



President George W. Bush Oral History Project

BRIEFING MATERIALS

Peter Wehner

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Presidential Oral History Program

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PETER WEHNER NEWS TIMELINE

Prepared by Bryan Craig

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 03/25/2015

1987-1988 Peter Wehner is speechwriter for Secretary of Education William Bennet in the Ronald Reagan Administration. (*The Washington Post*, 12/13/2004)

1989-1990 Wehner serves under Director Bennet as special assistant to the director in the Office of National Drug Control Policy. (*The Washington Post*, 12/13/2004)

1990-1993 Wehner is a research fellow at the Hudson Institute. (*The Washington Post*, 12/13/2004)

1993-2001 Wehner is director for policy for Empower America, a conservative public-policy organization. (*The Washington Post*, 12/13/2004)

2001

January Wehner enters the George W. Bush Administration as special assistant to the president and deputy director for speechwriting under Mike Gerson. (*The Washington Post*, 12/13/2004)

Bush delivers his inauguration speech and incorporates themes such as “compassionate conservatism” and faith-based initiatives to alleviate poverty and other social problems. (*The New York Times*, 01/21/2001)

August On the 9th, Bush outlines his plan that allows for government funding for research on already extracted stem cells, but prohibits extraction of additional stem cells from human embryos.

September On the 11th, al-Qaeda attacks the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and hijacks a plane that goes down in Pennsylvania. Wehner is at the senior staff meeting at the White House, and he calls Gerson after hearing the news that the World Trade Center had been hit. After the attacks, Gerson, Wehner, Matthew Scully, John McConnell, and others draft two of Bush’s speeches, one given at the Washington National Cathedral during a proclaimed National Day of Mourning on the 14th, and the other delivered before a joint session of Congress on the 20th. (Michael J. Gerson, *Heroic Conservatism*, New York: HaperCollins, 2008, p. 67; *The New York Times*, 10/07/2001)

October Bush gives a brief speech announcing the beginning of military operations against the Taliban-dominated regime in Afghanistan that is suspected of harboring Osama bin Laden. (*The New York Times*, 10/08/2001)

2002

January In his first State of the Union address, Bush uses the phrase “axis of evil” to describe the regimes that rule over Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. (*The New York Times*, 01/20/2003)

March The U.S. formally withdraws from the ABM treaty.

Bush signs the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act.

June Bush announces the “Bush Doctrine” at a West Point speech, laying out his theory of military preemption. Counselor Karen Hughes, Deputy NSC Advisor Stephen Hadley, Gerson, Chief of Staff Andy Card, Senior Advisor Karl Rove, and NSC Advisor Condoleezza Rice had helped draft the speech. (Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor*, New York: Crown, 2011, pp. 150-152)

Bush announces his proposal for a new Department of Homeland Security on the 6th. (Karl Rove, *Courage and Consequence: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight*, New York: Threshold Editions, 2010, pp. 310-311)

Bush calls for the creation of an independent Palestinian state on the 24th.

September Bush speaks in New York on consecutive days, first at Ellis Island on the 11th to mark the one-year anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and then at the United Nations on the 12th to make the case for forcefully confronting Saddam Hussein. (*The New York Times*, 09/07/2002)

October Bush gives a speech on the 7th in Cincinnati, Ohio. This speech, which incorporates phrases like “smoking gun” and “mushroom cloud,” is intended primarily for Americans and specifically outlines the national security threat posed to the U.S. by Iraq. (*The Washington Post*, 10/11/2002)

Congress passes a resolution on the 11th authorizing the use of force against Iraq.

November On the 5th, the GOP expands its congressional majorities in the midterm elections, marking just the second time a president has secured midterm gains for his party in both houses of Congress.

Bush signs legislation creating the Department of Homeland Security.

December Wehner becomes deputy assistant to the president and director of the Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI), replacing Barry Jackson. (*The Washington Post*, 12/04/2002)

2003

January In preparation for the 2004 campaign, Rove speaks with Jim Baker, Michael Deaver, and other Republicans who had fought to win reelection for an incumbent president. They all reportedly warn Rove not to let the White House and campaign staff work at cross purposes. To help minimize this problem, Card sets up a system at the White House in which all information to and from the campaign passes through Rove. Card also tells Rove to make sure to keep key White House staff involved in decision-making. In February, Rove begins holding weekly “Breakfast Club” meetings at his house each weekend to discuss the campaign. Rove also convenes biweekly, early evening meetings with senior White House staff to review Bush’s overall agenda beginning in 2003. These meetings later encompass campaign politics as well. (Rove, pp. 361-362; Rice, pp. 258-259; *Newsweek*, 11/15/2004)

On the 25th, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, the vice president’s chief of staff, gives a presentation on the newest intelligence against Saddam to Rove, Rice, Hadley, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Gerson, Hughes, Communications Director Dan Bartlett, and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. The evidence consists of satellite imagery and communications intercepts, including images of objects being dug up, moved, and reburied. While it is unclear what the material is, Libby says it fits the pattern of WMDs concealment. They discuss who should make a public case against Saddam. Rice and Hadley reportedly support Powell. (Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004, pp. 289-291)

February Powell presents the case that Saddam Hussein has been building WMDs in Iraq to the UN Security Council on the 5th.

