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## Sen. Frist Sees Bush Economy Plan Passing

BY JOANNE KENEN  
Reuters

**WASHINGTON** - The new Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist predicted on Sunday that Congress would approve President Bush's economic growth package, despite the swift criticism it received even from some influential fellow Republicans.

The Tennessee Republican did not rule out amendments or changes to the \$674 billion, 10-year package, but declared that it was definitely not dead on arrival in Congress.

Appearing on Sunday television talk programs, Frist said Bush would have to sell the plan. He added, however, that critics had forgotten how Bush defied predictions of failure in 2001 when he pushed through his first big tax cut package, receiving some Democratic support.

"Yes, the president will have to sell it. Yes, the United States Senate will have to debate it and look at each and every one of those components," Frist said on "Fox News Sunday." But at the end of the day, I am confident that in a bipartisan way ... we will have support to pass it, to implement it and ultimately, reap the benefits of it."

But Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota called the Bush plan "reckless" and said that many who had backed the 2001 tax package now regret doing so, given the ballooning federal budget deficits and weak economy.

"This is a stimulus for the rich and a sedative for the rest," Daschle said on ABC's "This Week," arguing that Bush's plan would benefit the wealthy most. Democrats have proposed alternatives that would direct aide to middle class and working families and to fiscally-strapped state governments.

### ECONOMIC GROWTH, JOB CREATION

Bush's package would eliminate taxes on most dividends paid to shareholders, speed up across-the-board cuts in tax rates and offer more tax relief to married couples and families with children. But even some fellow Republicans have voiced concern about its size and ability to stimulate the economy this year.

Former U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, in his first public comments since being dropped as a key member of Bush's economic team last month, spoke out against the package.

Speaking on Pittsburgh television station KDKA-TV on Sunday, O'Neill said he saw only minor value in eliminating taxes on corporate dividends, adding, "I would not have done it."

And commenting on employment data released on Friday that showed the nation's businesses shed 101,000 jobs in December, O'Neill said, "The notion that government can actually do something about that in the short term is ridiculous."

Frist defended the latest stimulus plan, including the controversial elimination of taxes on dividends.

"It is a balanced plan that benefits all Americans, all Americans -- forget that tax-cut-for-the-rich rhetoric. And I'm absolutely convinced ... that it will pass with bipartisan support, just like the president's initial plan did," Frist told NBC's "Meet the Press."

On another hot-button item, Frist again praised as "well-qualified" Charles Pickering of Mississippi, whom Bush renominated last week to become a judge on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. Last year, the Senate Judiciary Committee, then under Democratic control, rejected his nomination over concerns about his civil rights record.

Pickering's renomination surprised some observers given that the Republicans are trying to improve their reputation on civil rights after Mississippi Republican Trent Lott was forced from his Senate leadership position when he made remarks that were perceived as nostalgic for the era of racial segregation.

Frist succeeded Lott as the Senate's top Republican.

Daschle said the Pickering's renomination "really lays bare the administration's real position on civil rights" and promised an all-out fight to stop the nomination.