

growing social organism in human history, I guess. Just think, hundreds of thousands of pages are being added to the Internet worldwide every month, you know, whenever somebody has got some new idea.

So what does all that mean? Well, first of all, it means that the old arrangements are not adequate. And one of the things that had hurt my party, the Democratic Party, in national elections was that people said, "Well, the Democrats have a good heart, and they're trying to take up for the people that need help, but they're too wedded to the old arrangements." And then the modern Republican Party, the Republican Party of the last 20 years, said, "Well, the real problem is the Government itself. Government is inherently unsuited to deal with the problems of the modern age." And you heard them say that many times in all good faith: "The Government is the problem. The Government is bad. If we just had less Government, everything would be hunky-dory."

I did not agree with either approach. I didn't think that my party could afford to be a stand-pat party. I thought we had to change. But I thought I had seen enough of the world to know, number one, that no other country was trying to move into the 21st century without a partnership between government and business and labor and people in the public and private sectors and that there are some things we have to do together as a people that can only be done through our Government. There are conditions and tools that have to be provided to people to make the most of their own lives.

If you believe what I think is the American creed, which is: we're all created equal; nobody should be discriminated against; and everybody that needs it deserves a hand up—that's what I think. So I set out on this odyssey that has now culminated in where we are 5 years later, with the simple idea: I'm going to change the role of Government. We're not going to do nothing, but we're not going to try to do everything. We're going to focus on creating the conditions and give people the tools they need to make the most of their own lives.

What does that mean? It means we're going to grow the economy by reducing the deficit, investing in people, and expanding trade. It means we're going to protect the environment, but we're going to do it in a way that proves we can improve the environment while we grow the economy. It means we're going to expand

health care, but we're going to do it in a way that not only focuses on quality care but tries to keep the cost down. It means we're going to actually reduce the size of Government but increase the investment we make on the streets in trying to fight crime—different ideas, not being put into false choices.

And 5 years later, I think the results are pretty good. The budget is 92 percent lower than it was the day I took office—the deficit is. And I'm going to send a balanced budget to Congress next month for the first time in 30 years. We've had 14.3 million new jobs and the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, the lowest crime rate in 24 years, the biggest drop in welfare rolls in history, the highest rate of homeownership in history, including the highest rate of homeownership by African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans.

I didn't do all that. You did most of it. I did my job. Our job was to create the conditions and give people the tools to build good lives, good families, good communities, a strong nation, and then to reach out to the rest of the world, recognizing that this is an increasingly interdependent world.

I say this to make a simple point for why it really matters that you're here for Sheila Jackson Lee, apart from the fact that she's a fireball and you like her. [Laughter] That's good enough reason to show up, but there is a bigger reason. Ideas have consequences in public life, just like they do in the classroom or in novels or in your personal lives. We had an idea that there was a role for Government in public life in the 21st century; that it wasn't inherently bad, but it needed to be smaller and less bureaucratic and more focused on empowerment. And we have a lot of challenges left.

You've still got neighborhoods in Houston where there are people who haven't been helped by this global economy. We've still got places where free enterprise has not found its way in. The biggest untapped market for American goods and services are in the unemployed neighborhoods of America. We've made a lot of progress in education; there are still a lot of underperforming schools. I'm trying to get everybody to go to college, but the first thing you've got to know is when you get out of high school your diploma means what it says, and you can read it, and you know what it means, and you got out of it what you need.