March U.S. and coalition forces launch airstrikes in Iraq on the 19th. Coalition forces reach and occupy Baghdad by April 9th.

May The Bush campaign committee is filed with the Federal Election Committee on the 16th. (Rove, p. 367)

On the 23rd, Congress passes Bush's second major tax cut. The Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003 slashes individual rates, dividends, capital gains, and estate taxes. (*The Washington Post*, 05/29/2003; <http://www.gpo.gov>)

Bush signs the \$15 billion President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) on the 27th. It is a five-year program in 15 countries; its goals are to provide antiretroviral treatment to 2 million HIV-infected people in resource-limited settings, to prevent 7 million new infections, and to support care for 10 million people (the "2-7-10 goals"). (George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2010, p. 344; <http://southafrica.usembassy.gov>)

July

On the 6th, former U.S. Ambassador Joseph Wilson publishes an op-ed charging Bush with misrepresenting the threat posed by Iraqi WMDs in his 2003 State of the Union (SOTU) address. Wilson claims he was sent by the vice president's office in March 2002 to investigate Saddam's alleged attempt to purchase uranium yellowcake in Niger but reported back that he had found no evidence to support the charges. Bush subsequently references the yellowcake reports in his 2003 SOTU address to help build the case that Saddam is pursuing WMDs. Rove later writes he had never heard Wilson's name before reading the op-ed on the 6th. CIA Director George Tenet says in a statement that the intelligence behind the words is sound and denies that Wilson was sent to Africa by the vice president's office. (Rove, pp. 318-322; George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, New York: Harper, 2007, pp. 458-462)

Robert Novak reveals Valerie Plame's (Wilson's wife) identity as a CIA operative in his column on the 13th. The Justice Department subsequently opens an investigation to determine whether administration officials intentionally leaked Plame's identity in violation of federal law in retaliation for Wilson's criticism. Novak reportedly considered Armitage and Rove his two sources for the information about Plame. (Rove, pp. 327-331; *The Washington Post*, 7/13/2003; *New Yorker*, 11/07/2005)

On the 21st, Gerson calls Hadley to say he found two memos from the CIA regarding Bush's October 2002 Cincinnati speech on Iraq warning that the evidence on Iraqi efforts to obtain African uranium is weak. Hadley takes the blame the next day for not removing the uranium language in light of CIA warnings and offers his resignation. Bush instead asks Hadley to make a statement. (Rove, pp. 326-327; *The New York Times*, 07/23/2003)

Summer

Vice President Richard Cheney tells Bush that he should feel free to consider other running mates in 2004 should Bush decide he would like to make a change. Cheney has reportedly become a lightning rod for criticism

in the media. Bush talks with several senior advisers, including Card and Rove, about the possibility of running with Senator Bill Frist (R-TN), but decides to run again with Cheney. (Bush, pp. 86-87)

October Chief U.S. Weapons Inspector David Kay reports on the 2nd that the Iraq Survey Group failed to find any WMDs in Iraq.

December On the 8th, Bush signs the Medicare Modernization Act, creating a Medicare prescription drug benefit. Bush called wavering members of the House late into the night on November 21st to help narrowly gain passage. (Rove, pp. 372-374)

U.S. troops capture Saddam Hussein on the 13th.

On the 18th, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court legalizes gay marriage in the state, which becomes a major issue in the 2004 campaign. Bush considers supporting a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Wehner drafts a brief covering both sides of the issue for Bush and Cheney. (Rove, pp. 372-377; Peter Baker, *Days of Fire*, New York: Doubleday, 2013, p. 310)

Deputy Attorney General James Comey appoints Patrick Fitzgerald, U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, as special counsel to take over the Plame investigation after Attorney General John Ashcroft recuses himself on the 30th. The DOJ had first opened the investigation in September, which reportedly focuses on the identities of Novak's two administration sources. (Bill Minutaglio, *The President's Counselor*, New York: Rayo, 2006, p. 284; Dick Cheney, *In My Time*, New York: Threshold, 2011, pp. 407-408; *The Washington Post*, 9/1/2006; *The New York Times*, 12/31/2003)

2004

January On the 19th, former Vermont Governor Howard Dean finishes third in the Iowa caucuses. Later that night he delivers his concession speech featuring "the scream," which significantly damages his standing in the polls. (*The Washington Post*, 01/20/2004; *Newsweek*, 11/15/2004)

Bush proposes immigration reform.

