



President George W. Bush Oral History Project

BRIEFING MATERIALS

Margaret Spellings

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Prepared by Bryan Craig, Research Assistant
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Presidential Oral History Program

MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED OR CIRCULATED

MARGARET SPELLINGS NEWS TIMELINE

Prepared by Bryan Craig

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 05/25/2010

- 1979** Margaret Spellings graduates from the University of Houston with a B.A. in political science. (<http://www2.ed.gov/news/staff/bios/spellings.html>)
- 1987** Spellings serves as executive director for the Select Committee on Public Education in the Texas House of Representatives. (*Texas Monthly*, 05/2008)
- 1988-1994** Spellings is associate executive director for the Texas Association of School Boards. (*Texas Monthly*, 05/2008)
- 1994** George W. Bush hires Spellings as his political director for his first gubernatorial campaign. (*Education Week*, 11/24/2004)
- 1995-2000** Spellings is Bush's chief education advisor, working on updating the state curriculum standards and developing test-based accountability programs for grades three, five, and eight. She also helps develop such legislation as the Texas Reading Initiative and the Safe School Act. (*Christian Science Monitor*, 11/18/2004; *Education Week*, 11/24/2004)
- 2000**
- December* Spellings begins to serve on the seven-member Bush-Cheney transition policy-coordination group for the Department of Education, to develop legislation and to help Secretary-designate Rod Paige. (Maris A. Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, New York: Teachers College Press, 2009, pp. 159-160; *Education Week*, 01/10/2001)
- On the 21st, Bush hosts a luncheon on education reform in Austin. The ranking minority members on the education committees, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA), were not issued invitations. Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), the incoming chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, reportedly tells Bush's advisors that he would come to Austin, but would not attend another meeting unless Kennedy and Miller are present. (Adam Clymer, *Edward M. Kennedy: A Biography*, New York: HarperPerennial, 2009, p. 593; *The Washington Post*, 12/17/2001)
- 2001**
- January* On the 5th, Bush names Spellings as White House Domestic Policy Advisor overseeing education, health, transportation, justice, housing, and labor policies. She is also a member of the informal "strategy [sic] group" with Andy Card, Lawrence Lindsey, Condoleezza Rice, Karen Hughes, Josh Bolten, Mary Matalin,

and Nicholas Calio. (John P. Burke, *Becoming President: The Bush Transition, 2000-2003*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2004, pp. 44, 71)

On the 23rd, Bush unveils his education plan. It includes consolidating dozens of programs into five general grant categories, holding schools accountable by annual testing in grades 3-8, offering federal help for under-performing schools, and providing vouchers for students to attend private school. He also unveils a “Reading First” initiative that helps teach reading to disadvantaged children through the third grade. (*2001 Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2002, pp. 8-4 to 8-5; *Education Week*, 01/23/2001)

On the 23rd, Kennedy and Bush meet about education reform. Although Kennedy opposes the voucher plan, he tells Bush that all issues are negotiable. Spellings notes, “Ted Kennedy knew ten thousand times more about what it was going to take to do a legislative deal than we did at the White House.” (Clymer, p. 593)

On the 27th, Bush states he is willing to look at alternatives to the school voucher plan. (*The Washington Post*, 01/28/2001)

Winter The Bush Administration is reportedly worried about the Senate HELP Committee chairman Senator Jim Jeffords (R-VT) siding with liberal Democrats on an education bill. They develop channels with Senators Judd Gregg (R- NH), Evan Bayh (D-IN), and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) in order to compose a bill. Lieberman and Bayh helped develop the “Three R’s” bill last year that had accountability measures that Bush supports. (*The Washington Post*, 12/17/2001)

February On the 26th, Bush announces an Interagency Working Group on Federalism headed by Spellings. Its mission is to promote federalism by seeking opinions from state and local authorities on issues that need addressing and to move some federal control to local authority. (*The Washington Times*, 03/11/2001; <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>)

March On the 8th, the Senate HELP Committee approves its Better Education for Students and Teachers Act (S1) by a 20-0 vote. It includes Bush’s provision to test students in grades 3-8 for reading and math and to create a new reading program. Committee Democrats gave states an additional year to begin testing, but lost significant increases for training and Title I funding. Vouchers are not included. (*2001 Congressional Quarterly*, p. 8-6)

On the 22nd, Boehner introduces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It encompasses Bush’s plans from January. (THOMAS on HR 1)

On the 26th, Spellings, Bush, and First Lady Laura Bush attend a conference for women business leaders. (*Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 03/26/2001)

April Bush names Scott Evertz as AIDS czar, the first homosexual to hold that office. He works under Spellings, who coordinates AIDS policy within the White House. (*USA Today*, 04/11/2001)

May On the 9th, the House Education and Workplace Committee approves HR 1 with a 41-7 vote. To get Democratic support, Boehner includes a significant increase in funding for education, including Title I for poor schools. Boehner also modifies a Republican proposal (Straight A's) that converts most federal aid to block grants by giving states the ability to shift one half of a program's money to other similar programs. The voucher option is voted out. Spellings states that the bill is "very much true to the president's principles." (*The Washington Times*, 05/16/2001; 2001 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, p. 8-5; *The New York Times*, 05/24/2001)

On the 20th, Spellings appears on CBS's "Early Show" to talk about education reform and keeping school vouchers in a final bill. This is part of a larger public relations campaign throughout the winter and spring to gain support for NCLB. (*CBS News*, 05/20/2001; Cecil Miskel and Mengli Song, "Passing Reading First," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Summer 2001, p. 103)

On the 23rd, the House passes its five-year, \$22.8 billion NCLB by a vote of 384-45. (2001 *Congressional Quarterly*, p. 8-5)

June On the 14th, the Senate passes its \$33 billion ESEA reauthorization by a 91-8 vote. It includes some elements of "Straight A's" that gives seven states and 25 school districts more latitude to spend federal funds. Senate conservatives fail to amend the bill to include school vouchers. (2001 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, p. 8-7)

