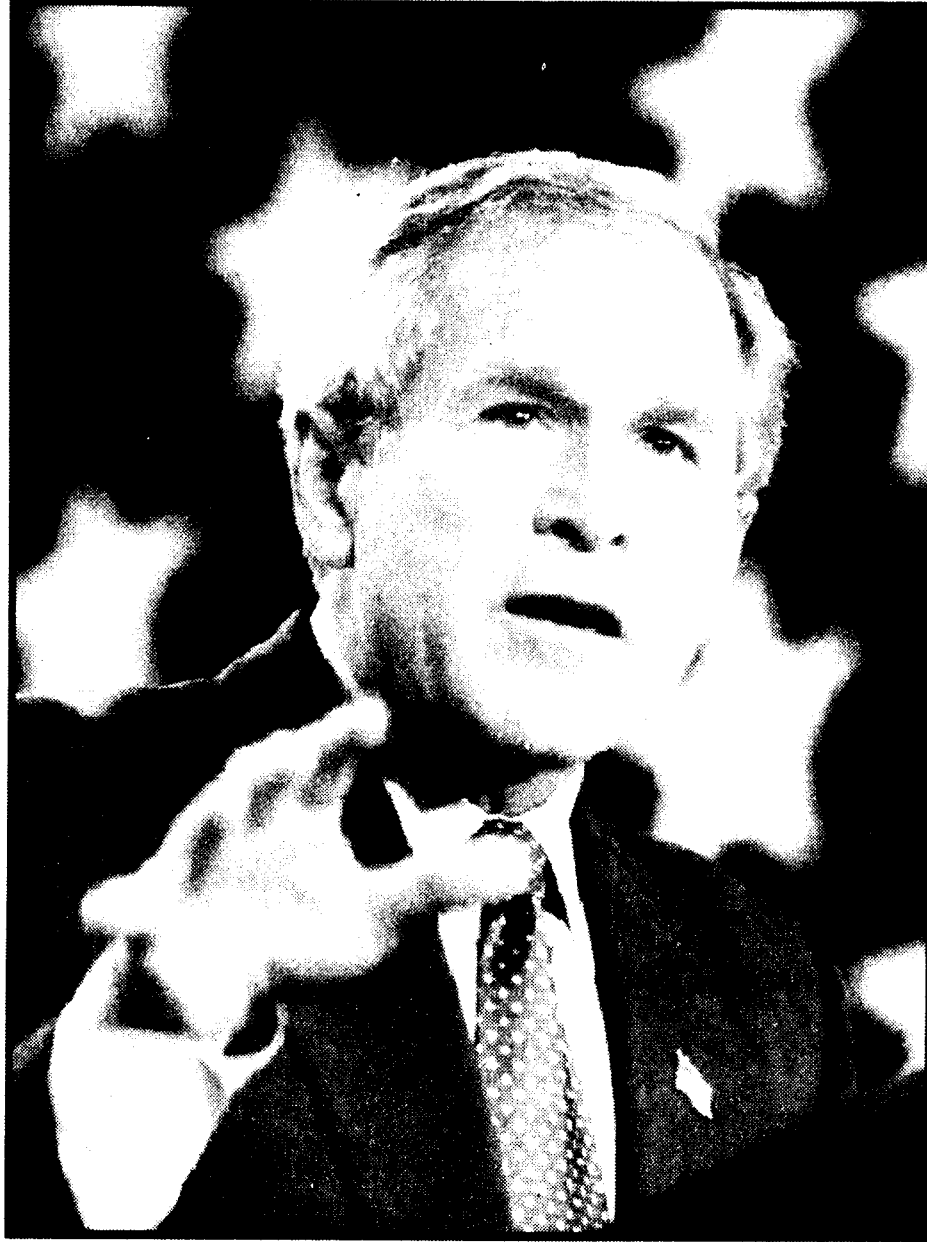
### EDUCATION

Bush's No Child Left Behind law seeks to improve education by imposing new standards on schools and holding them accountable for failure. The law requires annual testing in math and reading for grades three through eight, and at least once during high school. Parents can transfer their children out of schools with consistently low scores. Critics say that the federal government has failed to provide adequate funding to help states meet the law's goals. Bush says that federal spending for education has increased by nearly 60 percent between 2000 and 2003. He has also increased federal funding for charter schools, public institutions that operate independently from public school systems.

