

January 2, 2006 The ongoing war in Iraq, hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and congressional scandals all served to make 2005 a tough year for America. We can hope and pray that 2006 is a happier and more peaceful year for our nation. All Americans, regardless of their views on the Iraq war, can share the hope that the killing in that country will end in 2006-- and that our troops can begin to come home. Our goal in Iraq at this point must be self-determination for the Iraqi people, nothing more and nothing less. Nation building doesn't work and we can't afford it. We should seek to get our troops out of the country as soon as possible and remain neutral toward the various factions still vying for power. The ultimate solution may be for Iraq to break up into several countries based on ethnic and religious differences. Regardless of the outcome, we must have the courage and integrity to admit that our founders' wise counsel against foreign entanglements was correct. Once the rationale for the war shifted from weapons of mass destruction to installing democracy, our credibility became dependent on true Iraqi sovereignty-- even if the government that emerges is not to our liking. True sovereignty for Iraq cannot be realized unless and until we end our occupation and stop trying to engineer political outcomes. Meanwhile, prosperity at home cannot be achieved if we allow government to engage in the kind of runaway spending that marked the final months of 2005. The fiscal year 2006 budget, already bloated with billions of dollars in unnecessary and counterproductive spending, became an 11th hour Christmas grab bag for every group or industry seeking a handout. Several federal agencies and bureaucracies needlessly received even more funding than originally requested by the administration. Dangerous foreign aid spending also grows next year, sending more of your tax dollars overseas to fund dubious regimes that often later become our enemies- as we've seen in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Congress cannot continue to increase spending each year and expect tax revenues to keep pace. No reasonable person can argue that a \$2.4 trillion budget does not contain huge amounts of special interest spending that can and should be cut by Congress, especially when we are waging an off-budget war in Iraq that costs more than \$1 billion every week. It is easy for us to lose sight of the primary responsibility of our government during troubled times, and many Americans are anxious to have the administration spend any amount and ignore the Constitution to achieve some mythical standard of security. Yet we should not forget that peace and prosperity are best secured by a government that secures liberty for its citizens. The best formula for securing liberty is limited government at home and a noninterventionist foreign policy abroad. Americans deserve better from their government in 2006 than huge deficits, scandals, domestic spying, and mindless partisanship.