September On the 7th, the Bush Administration begins a week-long public relations drive to get Congress to fund public schools in the upcoming budget. Bush delivers a radio address on the 8th, and on the 11th, visits an elementary school in Florida, while Laura Bush plans to testify before the Senate Education Subcommittee. Spellings states the First Lady will "talk about how, when she was trained as a teacher, she didn't necessarily have the tools she needed...." (*USA Today*, 09/07/2001)

After the 9/11 attacks, Kennedy, Gregg, Boehner, and Miller make a public statement that they will continue NCLB negotiations. Spellings responds, "I think they saw it as a way they could demonstrate to the country that Congress had not been immobilized." (*The Washington Post*, 12/17/2001)

Spellings speaks at a symposium on education in Washington, D.C. She mentions the plan to conduct annual testing. Spellings states, “There will be a little shock to the system....” However, she argues that the data will help educators assess their needs. Spellings also states that demand for school choice might increase if parents realize their public school is doing poorly. (*Education Week*, 10/03/2001)

Sept-Dec. It is reported that Spellings, Sandy Kress (Bush’s chief education advisor), Kennedy, Gregg, Boehner, and Miller meet nine times to finish negotiations on NCLB. (*The Washington Post*, 12/17/2001)

December On the 11th, a final version of NCLB is announced. Kennedy wins more targeting for federal education spending and more money for teachers. A major obstacle was state control over use of federal funds. The compromise holds that all states can shift small portions of federal money for any educational purpose, but money directed to the poorest children can’t be diverted. A pilot program of seven states and 150 districts can shift more money than the rest. Congress passes the measure by substantial margins, with Spellings witnessing the Senate vote. (2001 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, p. 8-3 to 8-10; *The Washington Post*, 12/19/2001)

2002

January On the 8th, Bush signs the NCLB into law. On the same day, in a public speech, Secretary of Education Rod Paige congratulates Spellings for her work on NCLB. (*FDCH Political Transcripts*, 01/09/2002)

April On the 2nd, Bush announces his early childhood education plan. It is a Head Start accountability program where all Head Start teachers will be re-trained in alphabet, letter writing, and numbers instruction, using a detailed literacy-screening test. Bush plans to spend \$45 million over five years to research effective early literacy programs. Some educators reportedly fear the new plan would push children to focus too much on reading too early. Spellings states, “This is not about putting little kids in desks at age 3.” (*Education Week*, 04/10/2002) Kennedy responds that to do this, he will introduce \$5 billion in new money. (*The New York Times*, 04/03/2002; *The Washington Post*, 04/03/2002)

October On the 2nd, Spellings moderates a conference on missing, exploited, and runaway children. Bush is the keynote speaker. (*Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 10/07/2002)

Spellings puts together a conference held on the 15th on minority homeownership. Bush is the keynote speaker. (*Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 10/21/2002)

2003

January In his State of the Union speech on the 28th, Bush announces the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) focusing on a world-wide campaign to prevent the spread of HIV and caring for HIV-infected people. (<http://www.pepfar.gov/>)

Spring Spellings attends a series of meetings about severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) with policy advisers Bolten, Jay Lefkowitz, Carol Kuntz, and Anthony S. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. They closely follow the outbreak in China and Canada while Bush increases funding to combat a possible outbreak in the U.S. (*The Washington Post*, 05/03/2002)

2004

January During debate over the 2003 omnibus spending bill for Labor, HHS, and Education, the Senate rejects a Kennedy proposal for a \$6 billion increase in education spending. This amendment is part of a fierce fight over education dollars. Democrats and moderate Republicans charge that Bush is not allocating enough money for poor schools to meet the new testing standards under NCLB. Spellings responds to Kennedy by saying that there is \$6 billion for states in the Treasury that is unspent. The Senate passes an amendment adding \$5 billion for innovative education programs, financed by across-the-board cuts in the omnibus bill. (*2003 Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, pp. 2-18 to 2-19; *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 01/06/2004)

February On the 10th, the Utah House passes a bill that prohibits using state money to comply with NCLB. The Speaker of the House states, "We are not opting out of No Child Left Behind, but there is some disparity of agreement about whether it's fully funded...." (*The New York Times*, 02/11/2004) The bill is later pulled. Eight other states have looked at similar measures calling NCLB an infringement on states rights. (*USA Today*, 02/12/2004)

March Paige announces the White House will adopt a more flexible approach to NCLB provisions. Some changes include relaxing the rules governing special education and limited English speaking students, and a requirement that teachers have a degree or certification in the subject they teach. Paige states that this new approach is not a response to criticism by states, but an annual review of the law. (*The New York Times*, 03/14/2004)

October Democrats attack Bush's commitment to NCLB when a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report states the Education Department has not provided enough guidance to implement the law. Eugene Hickok, Deputy Secretary of Education, responds that states are making huge efforts. Throughout the presidential campaign season, Democrats like presidential nominee, Senator John Kerry (D-MA), and Kennedy also attack Bush for lack of funding. (William

Hayes, *No Child Left Behind: Past, Present, and Future*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, p. 26; *The Washington Times*, 10/05/2004)

November On the 17th, Bush names Spellings as his choice for Secretary of Education after Paige announces his retirement. School choice advocates are reportedly worried that their cause will not be a high priority, compared to test-based accountability. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11/26/2004; *Education Week*, 12/01/2004)

2005

January On the 7th, *USA Today* breaks the story that the Bush Administration paid conservative commentator, Armstrong Williams, \$240,000 to comment regularly about NCLB during his TV and radio talk shows. Paige defends the action as standard practice. On the 14th, Bush admits it was a mistake. (*USA Today*, 01/07/2005, 01/14/2005)

On the 12th, Bush announces a proposal for expanding NCLB to high school students. (*The New York Times*, 01/13/2005)

On the 20th, Spellings is confirmed by the Senate on a voice vote. On the 31st, she is sworn in. (*CQ Weekly*, 01/24/2005)

