

Leadership, Faith, and Public Service

An Interview with The Honorable George W. Bush President, United States of America

EDITORS' NOTE: The 43rd president of the United States of America, George W. Bush, was sworn into office on January 20, 2001, following a campaign in which he outlined sweeping proposals to reform America's public schools, transform national defense, provide tax relief, modernize Social Security and Medicare, and encourage faith-based and community organizations to work with the government to help needy citizens.

Born on July 6, 1946, in New Haven, Connecticut, Bush grew up in Houston and Midland, Texas. He received a bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1968, and then served as an F-102 fighter pilot in the Texas Air National Guard. Upon earning his M.B.A. from Harvard Business School in 1975, he returned to Midland to begin a career in the energy business. After working on his father, George's, successful 1988 U.S. presidential campaign, he assembled a group of partners to purchase the Texas Rangers baseball franchise the following year.

Bush served as managing general partner of the ball team until he was elected governor of Texas in 1994, with 54 percent of the vote. Four years later, he became the state's first governor to be elected to consecutive four-year terms, this time with 69 percent of the vote. During his six years in office, he earned the reputation for being a compassionate conservative who shaped public policy based upon the principles of limited government, personal responsibility, and strong family ties.

Since taking the office of president, President Bush has signed into law bold initiatives to improve public schools, pro-

vide all taxpayers with rebates and lower tax rates, and increase the salaries and benefits of the military. He is working to save and strengthen Social Security and Medicare, while also being committed to ushering in an era of responsibility in America. To that end he has called upon all Americans to be "citizens, not spectators; citizens, not subjects; responsible citizens building communities of service and a nation of character."

President Bush is married to Laura Welch Bush, a former teacher and librarian. They have twin daughters, Barbara and Jenna.



September 11, 2001, was a historic day for America. How did it challenge your leadership skills?

The main thing September 11 did was to make me realize that we were at war. The first thing a leader does is to define a goal, and I defined the goal of winning the war on terror as a paramount goal for America. And so my administration and the resources of our government and our country focused on that goal.

Secondly, September 11 tested my ability to make decisions during a hectic period. History will judge whether or not I made the right decisions during a hectic period, but one thing September 11 did was to sharpen the skills necessary to be a good leader. Sometimes the toughest decisions have to be made when there's a lot of chaos, or seeming chaos, around.

Thirdly, the nature of September 11 and the nature of the flow of information required me to rely upon the good people I had put in government as never before. By that I mean I needed the CIA and the FBI to move quickly in determining who the enemy really was. Once we figured out the action that night, I told [Secretary of Defense] Don Rumsfeld to prepare to win the war on terror and [Secretary of State] Colin Powell to gather a coalition of the willing. In other words, two of the things a leader must do are surround himself with good people and delegate. And I needed to delegate very quickly so we could get on top of the situation, which we were able to do.

How did you assemble such a team?

Fortunately, I was wise enough to seek excellence, and



excellent people were kind enough to say yes in the service of their country.

I think a leader must have good instincts. One instinct that is important is the ability to judge the character of somebody else and determine the nature of that person. I look for results-oriented people, people who have experience, people who are optimistic, and people who, once a decision is made, are willing to say, "Yes, Mr. President, I will execute your decision."

Is it hard to find good people?

