

# A Conservative Vision for 2005

By Jeb Bush

It is with some trepidation that I stand here tonight before so many distinguished scholars and leaders in the business of ideas—individuals that can speak in four and five syllable words. I am humbled, something I have been a great deal more than I would like lately, having run for office as a Republican in 1994 and actually lost.

Life does go on after a loss, but it can be a little confusing. Shortly after the election, I was traveling to downtown Miami for a meeting at the *Miami Herald*. I decided to take Miami's rapid transit system to my meeting at the *Herald*—a rapid transit system with an \$80 million annual deficit that the federal government has given to Dade County. I was one of only six other people on the train at the time, and a woman began staring at me. Now, I just spent approximately \$8 million of 48,000 Floridians' hard earned money to increase my name recognition. The woman knew she was supposed to know me. Finally, after some time, she approached me only to say, "You used to be Jeb Bush, right?"

Yes, a campaign can be a humbling experience, as is speaking to this group tonight. My mother always warned me that hanging out with a bad crowd would get me into trouble. If the major premise of her statement is valid—and I believe it is—then hanging out with each of you at this conference will hopefully make me smarter. Regardless, I know she would be proud that I am with such a distinguished group—particularly if at least half of you have purchased her book!

I have been asked to outline a vision for what the conservative agenda should represent by the year 2005. Five years into a new millennium, how will we measure our success, and what will it look like if we do our part?

Well, measuring is the easy part. We would ask Bill Bennett to revise his *Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*, reviewing the latest statistics in comparison to those previous and measuring the results.

We would also request the 2004 edition of the *Federal Register* via Internet, and assuming we could count the pages on one hand, that would be good. If what we received was as thick as the State of the Union addresses of one-term President Bill Clinton, this would be bad.

Additionally, if Heritage President Ed Feulner could complete his tax return for that year over dinner, by himself, or if there are vacant offices in D.C. federal buildings, then we would have achieved success! That is to say that finding a yardstick to measure our success should not be too difficult if at least the beginning of the conservative revolution takes place.

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But the most important yardstick of our success, relevant to the more than 250 million citizens of this great country, will be if we can say to each other that the American dream is alive and well. Will Americans feel that the prospects for the next generation will be better than what they had? Will there be a sense of hope and optimism in our daily lives, rather than the gloom and doom which surround most of our lives today? Today, for too many Americans, the American dream does not exist. Only one-third of us believe that the next generation will be better off than we are today. That is the lowest that question has polled in the history of polling, since the 1930s. Equally discouraging is that by a margin of two to one, Americans believe that we are moving in the wrong direction. And nearly three to one believe that government hinders more people than it helps.

If, by the year 2005, we have restored faith in the American dream, and we've done that at the grassroots level through conservative activists advocating ideas and principles that lead to good government, then we will easily measure the success of this movement.

How do we do this? Our challenge is to convince the American people that conservative principles offer the greatest hope of dealing with the trauma of turbulent change that we are currently experiencing in our country.

I believe there is a total disconnect between the politics of today and the concerns of real people. It exists because the real world is changing so fast, and the resulting anxiety leads to increased dependence on government. This anxiety exists in the cultural and social changes that have transformed our society for the worse. It exists with the ending of the Cold War, the void subsequently created and the uncertainty that followed. And certainly the anxiety exists with the shift from an industrial economic model to an economic era yet to be defined. It is hard to speak esoterically and convincingly about the power of conservative principles with an individual who has recently lost his or her job due to downsizing. It is very hard to speak esoterically with a mother who is terrified of sending her third-grader to a school that is so filled with violence her only concern is getting her child home safely, not teaching that child to read and write. It is hard to convince a small business man or woman of the power of the conservative movement when he or she pays more than 40 percent of his or her income to government.

People are tired of talk. They are ready for and want action. That is what they demanded in the last election. And for us to be successful and to take advantage of the opportunity with which we have been presented, we must begin the process—stop talking and start doing! I am excited that the first step has begun in Washington. But those of us that are in the rest of the country know that the hardest work is yet to be done, and it will be done at the state level and in our own communities.

There is a great deal at stake. We will redefine our country as we begin this battle. We must frame the debate in a way that challenges Americans to accept and reward individual achievement over collective action, to support equality of opportunity rather than a guarantee of results. Will we be a pluralistic, tolerant place to live or a multicultural country which breaks itself into separate parts with nothing in common—not even our language? Will we value freedom and the personal responsibility that is attached to it, or will we accept the false security of the state? If we convince enough people to make the right choice on these issues, the rest will fall into place.

I believe that we must immediately focus on four principles, particularly at the state and local level, in order to accomplish our agenda to ensure a brighter future for the next generation by the year 2005. And in the process, we must not compromise. We must not blink. I believe the principles that will drive the debate in our favor are the following:

- ① government should not grow any more, any time, any place, at any level faster than our ability or willingness to pay for it, and a crisis may be necessary to achieve this;
- ② public safety, in good times and bad, should and must be the first priority of government;
- ③ education must be revolutionized—not reformed; and, finally,
- ④ strong character must be held up high for all to see because it is the bedrock of freedom.