On the 25th, Spellings writes a letter to the producers of the show *Postcards from Buster* about her concerns over an episode portraying homosexual parents. PBS decides not to send it to its stations, but 94 out of 349 stations air it using the direct feed from WGBH in Boston. (*The Washington Post*, 01/27/2005, 03/06/2005)

February Spellings calls on colleges and universities to use NCLB as a model for measuring performance in higher education. (*Education Week*, 02/23/2005)

Spellings shows flexibility implementing NCLB. She approves 4,000 North Dakota teachers who were previously declared insufficient, and allows school districts not to transfer students if it is going to cause over-crowding. Although conciliatory, she also says she will not be a pushover for states: "I'm not necessarily going to always grant their requests...." (*The New York Times*, 02/14/2005)

On the 2nd, *The Washington Post* prints Spellings' editorial stating that the Bush Administration will not stop focusing on grades 3-8 when NCLB expands to the upper grades. (*The Washington Post*, 02/03/2005)

On the 7th, Bush announces an overall reduction of 1% in funding for education in FY2006 including \$2 billion in program cuts. Kennedy calls it an "anti-education" budget. Bush and Spellings argue that, in part, they are weeding out ineffective programs. However, Bush plans to increase Title I funding, Pell

grants, and programs dealing with math, reading, and science. He also calls for \$1.24 billion for high school programs that Congress later rejects. (*The New York Times*, 02/08/2005, 03/09/2005; *Education Week*, 06/15/2005)

On the 28th, Spellings gives a speech at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urging Catholic schools to become more active in tutoring public school children under NCLB. Under the law, federal funds do exist for religious-based groups to tutor students if they are state-approved. (*Education Week*, 03/09/2005)

On the 28th, the National Governors Association announces that thirteen states will form a coalition to improve high schools by adopting higher standards and developing tougher exams and course-work. Spellings welcomes the initiative. (*The New York Times*, 02/28/2005)

March

Spellings and Bush meet with Utah governor Jon Huntsman (R) to stall his new NCLB “protest” bill. (*The New York Times*, 03/06/2005)

On the 4th, Bush announces a reorganization of the Education Department. Two new offices are created. The first is the Office of Communications and Outreach and the other is the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. Also, the undersecretary will handle higher education and adult programs, while the deputy secretary will handle K-12. (*Education Week*, 03/16/2005)

On the 8th, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) and Spellings announce a plan to have California use Tennessee’s accountability model, a model used in twenty other states. Under this model, schools would get credit in their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for increasing individual student achievement, even if the schools have not reached their proficiency goals. (*Education Week*, 03/16/2005)

On the 9th, Spellings writes to Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate HELP Committee, to oppose the reauthorization of the popular Perkins Act, the vocational and technical educational program. The Bush Administration wants to eliminate the program for its reported ineffectiveness in preparing students for academic achievement. Congress ends up passing the bill and Bush signs it into law the next year. (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy>; *CQ Weekly*, 05/09/2005)

On the 29th, Spellings and Laura Bush make a surprise visit to Afghanistan promoting education for girls and women’s rights. They announce a \$17.7 million grant to set up a new American University of Afghanistan in Kabul and a \$3.5 million grant to start an International School of Afghanistan. (*The Washington Post*, 03/31/2005)

April

Spellings announces the Teacher Incentive Fund that would develop a \$500 million program to reward effective teachers, especially in high-poverty schools.

\$50 million will go to developing a performance-pay system. The National Education Association opposes linking pay to student achievement. (*Education Week*, 05/18/2005)

On the 7th, Spellings outlines a plan to make NCLB easier to implement, in an address at Mt. Vernon, Virginia. First, her department will draft rules to set up alternative standards for students in special education. Second, a panel will be convened to examine whether more states can use growth models. Third, Spellings will consider waiving certain NCLB rules for states with successful achievement results. (*The Washington Post*, 04/07/2005; *Education Week*, 04/13/2005)

On the 15th, the Education Department's Inspector General issues a report stating that department officials exercised poor judgment in the Armstrong scandal, but did nothing illegal. Both the report and Spellings blame the Education Department and not the White House for the episode. (*The Washington Post*, 04/16/2005)

On the 18th, Connecticut's Commissioner of Education Betty Sternberg fails to get her state some relief from NCLB's financial burden in a meeting with Spellings. Connecticut is one state that is considering a federal law suit. (*The New York Times*, 04/19/2005)

On the 18th, Spellings sends a letter to Hatch warning him that \$76 million in federal funds might be cut if Utah passes a bill that would ignore provisions of NCLB if they conflict with state goals. However, these lobbying efforts fail as the Utah Legislature passes it on the 19th. (*The Washington Times*, 04/20/2005; *The New York Times*, 04/20/2005)

On the 20th, the National Education Association (NEA), Michigan, Texas, and seven other states file a federal law suit (*Pontiac v. Spellings*) charging that the Education Department has not provided adequate funding for NCLB, making the states use their money for the shortfall. (*The Washington Post*, 04/21/2005)

May

On the 2nd, *USA Today* runs Spellings' editorial. She pledges to be flexible on implementing NCLB as long as schools meet their AYP. Spellings denies that the recent lawsuit is a "grass-roots rebellion" and defends NCLB as a way to improve education and not be a financial burden. (*USA Today*, 05/02/2005)

On the 10th, Spellings announces that up to 3% of special-education students can be exempt from NCLB's testing standards. To be eligible, states must show themselves to be in compliance with other parts of the law and that they are raising the achievements of students with disabilities. In December, Spellings outlines the new exemption in detail and extends it for the next school year. (*The New York Times*, 05/11/2005; *The Washington Times*, 05/13/2005, 12/15/2005)

On the 21st, Spellings travels to Jordan for a two-day education conference with Middle Eastern education ministers. (*Education Week*, 05/25/2005)

An Education Department auditor reports that New Mexico improperly exploited a federal loan subsidy guaranteeing 9.5% interest. The state refinanced some bonds under the higher rate. Spellings later endorses a plan to close this loophole. (*The New York Times*, 06/12/2005, 07/09/2005)