February Dean drops out of the presidential race on the 18th. (*The Washington Post*, 01/19/2004)

Rove meets with Bush and the senior campaign staff at the White House to preview the new ads, “Safer, Stronger” and “Tested,” featuring images of 9/11, to be run in March. Bush reportedly asks that the ads be tweaked to be a little more upbeat and positive. When the ads run in early March, they reportedly draw some criticism but receive considerable exposure featuring Bush as a strong leader in the wake of 9/11. At Rove’s next “Breakfast Club” meeting in early March, Mathew Dowd reportedly estimates that the ads had brought in \$6 to \$7 million in free ad coverage. (*Newsweek*, 01/15/2004)

March Senator John Edwards (D-NC) drops out of the presidential race on the 2nd after suffering losses on “Super Tuesday,” effectively giving the Democratic nomination to Senator John Kerry (D-MA). (*Newsweek*, 11/15/2004; *Associated Press*, 03/14/2004)

On the 14th, Rove’s “Breakfast Club” discusses how to respond to a speech Kerry is planning to give in West Virginia attacking Bush’s record on veterans’ spending. Rove suggests running an ad attacking Kerry for voting against the last funding bill for the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. The campaign changes the ad, after Kerry gives his West Virginia speech, to include Kerry’s line in which he admits that he had actually voted for the bill before voting against it. (Rove, pp. 379-381)

April The first Abu Ghraib photos appear on *60 Minutes II* on the 28th. The following week, the *New Yorker* reveals a secret Pentagon report suggesting that the abuses might have been sanctioned by Department of Defense and CIA officials. The press speculates whether Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld will resign. (*Newsweek*, 11/15/2004)

May After a meeting between Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and Bush campaign officials, McCain comes out strongly in support of Bush and joins the president on the campaign trail. (Rove, pp. 382-383; *New Yorker*, 05/30/2005)

June Sovereignty of Iraq is transferred to the Iraqi interim government on the 28th.

July Kerry accepts the Democratic presidential nomination. Edwards joins Kerry on the ticket as his running-mate.

August The Swift Boat Veterans for Truth begins running ads questioning Kerry’s war record in Vietnam. Rove says the Bush campaign had nothing to do with the ads and Bush later calls for an end to all ads by independent groups. (Rove, pp. 388-390; *Fox News*, 08/25/2004)

In a speech in New Hampshire on the 6th, Bush challenges Kerry to clearly answer whether he would have supported going into Iraq, knowing what he knows now. Kerry responds three days later with a qualified answer that fails to give a clear “yes” or “no” response. (Rove, pp. 383-385)

September

Bush accepts the Republican presidential nomination at the Republican convention on the 2nd. The convention goals are to portray Bush as a strong wartime leader and to focus on the future. After the convention Bush leads Kerry in the Gallup polls 52-45. (Rove, p. 388)

On the 8th, CBS’s *60 Minutes* releases documents, allegedly written in 1972, questioning Bush’s record in the National Guard. CBS apologizes a few weeks later when it is revealed the documents are fake, ending Dan Rather’s career at the network. (Rove, pp. 390-393)

On the 30th, Bush and Kerry participate in the first presidential debate covering foreign policy at the University of Miami. Rove later writes he was concerned because Bush seemed in the debate prep sessions to be just going through the motions. After the debate, Hughes notes that the networks failed to abide by the debate ground rules forbidding “reaction shots” of each candidate as the other was speaking. Rove warns Bush that Bush’s dislike for Kerry is making Bush appear unlikable. (Rove, pp. 392-393; *Newsweek*, 11/15/2004)

October

Cheney and Edwards participate in the vice-presidential debate on the 5th. The debate is reportedly a draw.

On the 4th, Bush signs a law that extends the marriage tax credit, the \$1,000 child tax credit, extends an expansion of the ten percent income-tax bracket until 2010, a one-year break from the alternative minimum tax (AMT), and other business tax breaks. (*The Washington Post*, 09/24/2004; *CQ Weekly*, 12/04/2004)

Bush and Kerry hold their second debate at Washington University in St. Louis on the 8th. The town meeting debate reportedly ends in a tie. (*The New York Times*, 10/09/2004)

Bush and Kerry hold their third and final debate on the 13th at Arizona State University. Bush’s advisers had reportedly warned Bush not to lean forward against the podium while speaking, as it created a lump in the back of Bush’s jacket during the first debate. The lump subsequently sparked speculation that it was a secret transmitter allowing Rove to feed Bush debate answers. During the third debate, Kerry commits a serious blunder when he uses Cheney’s daughter as an example to make a point about the Defense of Marriage Act. Rove later writes that Kerry seemed mean. Bush

comes out of the debates leading Kerry in the Gallup polls 49-46. (Rove, pp. 393-394; *The Washington Post*, 10/14/2004)

On the 22nd, Bush signs a corporate tax overhaul bill that cuts corporate taxes from 35 percent to 32 percent, worth about \$76.5 billion, and cuts taxes on overseas profits. (*The Washington Post*, 10/12/2004)

On the 29th, al Jazeera broadcasts a videotape of Osama bin Laden criticizing Bush four days before the election.

