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May 3, 2005

Policy Analysis no. 543

Policy Analysis

The Grand Old Spending Party: How Republicans Became Big Spenders

by Stephen Slivinski

Stephen Slivinski is director of budget studies at the Cato Institute.

Executive Summary

President Bush has presided over the largest overall increase in inflation-adjusted federal spending since Lyndon B. Johnson. Even after excluding spending on defense and homeland security, Bush is still the biggest-spending president in 30 years. His 2006 budget doesn't cut enough spending to change his place in history, either.

Total government spending grew by 33 percent during Bush's first term. The federal budget as a share of the economy grew from 18.5 percent of GDP on Clinton's last day in office to 20.3 percent by the end of Bush's first term.

The Republican Congress has enthusiastically assisted the budget bloat. Inflation-adjusted spending on the combined budgets of the 101 largest programs they vowed to eliminate in 1995 has grown by 27 percent.

The GOP was once effective at controlling nondefense spending. The final nondefense budgets under Clinton were a combined \$57 billion smaller than what he proposed from 1996 to 2001. Under Bush, Congress passed budgets that spent a total of \$91 billion more than the president requested for domestic programs. Bush signed every one of

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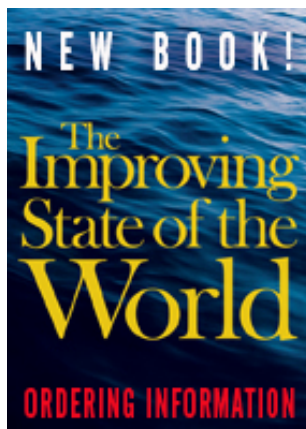
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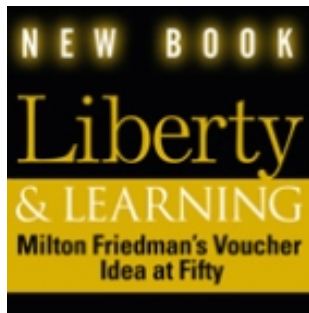
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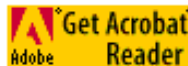
those bills during his first term. Even if Congress passes Bush's new budget exactly as proposed, not a single cabinet-level agency will be smaller than when Bush assumed office.

Republicans could reform the budget rules that stack the deck in favor of more spending.

Unfortunately, senior House Republicans are fighting the changes. The GOP

establishment in Washington today has become a defender of big government.

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