June-July The Education Department approves sixteen states to change their accountability plans under NCLB. (*The Washington Post*, 06/16/2005)

July On the 8th, Spellings states that NCLB could expand beyond math and reading. Testing in science is already set to begin in two years. She states, “In many ways we're in the infancy of accountability and education in our country.” (*The New York Times*, 07/09/2005)

On the 14th, Spellings praises the “Nation’s Report Card” or National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report as proof that NCLB is working. It states that African-Americans and Hispanic students are closing the gap at the elementary school level. However, the report also says little progress has been made at the higher grades. (*The Washington Post*, 07/15/2005)

August On the 8th, *USA Today* reports that Bush’s “Reading First” program is being investigated for possible mismanagement and conflict of interest. There are allegations that the program forces schools to buy from large publishers, and recommend text-books written by some reading experts in the program. (*USA Today*, 08/08/2005)

On the 22nd, Connecticut files a separate law suit asking the federal government to cover the state’s cost for NCLB and accuses the Education Department of acting in an “arbitrary and capricious manner” in denying the money. (*The New York Times*, 08/23/2005)

On the 25th, in another move to show NCLB flexibility, Spellings announces that four districts in Virginia will be allowed to run their own tutoring programs for low-income students using NCLB money even if the schools fail to meet academic goals. NCLB rules forbid schools to use NCLB money for their own tutoring program leaving them to find other funding sources, or to use private vendors. By the end of the year, Spellings allows Chicago, Boston, and New York City to use NCLB money for their own programs. (*The New York Times*, 09/02/2005, 11/08/2005; *Education Week*, 09/07/2005)

September Spellings announces that Bush plans to ask Congress for \$227 million for colleges and college students affected by Hurricane Katrina. The plan is later dropped, but these students are eligible for 25% of the \$36 million enacted last month. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11/18/2005)

On the 7th, Spellings meets with fifty-four educational groups to coordinate relief efforts for the areas hit by Katrina. The Education Department launches a “Hurricane Help for Schools” website to link donors with schools. (*Education Week*, 09/14/2005)

On the 8th, Laura Bush and Spellings travel to Mississippi to meet with displaced students. (*Education Week*, 09/14/2005)

On the 16th, Spellings announces that \$488 million out of a \$1.9 billion hurricane relief plan will be allocated to subsidize private-school tuition for families affected by Katrina. Kennedy offers a Senate bill on hurricane relief without vouchers and criticizes Bush for using such “a politically charged approach.” (*The Washington Post*, 09/17/2005)

On the 19th, Spellings declares the formation of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education to examine affordability and student academic preparation. She states, “We have a responsibility to make sure our higher education system continues to meet our nation’s needs for an educated and competitive workforce in the 21st century.” (<http://www2.ed.gov/news>) Some officials reportedly worry about more federal intrusion and the influence of business leaders on the commission. (*The Washington Post*, 09/19/2005; *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10/15/2005)

On the 23rd, Spellings announces that the Bush Administration will request that Congress pay for 90% of the average cost of educating each Katrina student, public or private, up to a ceiling of \$7,500 apiece. Some Congressional Democrats like Kennedy are critical of federal funding for parochial schools. (*The New York Times*, 09/17/2005; *Education Week*, 09/26/2005)

On the 29th, Spellings discloses that her agency will relax the NCLB accountability standards for Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. (*The Washington Post*, 09/30/2005)

On the 30th, the GAO issues a report stating that the Bush Administration violated the law by making payments to Armstrong Williams and sending out a prepackaged television presentation saying Bush’s tutoring program “gets an A-plus.” The investigation also reveals that the Education Department commissioned a newspaper article on science literacy without informing the readers it was behind the piece. The incidents occurred before Spellings became secretary. The ruling has no penalty. (*The New York Times*, 10/01/2005)

October

On the 7th, Spellings gives a speech at a UNESCO meeting with educational leaders emphasizing the success of NCLB. (*Education Week*, 10/19/2005)

The 2005 NAEP results are mixed as math scores for eighth-graders declined, but reading scores increased slightly, and the achievement gap between whites and

minorities is slowly closing. Bush calls the report “encouraging” (*The Washington Post*, 10/20/2005) while Spellings says it “shows us that we’re going to need to accelerate our progress at all grade levels....” (*USA Today*, 10/20/2005; *The New York Times*, 10/20/2005)

On the 21st, Spellings announces that states would not lose federal funding if they cannot reach the goal of staffing highly qualified teachers in every classroom by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. States have been struggling to reach this goal, because before NCLB, each state had its own guidelines. The law demands that teachers have a bachelor’s degree, obtain full state certification, and demonstrate knowledge in the field he or she teaches. (<http://www2.ed.gov>)

November Spellings states the Education Department has developed a “user friendly” booklet on NCLB for state educators. (*Education Weekly*, 11/16/2005)

On the 18th, Spellings unveils a program to allow ten states to use growth models in measuring AYP. The growth models include examining a student’s progress over time. Some civil rights groups are reportedly worried that more disadvantaged students will be left behind if accountability rules are changed. (Scott Abernathy, *No Child Left Behind Act and Public Schools*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007, p. 110; *The Washington Post*, 11/22/2005; *Education Week*, 11/30/2005)

On the 23rd, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan rules on *Pontiac v. Spellings* in favor of the Bush Administration. The court says that the federal government has the right to require states to spend their own money to comply with the law. Spellings calls the ruling “a victory for children and parents all across the country.” (*The New York Times*, 11/24/2005)

December On the 26th, Congress extends financial aid programs for three months as it fails to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. The Bush Administration has been working with Republicans like Boehner to cut financial aid, eliminate the Perkins Loan program, but increase Pell Grant money. (*The New York Times*, 12/22/2005; *CQ Weekly*, 12/26/2005)

On the 30th, Bush signs the Hurricane Education Recovery Act that provides three new grant programs to reopen schools affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and to help schools with displaced students. (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy>)