November

On the day before the election, Bush gives seven speeches in six states, before returning home with Rove and the campaign staff to Texas to attend one final rally at Southern Methodist University. The campaign decides to make one last campaign stop on Election Day in Ohio on the way back to Washington, D.C. (Rove, pp. 394-395)

Bush is reelected president on the 2nd, becoming the first presidential candidate since 1988 to win a majority of the popular vote.

After the election, the OSI staff writes a memorandum about the difficulties of presidential second terms. (Rove, p. 404)

Ashcroft announces his resignation as attorney general on the 9th. Bush nominates White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales as Ashcroft's successor the next day. Ashcroft agrees to remain in office until Gonzales can be sworn in as attorney general. Bush asks Harriet Miers to replace Gonzales as White House counsel and Rove to take on Miers' former responsibilities as deputy chief of staff for policy. Powell also announces his resignation as secretary of state. He is succeeded by Rice. Bush asks Card to speak with Fred Smith to see if he might be interested in succeeding Rumsfeld, but Smith says family health issues would prevent him from considering the position. Bush had also considered replacing Rumsfeld earlier in the year before the election. Card had reportedly suggested replacing Rumsfeld with someone like James Baker, but Rove and Cheney argue against replacing the secretary of defense in an election year. (Dale Herspring, *Rumsfeld's Wars*, University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, Kansas, 2008, p. 173; Bush, p. 91; Rove, p. 404; Scott McClellan, *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception*, New York: Public Affairs, 2008, p. 241; *The New York Times*, 11/11/2004)

December

On the 8th, Bush signs the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act to oversee and integrate the nation's fifteen intelligence agencies. The difficult part to reconcile between the two houses was how much power to give the new national intelligence director. The Senate had supported near unilateral authority over the 15-agency community, while the House

supported less budgetary power. (*The Washington Post*, 12/01/2004, 12/18/2004)

2005

January

On the 5th, Wehner's memorandum on Social Security reform is leaked. Wehner advocates for private investment accounts, but also for adjusting wage indexing. He writes, "You may know that there is a small number of conservatives who prefer to push only for investment accounts and make no effort to adjust benefits, therefore making no effort to address [the] fundamental structural problem." (*The Washington Post*, 01/07/2005)

On the 10th, Professor John Lewis Gaddis meets with Bush, Rove, Gerson, and Wehner to discuss how to articulate the "Freedom Agenda" and incorporate it into the second inaugural. Gerson writes that he and Wehner have been inviting historian and foreign policy experts to discuss policy issues. (Gerson, pp. 224-225; Baker, p. 372)

On the 26th, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) calls Rove to negotiate over Bush's stalled judicial nominations. With the Democrats blocking five of Bush's nominees for appeals court vacancies, Reid offers to support two of Bush's nominees if Bush withdraws the other three. Reid's offer is declined. (Rove, pp. 415-417)

February

Bush delivers the SOTU address on the 2nd. The administration had decided to lead off Bush's second term with Social Security reform, calling for private accounts for individual workers. However, the Democrats are united in opposition despite Bush's barnstorming efforts later in the month. Some prominent Republicans like Jack Kemp also oppose the Administration's proposals. Rove is dispatched in an attempt to bring Kemp in line with administration policy. Simplifying the tax code is also high on the agenda. Bush asks former Senators John Breaux (D-LA) and Connie Mack (R-FL) to head a tax reform commission. The Bush administration reportedly plans to move on immigration reform later in the second term. (Mark Rozell and Gleaves Whitney, ed., *Testing the Limits*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009, pp. 56-57; Rove, pp. 404-410; <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>; *Newsweek*, 01/24/2005)

Gonzales is confirmed as attorney general on the 3rd.

