

BUSH

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work unfinished."

On issue after issue, Bush described a nation confronted by challenges — at risk from terrorism, at risk from "thugs" in Iraq, at risk from "activist judges" who have been "redefining marriage" by striking down laws against gay marriage.

Declaring that "the people's voice must be heard," he threw his support behind a proposed constitutional amendment to outlaw same-sex marriages.

"If judges insist on forcing their arbitrary will upon the people, the only alternative left to the people would be the constitutional process. Our nation must defend the sanctity of marriage," Bush said.

Although Bush highlighted U.S. accomplishments in Iraq and in the war on terrorism, he said much more needs to be done. He urged Americans to avoid being lulled by the absence of attacks on the homeland since Sept. 11, 2001.

"That hope is understandable, comforting — and false," he said. "The terrorists continue to plot against America and the civilized world. And by our will and courage, this danger will be defeated."

He acknowledged the challenges in Iraq, where more than 500 U.S. troops have died since he came before Congress a year ago to make the case for war. Bush blamed the violence on holdouts from Saddam Hussein's ousted regime.

"These killers, joined by foreign terrorists, are a serious, continuing danger," he said. "We are dealing

with these thugs in Iraq, just as surely as we dealt with Saddam Hussein's evil regime."

He sought to counter critics who questioned the need for the war last spring and who fault Bush for failing to win more international support.

And, despite the failure of U.S. troops to find any weapons of mass destruction or Iraqi ties to terrorist groups, he again cited those risks as a justification for war.

"Objections to war often come from principled motives. But let us be candid about the consequences of leaving Saddam Hussein in power," he said. "Had we failed to act, the dictator's weapons of mass destruction programs would continue to this day."

Turning to domestic issues, Bush expressed confidence that the economy would continue to improve, but called on Congress to take additional steps that he believes will help encourage job growth. His legislative to-do list includes a producer-friendly energy policy and a proposal to make temporary tax cuts permanent.

He also acknowledged that some of the manufacturing jobs that have disappeared during his term would not come back. The nation has lost nearly 3 million jobs since Bush took office, many of them in the manufacturing sector. He urged Congress to approve a new job training program that would help displaced workers start new careers.

"America's economy is also a changing economy," Bush said. "We must respond by helping more Americans gain the skills to find good jobs."

In the Democratic response, Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle and House Democratic Leader Nancy

Pelosi said Bush has bungled key foreign and domestic issues.

Daschle said Bush has alienated allies with a "go-it-alone foreign policy," while Pelosi accused him of pushing corporate tax breaks at the expense of American workers.

"Instead of borrowing even more money to give more tax breaks to companies so that they can export even more jobs, we propose tax cuts and policies that will strengthen our manufacturing sector and create good jobs at good wages here at home," Pelosi said in advance excerpts.

Bush also used this year's State of the Union speech to deliver a progress report on efforts to transform Iraq and Afghanistan into democracies. He said the fall of Saddam sent a powerful message to other rogue nations and will encourage the spread of democracy in the Middle East.

"Because of American leadership and resolve," he said, "the world is changing for the better."

Polls show that most Americans continue to support the war in Iraq, but some national security experts, including some in Bush's own administration, dispute his assertion that it has made America safer. Bush's critics, including some current military, intelligence and Foreign Service officers, say the war diverted resources from the hunt for al-Qaida terrorists, hampered international cooperation in the war on terrorism and fueled more hatred toward America in the Muslim world.

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UNION

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Bush also indirectly criticized Dean, a contender for the Democratic presidential nomination, saying, "For all who love freedom and peace, the world without Saddam Hussein's regime is a better and

safer place."

Dean has been heavily criticized for saying last month that Americans "are no safer today than the day the planes struck the World Trade Center," despite Hussein's capture.

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Thursday, January 22, 2004
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