2006

January On the 5th, Bush proposes spending \$114 million on teaching children Arabic, Farsi, Chinese and other languages to help national security and to expand students’ cultural horizons. Spellings states, “We don’t know how to do it. This whole notion is in its infancy. But our hope is this is a start, and we can build on it.” (*The New York Times*, 01/06/2006)

On the 31st, in his State of the Union Address, Bush announces the American Competitiveness Initiative program. It funds training for 70,000 more teachers to teach Advanced Placement (AP) math and science classes and to give students more access to those courses. (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>)

February Spellings appears before a Senate HELP Committee hearing on the American Competitiveness Initiative. Spellings urges the committee to back Bush's plan. She states, "With the way we ration these courses, you would think we don't want students to take them, and that needs to change...." Kennedy responds that the government should not divert money away from needy children. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 02/24/2006)

Charles Miller, the head of Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education, says there is some consensus for higher accountability in colleges and universities. Testing is an option and Miller has seen it firsthand at the University of Texas. University officials are reportedly wary because a nationalized test does not fit with the variety of programs found at colleges. (*The New York Times*, 02/09/2006)

On the 6th, Bush unveils his education budget. He proposes to cut over \$1 billion in the Education Department's discretionary budget over 42 programs. Spellings responds that the programs are small while some are being replaced by larger initiatives. Title I money will be increased to help schools restructure under NCLB. (*The New York Times*, 02/07/2006)

March The Center on Education Policy releases a report stating that since the passage of NCLB, 71% of the nation's school districts have reduced their hours on history, music, and other subjects in favor of reading and math. Jack Jennings, the center's president, claims this narrows the curriculum. Department of Education spokesman, Chad Colby, states the department does not endorse nor criticize schools that concentrate instructional time for reading and math. (*The New York Times*, 03/26/2006)

A preliminary statistical report for the Education Department finds that 27% of the nation's schools did not meet the federal requirement for AYP in 2004-2005. (*The Washington Post*, 03/29/2006)

April Spellings visits India as part of a U.S. delegation of university presidents to examine that country's educational system. (*Education Week*, 04/26/2006)

On the 5th, Spellings warns she would withhold federal funds to states that do not make students aware of their options for free tutoring and school transfers. The Department of Education reports fewer than 1% of students who could transfer to another school actually do so, and only 17% signed up for tutoring, much lower than expected. (*The New York Times*, 04/06/2006)

On the 25th, Spellings meets with testing industry executives about recent errors in test scoring and this ability to handle the increased work load due to NCLB. Two major test scoring companies, Harcourt Assessments and Pearson, had encountered problems. (*The New York Times*, 04/26/2006, 05/05/2006)

May On the 2nd, Spellings states that low-income students are eligible for a new \$790 million program to encourage math, science, and language study. With this program, Congress hopes to help states develop these types of programs in their schools. (*The New York Times*, 05/03/2006)

On the 17th, Spellings declares Tennessee and North Carolina will be the first states to be in the federal pilot growth models program. (*The Washington Post*, 05/18/2006)

June On the 12th, Spellings announces \$24 million to set up charter schools in Louisiana. (*The New York Times*, 06/13/2006)

On the 27th, a draft report of the Higher Education Commission is released. It reports rising costs, an inadequate financial aid system, lack of accountability, and an “unacceptable number” of graduates entering the workforce without the right skills. The commission advocates testing and a confidential, national student tracking system. Some college officials criticize testing and claim that the tracking system is a violation of privacy. (*The New York Times*, 06/27/2006; *The Washington Post*, 07/07/2006)

July Facing the end of the 2005-2006 school year, Spellings learns that no state has met the deadline for qualified teachers and only 10 states have full approval of their testing systems. She says that states may face sanctions. “I want states to know that Congress and the president mean business on the law.” (*The New York Times*, 07/25/2006)

On the 18th, Bush, Spellings, and Republican legislators announce a \$100 million plan to offer low-income students private-school vouchers to leave low-performing public schools. Democrats oppose the plan and highlight a recent Department of Education study that reports public schools perform as well or better than private schools, with the exception of eighth-grade reading, and perform better than Christian schools, a constituency that supports vouchers. (*The Washington Post*, 07/19/2006)

August On the 12th, Bush signs the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006. Bush wanted to eliminate the Perkins program, but the bill passed through Congress by overwhelming margins. The law forces school officials that have federally supported programs to consistently report test scores and graduation rates. Also, states must play a more active role in defining core courses. (*Education Week*, 08/09/2006, 08/30/2006)

On the 31st, the FBI reveals the existence of a recently closed program called Project Strikeback. The Education Department shared personal information from hundreds of student loan applications to the FBI since the 9/11 attacks. David Warren, president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, says “This operation Strikeback confirms our worst fears about the uses to which these databases can be put.” (*The New York Times*, 09/01/2006)

September Spellings holds the first of four hearings in anticipation of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education’s final report. The hearings examine accreditation and public reporting of college financing and student performance. (*University Business*, 10/2006)

On the 22nd, the Department of Education’s Inspector General states department officials violated conflict of interest in the “Reading First” program. The report claims that the program managers pushed their own set of programs and promoted only certain textbooks. The program director, Christ Doherty, resigns and Spellings pledges to review the \$1 billion program. (*The New York Times*, 09/23/2006; *The Washington Post*, 10/01/2006)

On the 26th, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education releases its final report. It calls for policy makers to examine controlling costs as college tuition should not rise higher than the median family income. It also recommends increasing Pell Grants to cover 70% of in-state tuition over the present 48%. The panel backs off of requiring public universities to use standardize testing, but does recommend measurements of student learning. It still recommends a national student tracking database. One member, David Ward of the American Council on Education, refuses to sign it, saying he wants to be “free to contest it.” (*The New York Times*, 08/11/2006) In a speech to the National Press Club on the same day, Spellings pledges to improve academic accountability and to increase money for financial aid, but falls short of endorsing more Pell Grant money. (*The New York Times*, 08/11/2006; *The Washington Post*, 09/27/2006)

October On the 10th, President Bush and Laura Bush attend a conference on school violence held by Spellings and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. The conference is in the wake of shootings in Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Wisconsin. (*The New York Times*, 10/11/2006)