On the 8th, Rove is named deputy chief of staff for policy. Rove retains his responsibilities as senior adviser to the president. (<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>; *The Washington Post*, 11/18/2004)

- March* Congress passes and Bush signs legislation to grant federal court jurisdiction over the case of Terri Schiavo, a dying and brain-damaged woman. Conservatives reportedly hope that the federal court will compel reinsertion of her feeding tube. The bill states that Congress should consider a broader bill for incapacitated individuals. A federal court rules against reinstating a feeding tube, and Schiavo dies near the end of March. (*CQ Weekly*, 03/28/2005)
- April* Bush holds a news conference on the 28th to outline his Social Security proposal to protect low-wage workers. Wehner, Rove, Card, Treasury Secretary John Snow, and several other White House advisers serve on Bush's legislative team working to build support for the plan. Though it is modeled on a similar proposal by Robert Pozen, the Administration's plan receives very little support. Democrats charge that Bush is trying to privatize Social Security and the initiative stalls over the summer. Rove later writes that it was a mistake to lead off Bush's second term with Social Security reform instead of immigration reform, which might have garnered more bipartisan support. (Bush, p. 299; Baker, p. 381; Rove, pp. 406-410; Robert Draper, *Dead Certain*, New York: Free Press, 2007, pp. 296-304; *The New York Times*, 01/12/2005)
- May* The Gang of 14, led by Senators Ben Nelson (D-NB) and McCain, reach a compromise to end the deadlock over Bush's stalled judicial nominations. The seven Democrats agree to allow a floor vote on all five nominees and the seven Republicans agree not to support the "nuclear option" enabling the Senate to end a filibuster by a simple majority vote. The Gang of 14 also agrees to filibuster only under "extraordinary circumstances." The Senate approves three of Bush's nominees. (Rove, pp. 415-418; *New Yorker*, 08/08/2005)
- On the 17th, Bush signs the Tax Increase Prevention and Reconciliation Act of 2005. It provides another year of relief from the AMT and makes cuts in dividend income and capital gains taxes through 2010. (*CQ Weekly*, 05/15/2006)
- June* Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor informs the White House that she will be resigning effective July 1st. Bush begins to consider a list of candidates to replace O'Connor. Rove has been serving in a group to study possible candidates since Bush's first term, along with Cheney, Card, Libby, Ashcroft, Gonzales, and, ultimately, Miers. Bush later writes that Cheney and Gonzales supported Michael Luttig, Miers supported Samuel Alito, and Card and Rove supported John Roberts. Bush decides in favor of Roberts, whose nomination is announced on July 19th. (Bush, pp. 97-99; Cheney, pp. 322-323; Rove, pp. 418-420)

August Bush signs the Administration's energy bill on the 8th. It promotes investments in energy conservation and efficiency and provides incentives to encourage renewable sources and production of more oil and natural gas. (Rove, pp. 413-414; *The Washington Times*, 07/30/2005)

Hurricane Katrina strikes the Gulf Coast, making landfall in Louisiana on Monday the 29th. New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco had not issued a mandatory evacuation order until the 28th. Within a couple days it becomes clear that the National Guard forces under Blanco are unable to deal with the scope of the crisis. On Wednesday Blanco requests federal troops to help but, under an 1878 law, the military cannot be turned over to a governor for law enforcement. Card formally raises the question of federalizing the response so that active-duty troops could be deployed alongside the National Guard under a unified command, but Blanco reportedly refuses to cede control to the federal government. The proposal to federalize the response had also reportedly raised some objections from the Pentagon. In the absence of a request from the governor, Bush later writes he was very reluctant to use his other option, which would be to invoke the Insurrection Act to strip the sitting governor of her authority over disaster relief in her own state and authorize active military forces to perform law enforcement missions inside the U.S. "The world would see a male Republican president usurping the authority of a female Democratic governor by declaring an insurrection in a largely African American city. That would arouse controversy anywhere. To do so in the Deep South, where there had been centuries of states' rights tension, could unleash holy hell." (Bush, pp. 320-321; Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*, New York: Sentinel, 2011, pp. 616-619; Rove, pp. 443-459; Cheney, pp. 429-431)

September On the 2nd, Bush participates in a Situation Room videoconference with Rove, Card, Hadley, Rice, Rumsfeld, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, FEMA Director Michael Brown, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Alphonso Jackson, JCS Chairman General Richard Myers, and others, to discuss how the federal government can better respond to Katrina. Bush visits the region later that day and meets with Rove, Card, Hadley, Brown, Chertoff, Blanco, Nagin, and other officials aboard Air Force One at the New Orleans airport. Card and Miers develop a plan for Bush and Blanco to share a command structure through General Russel Honoré's joint roles as a member of the Louisiana National Guard and as a regular Army officer, but Blanco rejects the proposal. (Rove, pp. 443-452; Bush, pp. 320-321; Draper, pp. 332, 334; Rumsfeld, pp. 616-619)

