

begin the process of establishing modern dial exchanges. The Hazleton exchange became the first to be cut over to modern dial service on March 3, 1956. BEK continued to grow and prosper throughout the 1950's and 1960's. In April 1967, a third REA loan enabled BEK to begin upgrading its system to one party service. By June 10, 1977, all of BEK's 12 exchanges had been upgraded to one-party service.

What began as a dream in the minds of rural residents 50 years ago has evolved into a diverse, state-of-the-art telecommunications company serving 6,000 members across 5,700 square miles in a six-county area. Today BEK Communications provides many basic and advanced services including: local and long distance telephone service, dial-up and high speed Internet access, using DSL & satellite technologies, advanced intelligent network features, ISDN, dedicated data circuits, voice mail, automated attendant functions, centrex and more.

BEK's success and its commitment to providing exemplary telecommunications services to its members is indicative of all the rural telecommunications carriers that make up the membership of the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association. NTCA's membership has expanded from eight members in seven States to 558 members spread across 45 States. These small rural telecommunications systems provide voice services to approximately 3,270,000 subscribers over a combined territory comprising some 40 percent of the geographic United States. On average, NTCA member-companies serve rural areas with a population density averaging between one to five customers per square mile, a sharp contrast from the Bell companies average of 130 customers per square mile. Today, NTCA member-companies on average serve 5,100 subscribers. In addition to their traditional voice offerings, most are also engaged in the provision of some combination of Internet, wireless, long distance, paging, and cable or satellite television services.

Through it all, NTCA members have maintained that local touch that can only be found by folks serving their friends and neighbors. With the financial assistance of the Rural Utilities Service, NTCA members remain on the cutting edge of technology by expanding broadband opportunities through such means as fiber-to-the-home projects in communities across this country. NTCA rural telecommunications companies continue to connect the heartland of America to the world. NTCA and its 558 member-companies should be commended for their ever present commitment to rural America.

Happy 50th Anniversary, NTCA. ●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Evans, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

TRANSMITTING THE BUDGET OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2005—PM 62

The Presiding Officer laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was referred jointly to the Committees on Appropriations and on the Budget:

The Budget I am proposing for 2005 is a reflection of this Nation's goals and purpose, and advances our three highest priorities. First, America will prevail in the War on Terror by defeating terrorists and their supporters. Second, we will continue to strengthen our homeland defenses. Third, this Nation is building on the economic recovery that began in earnest in 2003 with policies that further promote growth and job creation. In addition, we will continue to strengthen the domestic institutions that best express our values, and serve the basic needs of all: good schools, quality and affordable health care, and programs that promote hope and compassion in our communities. In meeting these priorities, the Government must exercise fiscal responsibility by limiting spending growth, focusing on the results of Government programs, and cutting wasteful spending.

In 2003, America made great progress in the War on Terror. Afghanistan, which once was ruled by the repressive Taliban regime, now has adopted a new constitution, taking a fundamental step on the path to democracy. In Iraq, the remnants of the Ba'athist regime are being systematically rounded up, and Iraqis are assuming responsibility for their own security and future government. Libya has pledged to disclose and dismantle all of the regime's weapons of mass destruction programs.

These victories do not change a fundamental truth: Our Nation remains at war. In this war, which began on September 11, 2001, our citizens are the strategic targets of our enemy. We have responded in two significant ways: First, we have taken the offensive to hunt down the terrorists, deny them easy refuge, identify and seize their secret finances, and hold them and their sponsors to account. Second, we have moved to secure the Nation's homeland. In 2003, the new Department of Homeland Security began operations in the biggest reorganization of the Federal Government in half a century. Over this past year, we have taken

steps to reduce the terrorist threat to Americans here at home, and protect American interests overseas. This Nation has committed itself to the long war against terror. And we will see that war to its inevitable conclusion: The destruction of the terrorists.

Our Budget reflects the continuing importance of providing for the defense and security of the American people. We will continue to provide whatever it takes to defend our country by fully supporting our military, which is performing with great skill and honor in our battles overseas. We also are providing the necessary resources to our law enforcement and emergency personnel at home to meet the new threats posed by terrorists.

Just as we have taken much-needed steps to strengthen our national security, we have also pursued an aggressive agenda to promote our economic security. In 2003, we worked with the Congress to accelerate much of the tax relief that had been passed in 2001, so that Americans could keep more of their paychecks and so that businesses would have more incentive to invest in new jobs and new equipment. As a result, our economy is strong, and growing stronger. Economic output in the third quarter rose at its fastest annual pace in nearly 20 years. More manufacturers reported rising factory activity than at any point in the last 20 years. American homeownership reached its highest level ever. Employment is on the rise. By cutting tax rates on investment gains and dividend payments, we promoted saving, capital formation, and investment—and Americans' holdings in the stock market rose by almost \$3 trillion.

There is still more to do, however. We cannot be satisfied until every American looking for work has found a job. We must sustain the momentum of this recovery by making the tax relief passed in 2001 and 2003 permanent. We will continue to open markets abroad for American products. And as the economy improves, we will also confront the challenge faced by workers who must learn new skills to fill new jobs. As a Nation, we must help Americans develop the skills they need to succeed in a highly competitive, highly productive economy. And so this budget continues to support high standards in our schools and proposes a Jobs for the 21st Century initiative to ensure older students and adults can gain the skills they need to find work now.