November Spellings places second on the game show “Jeopardy!” (*Education Week*, 01/09/2008)

From the 10th to the 18th, Spellings and twelve college presidents visit Japan, Korea, and China to promote opportunities for international students. (*Education Week*, 11/15/2006)

December At a forum on university and college accreditation, Spellings seeks to improve the process by including “outputs” like graduation, employment rates, and student

learning outcomes. Critics are reportedly worried Spellings would force national standards, but Spellings states she is not looking for a “one size fits all” approach. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11/24/2006, 12/08/2006)

2007

January

On the 3rd, the Forum on Educational Accountability, a coalition of about 100 groups including the National Parent Teacher Association and NAACP, proposes reworking NCLB. Spellings responds that she welcomes proposals to tweak the law, but a rewrite is not necessary. (*The Washington Post*, 01/04/2007)

On the 8th, Bush, Spellings, and Democratic congressional leaders meet on the fifth anniversary of NCLB to discuss reauthorization of the law, which is up this year. Reflecting general Democratic sentiment, Miller urges the Bush Administration to support sharp increases for impoverished schools. (*The New York Times*, 01/09/2007)

On the 24th, Spellings unveils her new education proposals. It includes giving states more flexibility with federal money and giving local school officials the power to move teachers to charter schools even if it goes against their contracts. Other proposals include \$4,000 for each student to go to a private school, increased teachers’ salaries for those who raise student achievement, and providing parents a report showing how students perform on a national exam along with results of the state tests. Democrats attack the plan for its vouchers and for reversing collective-bargaining teacher agreements. (*The New York Times*, 01/27/2007; *USA Today*, 01/27/2007; *The Washington Post*, 01/25/2007)

February

Bush announces his Education Department budget. The department will receive the same level as last year, but asks for \$1 billion in new spending for NCLB. Also, he calls for an increase in the Pell Grant by about \$550 to a maximum of \$4,600 per student. Democrats ask for a 3% increase in education funding, a Pell Grant maximum of \$5,100, and they argue the president’s budget would cut key education programs. Spellings says cutting inefficient programs are necessary to balance the budget. (*The Washington Post*, 02/02/2007, 02/06/2007)

The nation’s report card comes out on the 22nd. The majority of twelfth graders have not mastered high-school-level math and reading skills. Spellings and Bush cite this as a reason why NCLB should be expanded to more of the high school grades. Spellings states, “The consensus for strengthening our high schools has never been stronger. Schools must prepare students to succeed in college and the 21st century workforce.” (*The New York Times*, 02/23/2007)

March

On the 14th, Spellings announces at a HELP subcommittee hearing she will let an outside advisory committee oversee the “Reading First” program. Although defending the program, she also states that she has accepted all the recommendations made by the Inspector General, including increasing her staff so

the program does not rely on so many contractors, who have been a target of conflict of interest charges. (*The New York Times*, 03/15/2007)

On the 22nd, Spellings convenes a higher education summit. The group of 300 people from the public and private sector will examine the proposals of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. (*USA Today*, 03/22/2007)

On the 23rd, Spellings attends a roundtable discussion in New York City with educators, publishers, and two dozen officials of technology companies to discuss how technology can improve education. It is the first of four planned roundtables. (*Education Week*, 04/04/2007)

April

Scandals emerge in the student loan industry. Spellings fires two department officials and orders an ethics review when she discovers both of them received money from a student loan company through stocks and consulting fees. By mid-April, *The Washington Post* reveals that lending companies have been searching the National Student Loan Data System, housing confidential information, without permission. Testimony by New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo states that lenders sponsor athletic events and give gifts to school officials to steer students toward their loans. Both Kennedy and Miller call for emergency regulations to end the database abuse and to prevent lenders from giving gifts and paying school officials. Spellings blocks lending companies from accessing the system while doing a security audit, and she forms a task force on student loan reform. (*The Washington Post*, 04/13/2007, 04/15/2007, 04/18/2007, 04/19/2007, 04/25/2007)

On the 20th, Miller holds a five-hour House hearing on the “Reading First” abuses. It’s discovered that the Justice Department is investigating the matter and finds one program official has made \$1.3 million off a “Reading First” endorsed reading test his company developed. However, Republicans and Democrats still support the program and plan to tighten the restrictions. (*The Washington Post*, 04/21/2007)

May

Spellings appears on the “Daily Show with John Stewart” to promote NCLB reauthorization. (*Education Week*, 01/09/2008)

In response to the April Virginia Tech shooting, Spellings and Gonzales develop a task force to disseminate strategies for preventing and responding to school shootings. (*Education Week*, 05/16/2007)

On the 9th, Spellings, President Bush, and Laura Bush announce an online database that provides high school graduation rates. It reveals a higher drop-out rate than states have been reporting, because it tracks the class size since freshman year. In the past, schools simply calculated only the students known to have officially dropped out. Spellings reports that graduation rates will be incorporated in the AYP. (*The Washington Post*, 05/10/2007)

On the 9th, Kennedy releases his report on the “Reading First” abuses. He uncovers more ties to the program and publishers. (*The Washington Post*, 05/10/2007)

On the 10th, Spellings appears before the House Education Committee on the student loan program, stating the program is in dire need of reform. Democrats accuse the Bush Administration of not clamping down on conflicts of interests, and allowing a lender, Nelnet, to recover \$278 million in federal subsidies. She responds that the company would have taken about a \$1 billion if it sued. Spellings goes on to say that the Bush Administration has reformed some of the rules and she can only affect federally guaranteed loans, not private ones. The committee also asks Spellings about the “Reading First” program. She emphasizes that she adopted all the Inspector General’s recommendations and plans to continue to investigate the abuses. (*Education Week*, 05/10/2007; *The New York Times*, 05/11/2007; *The Washington Post*, 05/11/2007)

June On the 5th, a Center for Education Policy study is released that reveals that since NCLB’s enactment, students have performed better on state reading and math tests. Spellings hails the report as proof that NCLB works and says, “...now is the time to reauthorize.” (*The Washington Post*, 06/06/2007)