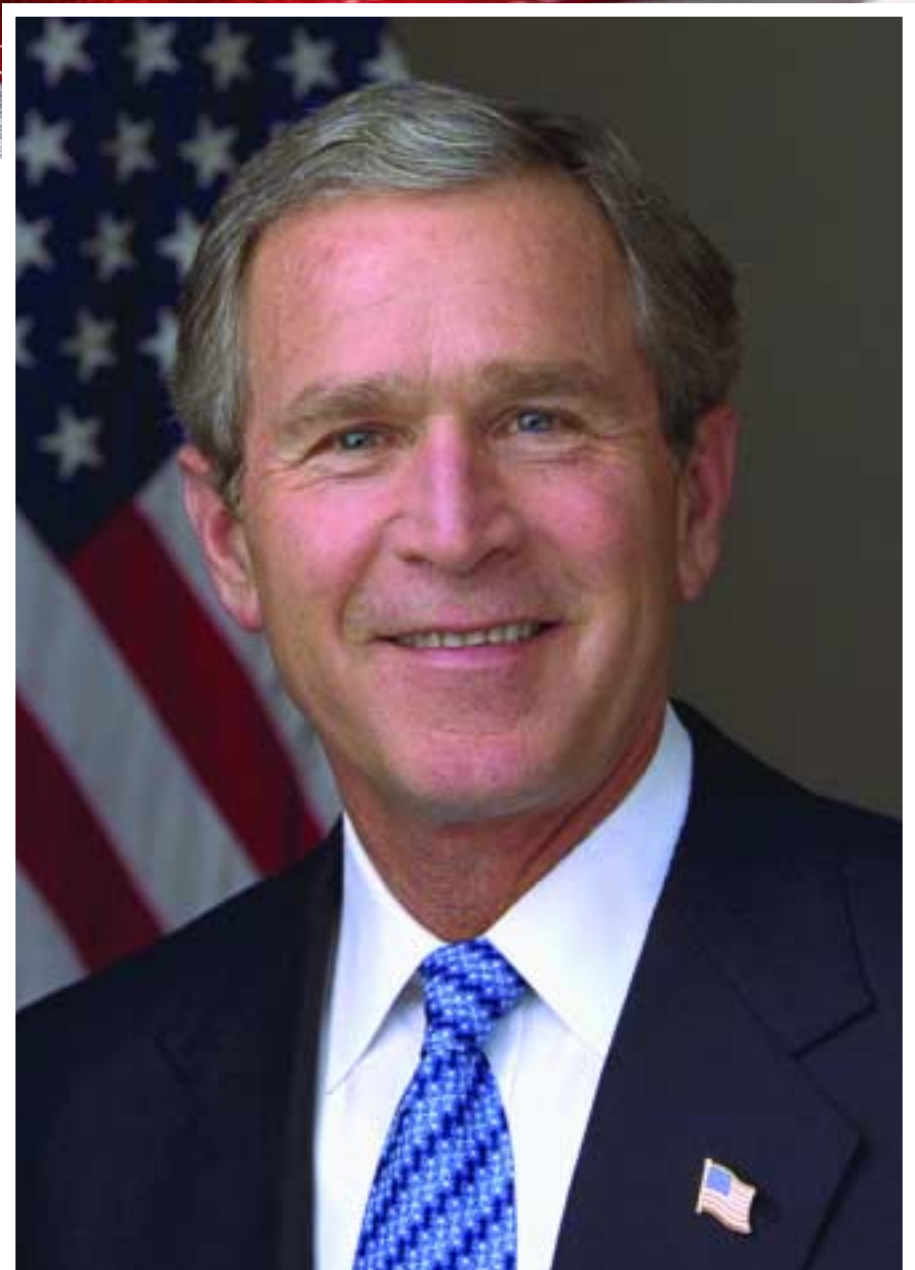
No, fortunately for America. At least initially during an administration, people are enthused about serving their country; they're enthused about the administration. It was not hard to find good people.

You're the first American president to hold an M.B.A. Do you think your education has influenced the way you govern?

Yes, I do. I think an education is part of a person's being. First of all, I think you can be taught, or be given certain tools to learn from others, and one of the things a Harvard M.B.A. does is to teach tools and skills using the case-study method. You study how others have done it, and you pick and choose the management skills of other people who fit your personality.

Second, Harvard Business School gave me a lot of confidence. Third, I learned what it means to be a capitalist, and we're a capitalist country. I think it's important for people to understand how a capitalist country functions.

I recently met with a group of economists, and while I'm not necessarily fully steeped in their language, I was able to understand and, more importantly, know what questions to ask. I would



highly recommend a Harvard Business School education for those who are interested in the business world, who have an entrepreneurial bent, and who want to develop the tools necessary to realize their entrepreneurial dream.

You've often urged citizens to serve a purpose greater than themselves. Can you describe the importance of public service and what it has meant to the Bush family?

Well, first of all, I believe that the job of a President is to call people to a higher calling. The painting there [on the wall of the Oval Office in the White House] by W. H. D. Kerner is called *A Charge to Keep*. It is based upon the Methodist hymn "A Charge to Keep I Have," which calls people to a higher calling. And the reason that painting is on the wall is that the job of the President is to call people to a higher calling.

A "higher calling" means not only being a Cabinet secretary; it also means being a volunteer at a Boys & Girls Club, or a mentor or teacher, or a good mom or dad. In other words, one of the things we must do in America is to work for a culture that insists that people be responsible for the decisions they make in life.



LEADERS Editor-in-Chief Henry O. Dormann interviews President Bush in the Oval Office.

People should also understand that, in this country, a responsible society encourages people to love their neighbors.

Now, that's the way I was raised by my folks. From the public service perspective, I was raised in a family that had a United States senator, Prescott Bush of Connecticut, who was a successful businessman and decided to serve his state in the halls of Congress. And that was a good lesson for my dad, and for me and all my brothers. We were taught that putting time in – in government, in this particular case – was noble and important. But my grandfather and grandmother also did a lot of charitable and volunteer work. I'm really talking about something greater than public service; I'm talking about helping others in need.

Throughout my adult life I have been involved with different charities. I ran the United Way campaign in Midland, Texas, as one example. And I believe that it's an important part of our society for people to contribute time and/or money to help those in need.

Why do people want to run for public office, when they know that every part of their personal and family lives from the past and present will be made public and picked apart in the press?

That's the trouble: It is a problem. The reason I decided to forego privacy was because I wanted to serve my nation, and I believed that the sacrifice was worthwhile.

I first got into public office because I was worried about the public education system in Texas. I ran for President because I was worried about the state of the morale of our United States military, and I was worried that big issues weren't being addressed. I couldn't foresee September 11; no one could. But I knew that a strong America would be needed to deal with the challenges of the 21st century, and I wanted to strengthen our country.