*"If the idea is to make sure not one child is left behind, you better test. ... We've got to stop this business about just shuffling kids through the schools in America. We've got to stop social promotion and focus on whether or not each child is getting the instruction he or she needs." (St. Louis, Jan. 5, 2004)*

### ENVIRONMENT

Bush favors market-based approaches to environmental protection and has sought to ease government regulation of business. He abandoned the Kyoto treaty on global warming because of concerns that it would damage the U.S. economy, but has pledged to find other ways to reduce emissions that contribute to the problem. His Clear Skies initiative gives power plant operators more flexibility in meeting emissions targets that are supposed to reduce emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and mercury by 70 percent. He favors opening 1.5 million acres of the 19 million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas exploration. He has pledged to spend \$1.2 billion on a hydrogen-fuel initiative that seeks to make hydrogen-powered cars widely available and affordable by 2020.



ERIC SEALS/REUTERS

*"One way to make sure that the job supply is steady and growing in the long-term is to have a realistic energy policy, coupled with realistic environmental policy. ... People in this country must understand that we can have a pro-growth agenda, a pro-job agenda and a pro-environment agenda at the same time." (The White House, Sept. 16, 2003)*

### GAY MARRIAGE

Bush initially resisted the idea of a constitutional amendment banning gay marriages, but changed his position in February. He said a court ruling in Massachusetts and gay marriages by local officials in California and New Mexico left him no choice. White House aides say Bush favors an amendment that would ban gay marriages but let states decide whether to allow civil unions or other arrangements that stop short of traditional marriage.

*"Marriage cannot be severed from its cultural, religious and natural roots without weakening the good influence of society. Government, by recognizing and protecting marriage, serves the interests of all. ... The amendment should fully protect marriage, while leaving the state legislatures free to make their own choices in defining legal arrangements other than marriage." (The White House, Feb. 24, 2004)*

### HEALTH CARE

Bush advocates new tax credits of up to \$1,000 for individuals and \$3,000 for families to help uninsured Americans pay for health insurance. He would also let small businesses band together to negotiate group rates from health-insurance companies. Another proposal seeks to hold down medical costs by limiting damage awards in lawsuits against doctors and other health-care providers. He would cap non-economic damages for issues such as "pain and suffering" at \$250,000 and put what he calls "reasonable" limits on punitive damages.

*"Our goal is to ensure that Americans can choose and afford private health-care coverage that best fits their individual needs. ... A government-run health care system is the wrong prescription. By keeping costs under control, expanding access, and helping more Americans afford coverage, we will preserve the system of private medicine that makes America's health care the best in the world." (State of the Union speech, Jan. 20, 2004)*

### IMMIGRATION

Bush has urged Congress to create a new temporary-worker program that would let an estimated 8 million foreigners who are in the country illegally gain legal status. The program, open to immigrants from any country, would let temporary workers stay for up to three years, with the

possibility of extensions. Employers would have to certify that no Americans were available for jobs filled by temporary workers.

*"This new temporary-worker program will strengthen both the American and Mexican economies. The United States will benefit from the labor of hard-working immigrants. Mexico will benefit as productive citizens are able to return home with money to invest and spend in their nation's economy." (Crawford, Texas, March 6, 2004)*

### IRAQ

Bush contends that the war in Iraq was necessary because Saddam Hussein's regime was "a grave and gathering danger" to the United States, even if U.S. troops do not find weapons of mass destruction. He has vowed to stay in Iraq as long as it takes to establish a stable democracy. He takes issue with critics who say that he failed to win international support for the war, noting that more than 40 nations have agreed to help the U.S. effort in some way. The White House list of allies in Iraq includes Eritrea, Micronesia, Angola and several other countries whose assistance is limited.

*"I had a choice to make — either to take the word of a madman, or take action to defend our country. Faced with that choice, I will defend America every time." (Dallas, March 8, 2004)*

### ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Bush has gone further than any other U.S. president in calling for creation of an independent Palestinian state, but he has also maintained close ties with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. After initially resisting calls for U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, Bush jumped into the fray in 2003 by endorsing a "roadmap for peace." The plan requires Israelis and Palestinians to take a series of steps to ease tensions, but it has been largely ignored. The Bush administration has protested the construction by Israelis of a fence around Palestinian areas but has avoided a direct confrontation on the issue.