August Spellings visits Chile and other South American countries to boost international student enrollment. (*Education Week*, 08/29/2007)

September Miller’s draft proposal for the reauthorization of NCLB is released. He recommends changes in determining school performance by adding other measures besides just math and reading scores, and draws a distinction between schools failing across the board and ones that just have some student groups failing. The proposal would also allow immigrants to take tests in their native language for five years. Spellings responds that the changes, “could be a significant retreat from accountability.” (*The New York Times*, 09/06/2007, 09/01/2007; *The Washington Post*, 09/06/2007)

On the 25th, the nation’s report card is released. Math scores as well as fourth-grade reading continue to increase, but eighth-grade reading remains unchanged. Spellings credits NCLB, but Miller suggests “with an improved law and better funding” we can produce stronger gains. The next day, Bush answers, “Don’t water down this good law.” (*The Washington Post*, 09/26/2007, 09/27/2007)

On the 27th, Bush signs the College Cost Reduction and Access Act. It cuts federal subsidies to lenders and increases Pell Grants to a \$5,400 maximum within five years. For Spellings, the law fulfills a campaign promise to provide more needs-based aid. Lenders oppose the bill, because the lack of subsidies will shut some of them down, thus reducing competition and services to students, they say. (*The New York Times*, 08/08/2007; *The Washington Post*, 08/28/2007)

October Spellings leads a delegation to the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China and participates in a Global Policy Summit on the Well-Being of People with Intellectual Disabilities. Later in the month, she goes to Moscow for a conference on international partnerships. (<http://www2.ed.gov/news>)

On the 9th, Bush welcomes civil rights leaders, who are NCLB supporters, to the White House in an effort to get it reauthorized by the end of the year. The group asks Bush to support substantial increases in federal education spending. (*The New York Times*, 10/10/2007)

On the 31st, Spellings announces new regulations for the loan industry. It prohibits lenders from giving gifts to universities, and every university must have at least three companies on their preferred lender list. (*The Washington Post*, 11/01/2007)

November A report by the Department of Education's Inspector General reveals that the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency collected \$34 million in subsidies from the 9.5% rate of return. In October, Spellings admits the federal government had some responsibility for the confusion over subsidy rules. (*The Washington Post*, 10/02/2007; *The New York Times*, 11/20/2007)

December Congress and the Bush Administration agree to a budget bill that includes \$59.2 billion in education spending, keeping it flat and cutting the "Reading First" funding to \$393 million. In November in an effort to control spending, Bush vetoed a bill that would have spent \$60.7 billion, but the House could not override it. The budget battle reportedly helps develop more of a bipartisan atmosphere that stalls NCLB reauthorization. (*Education Week*, 03/05/2008, 12/19/2007)

On the 19th, Spellings speaks at a meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) focusing on the need to change higher education accreditation. She remarks that the process needs to be more transparent and consistent. Spellings states, "no one-size-fits-all measures. No standardized tests. All I ask is that institutions be more clear about the benefits they offer to students." (<http://www2.ed.gov>)

2008

January Spellings announces she will visit nearly 25 states to meet with educators about NCLB, ideas as Congress has stalled on reauthorization. She is looking to expand a program to give schools credit for individual student achievement, allow different consequences for schools that chronically underperform versus those with just a few students who don't perform, and to require states to use a uniform determination for high school graduation rates. (*USA Today*, 03/10/2008)

On the 7th, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit reverses an earlier decision on the *Pontiac vs. Spellings* case stating schools had been justified in

bringing suit and that states cannot be compelled to use their own resources to pay for NCLB. Spellings responds, “This decision could undermine efforts to improve the education of our nation’s children...” (*The New York Times*, 01/08/2008)

February Spellings announces the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship program where 20 teachers will work as advisors at the Education Department for one year while teaching in the classroom. (*Education Week*, 03/05/2008)

Bush announces his education budget. He will freeze spending to \$59.2 billion, but restore full funding to the “Reading First” program, and add a new voucher program. Some Democrats such as Miller and Kennedy say that the total is not enough to meet the needs of NCLB. (*The Washington Post*, 02/05/2008)

March In a statement, Miller says he doubts Congress can pass a reauthorization of NCLB this year. (*Education Week*, 03/19/2008)

On the 13th, the National Mathematics Advisory Panel releases its report stating that math education is “broken.” It urges more teacher training. Spellings, who appointed the panel in 2006, calls the report a “seminal moment” in math education and urges schools to use it. (*The Washington Post*, 03/14/2008)

On the 14th, Spellings appears before the House Education and Labor Committee about how the credit crunch is causing some lenders to scale back on offering loans. Spellings insists that aid will be available and that the federal government can provide funds to finance federally guaranteed loans. (*The Washington Post*, 03/15/2008)

On the 18th, Spellings announces a new pilot program that will apply different consequences to schools that miss targets due to the majority of students failing versus ones that miss because of only a minority. Some educators are reportedly worried that this favors suburban schools. (*The Washington Post*, 03/19/2008)

May On the 1st, a Department of Education study reveals that the “Reading First” program does not help reading comprehension, countering a Center on Education Policy report stating it has helped boost achievement. Kennedy, a long-time critic of the program, remarks that the Bush Administration has put “cronyism first and reading skills last” and the Department of Education study proves it. (*The Washington Post*, 03/30/2008; *The New York Times*, 05/02/2008)

On the 21st, Spellings outlines a financial rescue plan for student loan companies. The federal government will advance money to lenders of last resort and buy up other loans. The Administration expands the buy-out program later in the year as the crisis deepens. (*The Washington Post*, 05/22/2008; *The New York Times*, 11/08/2008)