I also knew that the economy was weakened. As a matter of fact, the stock market started to decline in March 2000. I knew it was going to require a different kind of approach to dealing with the economy. As opposed to a fixation on a balance sheet, it required an approach designed to give people more of their own money back, so they could spend it to get the economy going.

I will tell you, however, that I didn't make up my mind to run for President because of economic woes; I made up my mind in '99. But as the campaign evolved, I began to sense that

something was amiss in the economy. What I'm saying is, you have to have a big cause to run for, in order to run. And if you don't believe that strongly about your country or your state, there are plenty of reasons not to run. One reason is that it's tough. It's tough on your family. There's heavy scrutiny, no question about it. And I think that does discourage good people from serving.

Do you fear that the heavy sacrifice of one's personal privacy, in order to serve in public office, might frighten off some of the best candidates?

Oh, I think so, definitely. Anybody who thinks about running for President must understand that he will forego privacy. You're an open book. And if you're fortunate enough to win, your life will be an open book from that point forward. And so anybody who is thinking about running

for President must put that in the calculation. I will tell you, however, that it's worth it, in my judgment. It's worth serving this country. It's worth being in a position to make big decisions about peace and freedom and prosperity. But there's no question about it: Our system today is one that opens up the past for everybody to see. It is what it is, but I think it's awfully difficult for some to accept that.

That's the price of freedom.

Well, it is the price of freedom, but it's also awfully hard for some people to accept that price of freedom. And they just do not want people to know certain aspects of their background, or they don't want to disclose their finances, or they don't want to divest themselves of certain assets. If that's the case, the way our system operates today, they best not get into the political process. I'm sorry that's the case – that some people would look at the sacrifice and say, "Well, gosh, I don't want to serve." I'm afraid some good people are shying away from serving their country or their state because of the fishbowl effects of politics.

It takes tremendous courage to be a leader, particularly in times of difficulty. In your case, where does that courage come from?

Here in Washington, it's important to know what you believe, base decisions upon principles, and not be afraid of what others think. And the principles upon which I make my decisions are that I understand we're here – this interview is taking place in the Oval Office – and I understand the office is bigger than the person. I'm a part of history, and it's a grand history, I might add.

Second, I believe deeply in freedom. I believe that freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is God's gift to every individual. I believe that a free society will be a peaceful society. I believe the human desire of every person on this globe is to be free. Those are, in my judgment, inherent American principles. And I make decisions based upon those principles and beliefs.

I trust people. I want people to be owners. I believe in an ownership society. That means that we have to close the minority gap in homes and encourage small-business creation.

I believe in local control where possible. The government that's closest to the people is that which can be reformed the most easily, if it needs to be reformed.

I understand whose money we spend in Washington. It's not the government's money; it's the people's money. The role of government is not to create wealth but an environment in which the entrepreneur can flourish. Families are the backbone of a stable society, and public policy must reflect that.

In other words, there's a series of principles by which I make decisions – principles that came as a result of being raised where I was raised and by whom I was raised. It may seem like courage. To me it's natural to stick by the principles that are inherent in my being.

You have to say what you believe and stand by it. And it's tough in Washington, DC, sometimes, because some people in this town are so political that they have a zero-sum attitude: Either I win and he loses, or he wins and I lose. That's not the way I think. I have Abraham Lincoln on the wall here in the Oval

Office. He's on the wall because I think he was the country's greatest President, because he understood that a President must unite the country to achieve big objectives. And I work hard to unite the country. We have to have a united country to achieve peace around the world and a united country to be a compassionate America. Therefore, you have to rise above the critics and the background noise here in Washington, speak directly to the people, and explain to them why we make the decisions we make. You have to bring them along in a constructive, nonpartisan way to achieve big things for this great country.

Lincoln had the hardest task of all, being President when the country was fighting internally. Yet, his whole thought process was aimed at the important principle of a United States of America, and he achieved that. I love to show people the portrait here in the Oval Office, and remind them that I am the President of the United States of America, thanks to Abraham Lincoln.

What role does faith play in your life?

Faith plays a very important role in my life. I recognize that there is the Almighty. I pray to Almighty God. I pray for strength and wisdom. I pray for others. I pray for my family members. And I gladly accept the prayers of our fellow Americans. I am deeply touched when I work a rope line and some total stranger says, "Mr. President, I pray for you, and my family prays for you." It is a remarkable country where people are willing to say a prayer on behalf of the President, a political figure. And they do it in a genuine fashion. I'm grateful for that.

I believe that this country is a blessed country because of its people. And many of the people of this country are in prayer. I also recognize that I view my faith from a personal perspective. It gives me great strength as I serve this country.

My job, as well, is to make sure America holds true to the principle that we believe in freedom of religion. People can accept any religion they choose or no religion at all. They are free to do so in America, and we will keep it that way. ●



President Bush talks with Prime Minister John Howard of Australia