On the 3rd, Bush decides to deploy active-duty troops without law enforcement powers, deciding that "sending troops with diminished

authority was better than not sending them at all.” (Bush, p. 323) Rumsfeld writes in his book that Bush made the right call. “Instead of overruling the law on posse comitatus by performing law enforcement missions, thousands of active-duty troops could support the National Guard by delivering humanitarian aid and rescuing stranded victims. Their very presence had the effect of reducing crime and disorder.” (Rumsfeld, pp. 616-619) Rove later writes that the Administration should have federalized the response sooner and immediately sent in federal troops despite the Pentagon’s objections. (Rove, pp. 452-457; Bush, pp. 321-323)

Chief Justice William Rehnquist dies on the 3rd. Bush nominates Roberts as chief justice on the 6th. Roberts is confirmed and sworn in on the 29th. During this time Rove continues working with the Supreme Court nomination group to consider candidates to fill O’Connor’s seat. (Rove, pp. 420-422; *USA Today*, 09/06/2005)

FEMA Director Michael Brown resigns on the 12th.

October On the 3rd, Bush nominates Miers to replace O’Connor on the Supreme Court. Miers’ nomination, however, draws criticism from both parties. She withdraws her nomination by the end of the month. Bush nominates Alito on the 31st. Alito’s nomination is approved by the Senate and he is sworn in on January 31st. (Rove, pp. 421-424; *The Washington Post*, 10/15/2005)

Libby is indicted for perjury, obstruction of justice, and making false statements to investigators looking into the Plame affair on the 28th. (Rove, pp. 432-436)

2006

February On the 8th, Bush signs the Deficit Reduction Act that aims to reduce annual growth of mandatory spending on Medicaid and Medicare.

On the 11th, Cheney is involved in a hunting accident, in which he mistakenly shoots his friend Harry Whittington. Cheney says he is too focused on his friend’s health and does not issue a press statement until the next day in a local paper. (Rove, pp. 460-461)

March On the 28th, Director of Office of Management and Budget Josh Bolten succeeds Card as White House chief of staff. (*The Washington Post*, 03/29/2006)

April Bolten names his long-time deputy, Joel Kaplan, to take over for Rove as deputy chief of staff for policy. Press Secretary Scott McClellan resigns and

is replaced by Tony Snow. Bolten is replaced at OMB by U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman. Michael Hayden replaces Porter Goss as CIA director. Bush had reportedly considered also replacing Rumsfeld, asking for a show of hands among his aides. It is reported that Rice, Card, Bolten, and five others vote to remove him. Hadley, Rove, and Bartlett vote no. Bush decides not to remove Rumsfeld at this time. (Elisabeth Bumiller, *Condoleezza Rice: An American Life*, New York: Random House, 2009, p. 298; Rove, pp. 461-462; *The Washington Post*, 04/19/2006, 04/26/2006; *The New York Times*, 05/09/2006)

Spring Rove ramps up his work on strategic and tactical planning for the upcoming midterm elections. Many Republican candidates have reportedly been struggling in the wake of GOP scandals surrounding lobbyist Jack Abramoff, former House majority leader Tom DeLay (R-TX), and former Representative Duke Cunningham. The Bush administration is also dealing with fallout from the breaking of the Terrorist Surveillance Program story last December. (Rove, pp. 462-467; *The Washington Post*, 01/21/2006)

June On the 7th, Senate Republicans fail to pass an amendment to ban same-sex marriage. Bush and conservatives have been pressuring the Senate to put it to a vote. (*The Washington Times*, 06/08/2006)

Summer Rove, Bolten, Counselor to the President Bartlett, National Security Adviser Hadley, and Chairman of the Republican Party Ed Gillespie meet to review U.S. strategy in Iraq as the violence increases. In a meeting of the national security team on August 17th, Bolten asks, "If it gets worse, what radical measures can the team recommend?" Following the meeting, Bush authorizes Hadley to undertake a more thorough review of the Administration's Iraq policy. (Bush, pp. 370-371; Cheney, p. 460; *The New York Times*, 08/16/2006; *Newsweek*, 12/18/2006)

Rove asks whether Fred Smith might be interested in taking over as secretary of defense. Smith had been Bush's first choice for the position in 1999 but is still not interested in the post. Former CIA Director Robert Gates is also not interested in taking the post at this time. (Rove, p. 466)

August On the 29th, Armitage is publicly revealed to be Novak's original source in the Plame story. (Rove, pp. 440-442)

On the 15th, columnist George Will writes an op-ed piece criticizing the Bush Administration policy in Iraq. The next day, Wehner publically responds by defending Bush's "Freedom Agenda" and the need for military force. (*The Washington Post*, 08/15/2006; http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/08/george_wills_realism_doesnt_ex.html)

In his book, Peter Baker writes that Wehner sends a memo to Bolten arguing the need to fire Rumsfeld. (Baker, p. 479)