- June* A Department of Education report states that the D.C. voucher program to send students from struggling schools to private ones did little to improve student test scores. However, Spellings asks Congress to preserve the program. (*The Washington Post*, 06/17/2008)
- July* By the 1st, both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees eliminate funding for the “Reading First” program. Spellings calls the cuts “outrageous.” (*USA Today*, 07/02/2008)
- August* Although Spellings sends a letter to lawmakers regarding her concern about the costs of over 60 new programs, Bush signs the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. It includes new regulations for financial perks and increases financial aid programs. (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 08/15/2008; *CQ Weekly*, 12/08/2008)
- September* On the 15th, at an education summit sponsored by the Aspen Institute, Spellings says we must not “water down” accountability in renewing the NCLB. She also says that as president, neither Senators Barack Obama (D-IL) nor John McCain (R-AZ) would make renewal a top priority. (*The Washington Post*, 09/16/2008)
- Oct.-Nov.* Spellings visits Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Rwanda to meet with education leaders. (*Education Week*, 11/28/2008; <http://www2.ed.gov>)
- October* On the 28th, the Education Department announces that states must use a single graduation-rate formula that counts percentages of ninth-graders who earn a diploma within four years. The schools also must notify parents of the right to transfer their children out of a failing school, and have schools fully explain their tutoring options. The NEA responds that the administration should not tinker with the regulations. Spellings states, “...I think my responsibility is to make sure that these policies and the laws are in good shape when I leave the Department of Education.” (*The Washington Post*, 10/29/2008)
- November* Spellings, New York schools chief Joel Klein, and domestic advisors on Obama’s transition team, meet with Bill Gates in Seattle to go over the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s educational support. (*The Washington Post*, 12/04/2008)
- December* Obama announces Arne Duncan as his Secretary of Education. Spellings calls him “a visionary leader and fellow reformer....” (*The Washington Post*, 12/17/2008)

2009

- January* On the 8th, Spellings gives four additional states the authority to use growth models and three others to differentiate the interventions for their failing schools. (*Education Week*, 01/21/2009)

Spellings leaves office on the 19th. She goes on to become an advisor for the Boston Consulting Group and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and forms her own consulting company Margaret Spellings and Company.
(<http://www.uschamber.com>; <http://www.margaretspellings.com>)

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MARGARET SPELLINGS SUGGESTED TOPICS

Prepared by Bryan Craig

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 05/25/2010

Joining the Administration

- Discuss what role, if any, you played in the 2000 presidential campaign. How involved were you in helping to establish education as one of the signature initiatives of George W. Bush as a presidential candidate?
- Describe your work with the transition team for the Education Department. With whom did you work most closely? Describe the overall operation of the transition team as you saw it.
- Discuss your appointment as President Bush's chief domestic policy advisor. Were there other positions you considered at the outset? Did you have any special agreements with President Bush in advance of taking the position about the parameters of this job (access, agendas, etc)?

Domestic Policy Advisor

- Discuss how you set up the domestic policy shop within the Bush White House. Did you have discussions with predecessors about do's and don'ts? Were there any major departures from the way the Clinton domestic policy operation was structured?
- How did your role fit in the overall structure of the White House? Discuss your working relationships with the chief of staff, Karl Rove, the public liaison office, speechwriting, the National Economic Council, the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, congressional liaison, etc.
- Who was in the informal "strategery group"? Describe how it worked in developing policy and recommendations for President Bush. Discuss the interaction between policy and political considerations in shaping the work of the domestic policy advisor.
- Tell us about the Interagency Working Group on Federalism. Did it prove effective in providing more local control?
- Discuss your working relationship with members of the cabinet. Were there any major areas of disagreement about administration priorities? How closely did you coordinate your efforts with the public liaison office?
- Discuss your role in the early stages of developing No Child Left Behind. Who else was involved in the administration in crafting the bill and guiding it through Congress? How involved was Secretary of Education Rod Paige? Describe your work in passing it through Congress. What was your role after the law was passed?
- Did the May 2001 change in organizational control of the Senate have a significant impact on President Bush's domestic agenda?
- What other major issues did you work on during your tenure? Are there other initiatives within the domestic policy arena from your time in the White House that ought to receive more attention? How did 9/11 influence the course of the President's domestic policy agenda?

Secretary of Education

- How did you come to be appointed Secretary of Education? Did you have any prospective discussions with the President about your role as Secretary of Education?

- Describe your working relationship with the White House staff. With whom in the West Wing did you work most closely?
- Did you meet with the President on a regular basis? How involved was the President in formulating education policy?
- Characterize your working relationship with other members of the cabinet. Describe cabinet meetings during the Bush Administration. How important was the cabinet in helping the President achieve his policy goals?
- With whom in the Congress did you work most closely? In particular, describe your working relationship with the chairs of the House and Senate committees that dealt with education issues. Describe more generally the President's working relationship with Senator Edward Kennedy.
- Evaluate your working relationships with organized interest groups. Which interest groups were your main allies and adversaries?
- Tell us about the reorganization of the Education Department. Did it prove to be effective?
- Discuss your press relations as Secretary of Education? Were there any special challenges in dealing with the press on matters of education policy?

Major Education Issues and Policies

- Comment on the process through which major education policies were formulated, proposed, and implemented.
- How well has NCLB been implemented? Tell us about the conflict over its funding and its legal challenges. What problems did states, school boards and teachers have with it, and how did you address those problems? How difficult was it to be flexible while enforcing the law?
- Why did you form the Commission on the Future of Higher Education? How effective was it? What were the major issues you faced on higher education?
- How did Hurricanes Katrina and Rita affect educational policy for the Bush Administration?
- Tell us about the Department of Education budget cuts and how they affected policy and relations with Congress and the education community.
- Why did you travel abroad? How effective were these trips in accomplishing your goals?
- Tell us about the Reading First and student loan scandals. How did you try to find solutions, and were they effective?

The Bush Presidency in Retrospect

- What do you consider your greatest accomplishments in working with President Bush?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Bush presidency? What features of the Bush presidency were overlooked or misunderstood by the press?
- How effective was President Bush as a domestic policy leader, public leader, a legislative leader, and a party leader?
- What, in your opinion, has been President Bush's impact on the Republican Party?
- How should the Bush presidency be viewed in history?