If we are willing to pursue those four principles, then I am convinced we will win the revolution.

First, on government growth, I cannot believe that people would think that we can sustain the ability of government to grow faster than personal income growth, or faster than our ability to pay for it. But for the last 30 years, that is exactly what we have been attempting to do, not just in Washington, but in Tallahassee and in many local communities as well.

Today, that is changing, and it must. Thank goodness for Newt Gingrich! Thank goodness for someone who has the vision to recognize that we must slow the rate of government growth and get government out of our lives.

The biggest tragedy of the first 100 days of this new Congress was that Mark Hatfield did not support the balanced budget amendment. Because the balanced budget amendment would have created a crisis—and in Washington, or in Tallahassee, we must create a crisis to force government to change. Governments do not change unless they are compelled to do so. Fortunately, in the real world, we have markets, and markets force businesses to change. Markets force families to change because of declining income. But government has never been compelled to change. We are lacking an ingredient to create a crisis.

At the state level, where many states have a balanced budget requirement, we need constitutional constraints on government's ability to tax and spend. Whether that means an extra majority in the legislature to raise taxes, or voter approval of all taxes, we must create boundaries to ensure that government cannot grow faster than our ability to pay for it.

If we do that—create a crisis—then we set the stage to deinvent government. And inside this principle of controlling government growth are two additional points that I believe are important: We must control government with a degree of fairness and sacrifice, and we must do it with a little intellectual audacity.

**First, on fairness.** Clinton's Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich, has said very few things that make sense. But one thing he has said that I believe makes a great deal of sense is that if we are focusing on dismantling the welfare state, on reducing the power of government in our lives, then we must also focus on dismantling the corporate welfare state. We must be honest that it exists, and we must be fair.

Fairness means that in my home state of Florida, for example, where the sugar industry fights for price supports that protect their ability to grow sugar at the approximate cost of \$1 billion to American consumers, we should begin to dismantle that price support system if we are to call for the dismantling of public assistance for individuals living below the poverty level. Pick your favorite corporate subsidy or protective tariff or quota imposed by government at the request of business. If we are to dismantle welfare and deinvent government, we cannot stop with Democratic constituencies. We have to get Republican constituencies out of the trough as well.

**Sacrifice.** How often have you attended a Chamber of Commerce meeting in your local community where the Chamber president, with the best of intentions, talks about how important it is for the local government to fund the civic center? In that same sentence in

which they advocate the civic center, they bemoan the waste, fraud, and abuse of government for some constituency with no ties to the Chamber. If we are going to reinvent government, the sacrifice must be across the board. I am willing to put my favorite government programs on the table. Everyone must be willing to do that in order to make the revolution successful.

**Intellectual audacity.** Audacity is one of the key ingredients for successful enterprise. We must challenge every basic assumption about how things work. If we aren't doing it this way, should we? If it's not broken, should we break it? Challenging every basic assumption—that's my mother! And that's what makes for successful entrepreneurship.

Why is it that in government we don't use these principles? Let me give you another Florida example. The juvenile justice system there, as in most states, has been based on the therapeutic model, where we tell children they are victims of society when they begin to commit violent crimes. We accelerate them into a life of being hardened criminals by never punishing. In Florida, the toughest juveniles in the system are called "level eight detainees"—a code word in social service talk for first degree felons.

We will spend \$150 a day for programs that will last over a year with recidivism rates of over 75 percent. That's around \$150,000 per successful case. Yet no one has the audacity to say, "Is this appropriate? Is this appropriate, this false sense of compassion? Or is it more appropriate to punish a child closer to the first crime they commit, offering them long-term hope by teaching that there are consequences to their actions? If they do something right they will be rewarded. If they do something wrong they will be punished."

This combination of fairness, sacrifice, and intellectual audacity will allow us to begin the process of dismantling government. But we can't stop there. Once government becomes smaller, what will be our priorities?

Conservatives must make public safety the first priority of government. Today, we are finally winning that fight across the country. Through ballot initiatives and through legislation, people are forcing prisoners to serve their time. Yesterday, the Florida legislature passed a bill requiring prisoners to serve 85 percent of their sentences. There are initiatives to reform the death penalty process. There are substantial changes in the juvenile justice system. The challenge now will be, as financial resources become more and more limited, to continue this prioritization of public safety. And I believe, though there will be much screaming and howling, that voters will respect the public officials who advocate making public safety the first priority of government.

Francis Bacon said that knowledge is power. Today, that statement is even more relevant and true. It is essential for the long-term survival of our country to recognize that the only way to achieve power and economic security is to acquire knowledge.