September An informal White House group is reportedly formed to discuss the future of Iraq and the question of whether to make a change at the Pentagon. The group includes Hadley, Bolten, Rove, and Bartlett. (Bumiller, p. 300)

Efforts to reach compromise legislation between the House and Senate immigration bills collapse, as Senate leaders turn from comprehensive legislation to building a border fence. The collapse comes after House GOP leaders have spent much of the summer holding field hearings, which backers of the bipartisan plan label as delay tactics meant to drum up anti-immigration sentiments. (*The Washington Post*, 9/30/2006)

October Bush signs the Military Commissions Act on the 17th, which legislatively authorizes the new military tribunal system.

Bush signs the Secure Fence Act of 2006 on the 26th. It authorizes the construction of hundreds of miles of fence on the southern border, more checkpoints and barriers, and allows the Department of Homeland Security to use advance technology, like satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles. (<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>)

November The Democrats win both the House and Senate in the midterm elections following a series of GOP scandals and public relations blunders. Clinton later credits Rove and Ken Mehlman's 72-hour "get out the vote" task force as critical in minimizing the GOP's losses. *The Washington Times* estimates that Rove's task force may have saved as many as 40 GOP House seats and a Tennessee Senate seat. (Rove, pp. 462-467; *The Washington Times*, 11/12/2006)

Rumsfeld resigns as defense secretary. Bush nominates Gates the next day.

December On the 6th, the Iraq Study Group, chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, releases its findings. Its primary recommendations include a pullback of U.S. forces over the next fifteen months, an amnesty program for insurgent fighters, a "diplomatic offensive" toward Israel-Palestine negotiations, and high-level talks on Iraq with Iran and Syria. Hadley rejects the plan to talk with Iran and Syria and to set any deadlines for reducing U.S. troops. (Bob Woodward, *The War Within*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008, pp. 314-315; *The Washington Post*, 12/07/2006, 12/15/2006)

On the 11th, Bush and Cheney meet with Hadley, retired General Jack Keane, AEI scholar Fred Kagan, Eliot Cohen, Stephen Biddle from the

Council of Foreign Affairs, and Rove. Bush had asked Hadley to conduct a review of the situation in Iraq. Keane, Kagan, Cohen, and Biddle argue for a surge to protect the population and for Bush to make his generals more accountable. (Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble*, New York: Penguin Press, 2009, pp. 98-101; Rove, pp. 475-478; Woodward, *The War Within*, pp. 286-289; Stephen Benedict Tyson, *Political Science Quarterly*, 2010, p. 574)

In an NSC principals meeting on the 15th, Bush announces his support for a surge in Iraq, despite some reported concerns from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Rove, pp. 471-479; Woodward, *The War Within*, pp. 286-289; Tyson, p. 575)

Gates is sworn in as secretary of defense on the 18th.

2007

January

On the 10th, Bush announces on live television a surge of roughly 20,000 troops to Iraq. Rove later writes that the plan was ready to be announced in December but the announcement was delayed to give Gates a chance to review the plan and offer his input. The plan called for a new counterinsurgency strategy to gain the support of the Iraqi people and for General David Petraeus to serve as the new ground commander in Iraq. Bush's announcement is met with criticism from Democrats. Wehner emails Rove and other staff members his concerns that influential Republicans like Senators John Warner (R-VA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) will block funding for the war in Iraq. (Rove, pp. 480-481; Baker, p. 527; <http://www.cnn.com>)

In the SOTU on the 23rd, Bush announces he will begin working again on immigration reform. Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) had called Rove after the midterm elections to let Rove know that he and Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and John Cornyn (R-TX) were interested in supporting a new compromise bill. (Rove, pp. 467-470)

March

On the 4th, *The New York Times* reports that the DOJ asked for the resignations of seven U.S. attorneys on December 7th, 2006 in favor of candidates who are seen as more likely to carry out administration policy. The story first began to break in January. (*The New York Times*, 03/04/2007; *CQ Researcher*, 06/22/2007; <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>)

On the 21st and 22nd, the House and Senate Judiciary Committees issue subpoenas relating to the U.S. attorney firings to Rove, Bolton, Miers, and

Gonzales. The White House offers to turn over some correspondence and to make aides available for private interviews, but Bush insists that his aides will not testify under oath or provide documents, citing executive privilege. The issue remains in the courts until the Obama White House reaches a deal with the Judiciary Committee on March 4, 2009, allowing for Rove and Miers to testify under oath behind closed doors in a transcribed interview, as Rove had initially offered to do in 2007. Rove testifies in July 2009. The Department of Defense also later announces in 2010 that it has not found any evidence of wrong-doing in the firings. (Rove, pp. 508-511; *The Washington Post*, 03/22/2007, 07/22/2010)