*"America is committed, and I am personally committed, to implementing our road map toward peace. Our efforts are guided by clear principles: We believe that all people in the Middle East — Arab and Israeli alike — deserve to live in dignity, under free and honest governments." (The White House, March 14, 2003)*

### JOBS

The economy has suffered a net loss of about 1 million jobs since Bush took office. Administration officials express confidence that modest recent job gains — about 1.7 million over the past year — will increase as the economy improves. Even so, the White House backed away from its prediction that the economy would

gain 2.6 million jobs this year. Bush contends that job growth is a direct result of his tax cuts. He has released a six-point plan to encourage more job growth. It calls for making tax cuts permanent, implementing a producer-friendly energy policy, expanding trade, restricting lawsuits against business and doctors, reducing government regulation and cutting health costs.

*"We'll keep this government on the side of growth and job creation, so American businesses can compete and prosper. We'll focus on job training and education, so Americans can improve their skills and improve their lives. We'll get the policies right, and the American people will do the rest." (Cleveland, March 10, 2004)*

### SOCIAL SECURITY

Overhauling Social Security is near the top of Bush's second-term agenda. His plan would let younger workers invest a small part of their Social Security taxes in the stock market or other private investments. Older workers would be allowed to stay in the current system. Under the current system, younger workers pay for benefits to older retirees. Under Bush's plan, workers would set aside money for their own retirement. Bush has not said how he would deal with huge transition costs to make sure retirees get their benefits while younger workers sock away cash for their own retirements.

*"Today, young workers who pay into Social Security might as well be saving their money in their mattresses. ... Personal savings accounts will transform Social Security from a government IOU into personal property and real assets; property that workers will own in their own names and that they can pass along to their children." (The White House, May 2, 2001)*

### TAXES

Bush contends that the tax cuts he pushed through Congress pulled the economy out of recession and started a new growth cycle. Now he wants Congress to permanently extend the tax cuts before they expire in 2011. According to White House budget officials, the lost revenue from Bush's tax cuts accounts for about one-fourth of the record \$521 billion deficit, but Bush contends that the loss will be more than offset by increased revenue as the economy strengthens. He also has more tax cuts in mind for his second term, including expanded tax breaks for certain savings accounts.

*"With the largest tax relief since Ronald Reagan was president, we've left more money in the hands that earned it. By spending and investing and helping create new jobs, the American people have used their money far better than the government would have." (Los Angeles, March 3, 2004)*

### TRADE

Bush is an outspoken advocate of free trade who has pushed for trade agreements with countries around the world. His second-term goals include a proposal to link the entire Western Hemisphere in a pact similar to the North American Free Trade Agreement. But Bush has sometimes deviated from his free-trade principles. In a move that critics considered blatantly political, he imposed tariffs on foreign steel in 2002 to protect the U.S. steel industry. He lifted them late last year to avoid a trade war with Europe and sanctions from the World Trade Organization, which ruled the tariffs illegal.

*"Instead of building barriers to trade, we must break down those barriers so that good products, American products, are welcomed and sold on every continent. ... One in five factory jobs in this country directly depends on trade. The surest way to threaten those jobs is a policy of economic isolation." (Cleveland, March 10, 2004)*

### VETERANS

Bush says that his administration has cut the average time for processing veterans' disability claims by 30 percent. He hopes to eliminate the waiting list for veterans' health-care services by this summer. Although Bush says health-care funding for veterans has also increased by 30 percent since he took office, the funding has not satisfied veterans groups. Both the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion called Bush's proposed 2005 health-care budget of \$29.5 billion inadequate.

*"Many veterans have observed that the government seemed to work a lot more efficiently when it wanted something from them. When the Draft Board got your file, it worked efficiently. But now, when you need health care, forms get lost and answers come late. That is no way to treat America's veterans, and that is going to change." (Milwaukee, Aug. 20, 2001)*

— Ron Hutchison, Knight Ridder Washington correspondent

BUSH ON THE ISSUES  
KNIGHT RIDDER/TRIBUNE

# Remember to vote