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January 29, 2003

State of the Union speech laid out agenda of 'global welfare and global warfare,' Libertarians say

WASHINGTON, DC -- President Bush laid out an agenda in his State of the Union speech that will make most Americans worse off than before, Libertarians say, by expanding government spending and increasing the likelihood of war with Iraq.

"Americans who were hoping for peace and prosperity instead got a plan for global welfare and global warfare," said Geoffrey Neale, Libertarian Party national chair. "Confiscating more money from struggling American workers is the worst prescription for a sputtering economy, and waging perpetual war will never achieve perpetual peace."

During his hour-long State of the Union address on Tuesday night, Bush unveiled plans for approximately a half-trillion dollars in new or expanded social programs; said Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had missed his "final chance" to avoid a U.S.-led attack by continuing to thwart U.N. weapons inspectors; and cited threats posed by Iran and North Korea.

But Libertarians say more government spending and more war is the exact opposite of what America needs.

"The mind-boggling array of government programs laid out by President Bush has to be paid for by someone, and that someone is the ordinary Americans who can least afford it," Neale said.

The presidential wish list included \$400 billion for prescription drug coverage for seniors; \$600 million to remedy drug addiction; \$6 billion for vaccines against bioterror attacks; \$1.2 billion to fund government research into hydrogen-powered cars; \$450 million to

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mentor children; and millions to hire more "citizen volunteers" for the USA Freedom Corps and to continue Bush's "faith-based initiative" to funnel tax money to churches and charities.

"But Bush's impulse to spend tax money promiscuously didn't stop there," Neale noted. "He even made Clintonesque appeals for more money for homeless shelters; to protect abused women; to 'provide companionship' for the elderly; and even to prevent forest fires. Apparently there's no aspect of American life that this self-described conservative doesn't want to federalize.

"Unfortunately, Bush doesn't want to limit the spending of American money to, well, America," said Neale, noting that Bush proposed spending \$10 billion for anti-AIDS programs in Africa; expanding international food programs; and even using U.S. tax money to educate children in Afghanistan.

"It's clear that under the Bush administration, welfare has gone global," Neale said. "And this 'compassionate conservative' shows no mercy at all for his fellow Americans who have to pay the bill."

Regarding Iraq, Neale said that Bush failed to make a convincing case that going to war is necessary for America's self-defense, which is the only reason that Libertarians believe war can be justified.

"Bush pointed out that Saddam Hussein is a ruthless dictator who represses his own people, and that the Iraqi leader possesses or is trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction - both of which seem to be true," Neale said.

"But the fact remains that Iraq has not attacked the United States, nor has Bush presented the American people with any specific, credible evidence that Hussein is linked to the September 11 terrorist attacks. So launching a war against Iraq is unnecessary for self-defense, and therefore totally unjustifiable."

While acknowledging that Bush claimed that the United States has "secret communications" that show a link between Iraq and al Qaeda, Neale noted that foreign policy experts say such an alliance is extremely unlikely.

Neale said: "As John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt point out in the January/February issue of Foreign Policy magazine: 'Osama bin Laden is a radical (Muslim) fundamentalist, and he detests secular leaders like Saddam. . . Relations between Saddam and al Qaeda have always been quite poor.' The scholars conclude there is 'no credible evidence that Iraq had anything to do with the terrorist attacks' on September 11.

"If Bush has evidence to the contrary, he has a solemn

obligation to show it to Congress and to the American people before taking even one more step toward war."

But what about Bush's prediction that Saddam himself would initiate a chemical or biological attack against the United States?

"That's extremely unlikely as well," Neale said.

"What Saddam values above all else is his own survival, and he knows that attacking the United States would lead to a devastating counterattack and the loss of his own life," Neale said.

"Moreover, Saddam had the opportunity to douse U.S. troops with such weapons during the Gulf War, and declined. So we can assume that he was deterred by the same thing that would deter him in the future: the belief that he would be obliterated by the U.S. response."

The best way to protect Americans from war with Iraq or with any other nation is to bring U.S. troops home and use them for defensive purposes only, Libertarians say.

"The real lesson from Bush's speech is that big government causes more problems than it solves, both overseas and at home," Neale said. "America can become more prosperous and more secure only if we declare an end to global warfare and global welfare."

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