Economic growth and good stewardship of taxpayer dollars will help us meet another important priority: Cutting the budget deficit brought on by recession and war. We must continue to evaluate each Federal program, to make sure that it meets its goals, and produces the desired results. I propose to hold discretionary spending growth below four percent, less than the average rate of growth of American family incomes. And spending unrelated to defense and homeland security will be held below one percent growth—less

than the rate of inflation—while continuing to meet education, health care, and other priorities of this Nation. With this spending restraint and continue pro-growth economic policies, we can cut the deficit in half over the next five years.

Finally, this Budget addresses the needs of a great and compassionate Nation, whose values are strong, and whose institutions of hope are enduring. We are helping communities of faith pull the addicted out of dependency. We are lifting children out of a life of despair by making sure they have mentors, and we will continue to press for improvements in our schools, so that no child is left behind. We are extending hope and healing to millions suffering from the global epidemic of AIDS. We will begin to implement the benefits of our Medicare modernization and reform law, which will bring all our seniors coverage for prescription drugs. And we will make health care more affordable and extend the full benefits of our health care system to more Americans who currently have no health insurance.

Meeting these priorities will require hard work, skill, and the resources of a great Nation. Yet America has always risen to new challenges, and has always set new goals. Challenge and change have revealed the true strengths of this Nation and the enterprise of its people. And as 2004 begins, I am confident those gifts will serve us again, until our work is done.

GEORGE W. BUSH,
THE WHITE HOUSE, February 2, 2004.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-6008. A communication from the Secretary of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the implementation of the Performance-Based Incentive System; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC-6009. A communication from the Secretary of Labor, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Department of Labor's Fiscal Year 2003 Annual Report on Performance and Accountability; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC-6010. A communication from the Director, Office of Exemption Determinations, Employee Benefits Security Administration, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Class Exemption for the Release of Claims and Extensions of Credit in Connection with Litigation" (RIN1210-ZA03) received on January 13, 2004; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC-6011. A communication from the Chairman, National Indian Gaming Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Fees" (RIN3141-AA16) received on January 13, 2004; to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

EC-6012. A communication from the Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the implementation of machine-readable

passports; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

EC-6013. A communication from the Under Secretary and Director, United States Patent and Trademark Office, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Changes to Implement the 2002 Inter Partes Reexamination and other Technical Amendments to the Patent Statute" (RIN0561-AB57) received on January 13, 2004; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

EC-6014. A communication from the Director, Regulations Management, Veterans Benefits Administration, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Exclusions from Income and Net Worth Computations" (RIN2900-AJ52) received on January 13, 2004; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

EC-6015. A communication from the Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Revisions to the California State Implementation Plan, San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District, Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District" (FRL#7607-5) received on January 20, 2004; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-6016. A communication from the Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Formaldehyde, polymer with a[bis(1-phenylethyl)phenyl]-w-hydroxypoly(oxy-1,2ethanediy)-; Tolerance Exemption" (FRL#7340-9) received on January 20, 2004; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-6017. A communication from the Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Copper (ii) Hydroxide; Exemption from the Requirement of a Tolerance" (FRL#7341-1) received on January 20, 2004; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-6018. A communication from the Chairman, Commodity Futures Trading Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, the fiscal year 2003 Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-6019. A communication from the Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Sulfuryl Fluoride; Pesticide Tolerance [Final Rule]" (FRL#7342-1) received on January 20, 2004; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-6020. A communication from the Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Lactic Acid, n-Butyl Ester, (S) and Lactic Acid, Ethyl Ester, (S); Exemption from the Requirement of a Tolerance [Final Rule]" (FRL#7338-4) received on January 20, 2004; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-6021. A communication from the Secretary, LOCAL Television Loan Guarantee Board, Department of Agriculture, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "7 CFR Part 2200 and 2201, LOCAL Television Loan Guarantee Program" (RIN0572-AB82) received on January 27, 2004; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-6022. A communication from the Congressional Review Coordinator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Department of Agriculture, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Add Yucatan Peninsula to the List of Regions Considered Free of Exotic Newcastle Disease" (Doc. No. 02-036-2) received on January 27, 2004; to

the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-6023. A communication from the Chair, United States Access Board, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the Inspector General Act and the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6024. A communication from the Chair, United States Access Board, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the Inspector General Act and the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6025. A communication from the Director, Office of Management and Budget, Executive Office of the President, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Office's Fiscal Year 2003 Inventory of Commercial Activities; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

EC-6026. A communication from the Executive Director, Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the Federal Managers' Fiscal Integrity Act of 1982 and the Inspector General Act of 1988; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. DASCHLE (for Mr. LIEBERMAN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. DASCHLE, Mr. DORGAN, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. CORZINE, Mr. GRAHAM of Florida, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. DODD, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. LOTT, Mr. GRAHAM of South Carolina, and Mr. HAGEL):

S. 2040. A bill to extend the date for the submittal of the final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, to provide additional funding for the Commission, and for other purposes; to the Select Committee on Intelligence.

By Mr. MILLER:

S. 2041. A bill to provide that pay for Members of Congress be reduced following any fiscal year in which there is a Federal deficit; to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. GRAHAM of Florida:

S. 2042. A bill for the relief of Rocco A. Trecosta of Fort Lauderdale, Florida; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. SPECTER (for himself and Mr. SANTORUM):

S. 2043. A bill to designate a Federal building in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, as the "Ronald Reagan Federal Building"; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. SCHUMER:

S. 2044. A bill for the relief of Alemseghed Mussie Tesfamical; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mrs. BOXER:

S. 2045. A bill to amend the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to require a voter-verified permanent record or hardcopy under title III of such Act, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Rules and Administration.

By Mr. GRAHAM of Florida (for himself and Mr. NELSON of Florida):

S. 2046. A bill to authorize the exchange of certain land in Everglades National Park; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. BOND:

S. 2047. A bill to amend the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000 to include certain