Peter Drucker's article "The Age of Transformation" is a powerful piece which discusses how knowledge has become the driving force of our economy. Knowledge-based workers are replacing industrial workers as the base of our economic might. And if too few of us make the transition, our quality of life will not be sustained.

I believe we are moving toward economic apartheid in America—apartheid not based on race, but on the ability to reason, the power of knowledge. Young people who acquire this power will be the haves; those who do not will be the have nots. The old paradigm of race is gone. Today, knowledge is what drives the possibilities of a fulfilled life.

My friends, if you think that our current education system is going to deliver that power to enough young people today, then I would recommend that you switch parties or change think tanks. I submit to you that we must revolutionize education to deliver that power.

And we must start with the education structure. School time is based on the agricultural model. School organization is based on the industrial model of the 1950s. How could we think that our children are going to be educated in those models today? If you are not involved in the fight to revolutionize our educational system, you should be. There are great examples of individuals outside government fighting that battle right now. And it is time for conservative activists like us to join them and together change the structure of our education system.

I'm excited that the city of Orlando has joined perhaps 15 other cities to sponsor a privately funded voucher program where children below the poverty level will now be able to attend private school. I'm excited that the Florida legislature now appears to have passed a charter school bill that will be a live bill, offering the chance of innovation.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the Foundation for Florida's Future, a grassroots-based conservative action network in which I am involved, is jointly sponsoring a charter school with the Greater Miami Urban League in Liberty City, an area of Miami where too many children have no dreams. It is unconscionable to me that there exists a totally different America within five miles of where I live in Miami. Charter schools offer hope in that regard. These children will attend school in uniforms. They will attend school in which there will be respect for authority. They will have teachers who will love them. And they will be focused on reading. Every one of these children, at the end of their first year, will have improved their reading levels in a way that the bureaucrats in the education establishment could never imagine.

We can change our education system, but, again, it will take action, not talk. I encourage you not only to advocate the passage of legislation on vouchers, charter schools, and deregulation, but to get involved by encouraging people to set up schools when that legislation becomes law. By the year 2005, if we have injected competition into our education system and, through competition, mistakes have been allowed to occur, we will have been successful. Because if we are to be successful, we have to fail along the way. How many people here have failed before? Our education system today doesn't allow failure. If we revolutionize our education system through competition, we'll make that happen.

And, finally, let me suggest that character matters a lot in this regard. Imagine we are in the year 2005. Imagine that government is 15 percent of GNP. There is no budget deficit. Government lives within its means. Imagine that all of the federal departments recommended for closure by The Heritage Foundation don't exist anymore. Imagine that this is occurring at the state and local levels as well. Imagine that making public safety a priority has led to decreases in crime. And imagine that we have saved a generation of young people by radically changing the philosophy of dealing with juvenile crime. Imagine a revolutionized education system where there is innovation and more choice for parents, with children increasingly acquiring the power of knowledge.

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1 Unfortunately, subsequent to this speech, the Florida legislature failed to agree on legislation that would have allowed for the organization of charter schools. Funding does exist in appropriations legislation that would allow the Commissioner of Education to establish several "break the mold" schools—possible mock charter schools. The governor has not yet signed the appropriations legislation. This is another example of how difficult it is to convert ideas into action. The battle has just begun, and we have a long way yet to go.

Is that enough? No. Because unless we have character at the forefront of our lives, then the pursuit of happiness, that inalienable right, cannot occur.

One of the toughest moments in my life was when I lost the 1994 governor's race in Florida. I know that if that's the worst thing that ever happens to me, I'll be a lucky man. But it hurts. The day after the election I was driving home with my family and I passed Governor Lawton Chiles waving signs of "thank you" on U.S. 1 in Miami. Lawton Chiles never lost an election in 35 years. It became his tradition to sign wave after an election, thanking people for supporting his candidacy. I stopped my car and shook hands with Governor Chiles because it was the right thing to do. This wasn't hard, because my parents taught me that you should do these things. In fact, I didn't really think about it. It just happened. And you know what happened next? This small act made the national news. Thirty seconds of news on every national network. It was written about in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. I'm not bragging about this. I'm bemoaning the fact that we've lost our civility to the extent that this small act of character would make national news. We've lost our civility. We've lost a sense of character. Thirty years ago, not shaking Lawton Chiles' hand would have been considered newsworthy. Today, doing so is newsworthy.

We cannot sustain freedom unless we restore a sense of civility to our lives—unless we place character at the forefront. This is not a religious discussion. Character matters. The right values matter. Government can no longer be neutral in this debate because, by doing so, it is rewarding the wrong values. For us to keep freedom intact, we must end the debate on the margins and join together with a shared vision, liberal and conservative, recognizing that good character matters.

That is the agenda for the year 2005 that I believe will lead to a brighter future for George, Noelle, and Jeb—my children—and the children and grandchildren of the people in this room. Imagine the sense of satisfaction you will have by fighting for a similar agenda in your states and communities to ensure a brighter future for the next generation. I can't think of anything more important for us to do.