Spring Bolten tells senior White House staff that if they are considering stepping down, they should do it by Labor Day or plan on staying until the end of the second term. Bush reportedly planned on “sprinting to the finish line.” (Rove, p. 493; *The Washington Post*, 08/14/2007)

June The Senate votes against the compromise immigration bill 53-46 on the 28th. Reid had delayed the bill earlier in the month, limiting the number of amendments that could be considered. (Rove, pp. 467-470; *The Charlie Rose Show*, 11/21/2007)

Rove informs Bush over lunch that he would like to step down over the August recess. (Rove, pp. 493-494; <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov>)

July Bush asks Rove, Hadley, Bartlett, Gillespie and Bolten to hold a series of meetings to consider possible changes in the Iraq surge strategy to try to satisfy the growing opposition in Congress. (Cheney, pp. 460-462)

August Wehner leaves the Administration to become a Senior Fellow at the Ethics & Public Policy Center (EPPC). (<http://www.eppc.org>)

TIMELINES

- Peter Wehner News Timeline, prepared by Bryan Craig, Miller Center, University of Virginia, 03/25/2015.
- Timeline of the Bush Presidency, prepared by Justin Peck and Bryan Craig, Miller Center, University of Virginia, 04/30/2010.

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- George W. Bush, “2001 Inaugural Address,” 01/20/2001, < <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/inaugural-address.html>> (03/20/2015)
- George W. Bush, “Address to the Nation on Stem Cell Research,” 08/09/2001, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=63209>> (03/20/2015).
- George W. Bush, “President Bush’s Address at Washington National Cathedral,” 09/14/2001, <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/14/bush.memorial/>> (03/20/2015).
- George W. Bush, “President Bush’s Address to Joint Session of Congress,” 09/20/2001, <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>> (03/20/2015).
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- Peter Wehner, “The Wrong Time to Lose Our Nerve; A Response to Messrs. Buckley, Will and Fukuyama,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 04/04/2006.
- Peter Wehner, “Revisionist History; Antiwar Myths about Iraq, Debunked,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 05/23/2006.
- Peter Wehner, “Democracy and Its Discontents,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 08/09/2006.
- Peter Wehner, “Responding to George Will’s Realism,” 08/16/2006, <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/08/george_wills_realism_doesnt_ex.html> (03/20/2015).
- Peter Wehner, “Why They Fight; From RealClearPolitics: Why Global Jihadists Fight and What It Means for Us,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 01/08/2007.

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- Bradley H. Patterson, *To Serve the President: Continuity and Innovation in the White House Staff* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008) pp. 161-162.
- Dan Balz, “Resident Thinker Given Free Rein in White House; Official Promotes Role of Ideas in Politics,” *The Washington Post*, 12/13/2004.
- Peter Baker, “Policy Aide’s Departure Continues Transformation of Bush’s Staff,” *The Washington Post*, 03/30/2007.

KEY ISSUES AND EVENTS

Bush Ideology

- Dana Milbank, “Needed: Catchword for Bush Ideology; ‘Communitarianism’ Finds Favor,” *The Washington Post*, 02/01/2001.

Agenda for Second Term

- John F. Harris and Jim VandeHei, “Doubts About Mandate for Bush, GOP,” *The Washington Post*, 05/02/2005.
- Peter Baker and Jim VandeHei, “Bush Team Rethinks Its Plan for Recovery; New Approach Could Save Second Term,” *The Washington Post*, 12/29/2005.
- Peter Baker, “Spate of Good News Gives White House a Chance to Regroup,” *The Washington Post*, 06/14/2006.

Social Security Reform

- George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown, 2010) pp. 296-301.
- Jonathan Weisman and Jim VandeHei, “GOP Divided on Social Security Push,” *The Washington Post*, 01/07/2005.
- Jonathan Weisman, “Competing Visions for Social Security,” *The Washington Post*, 02/24/2005.

Freedom Agenda

- George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown, 2010) pp. 395-438.
- Dan Balz and Jim VandeHei, “Bush Speech Not a Sign of Policy Shift, Officials Say; Address Said to Clarify ‘The Values We Cherish,’” *The Washington Post*, 01/22/2005.
- Howard Kurtz, “Journalists Say Their White House Advice Crossed No Line,” *The Washington Post*, 01/29/2005.

The Troop Surge in Iraq

- George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown, 2010) pp. 355-394.
- Stephen Benedict Dyson, “George W. Bush, the Surge, and Presidential Leadership,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 125(4): 557-585.
- Peter Baker, Karen Deyoung, Thomas E. Ricks, et al., “Among Top Officials, ‘Surge’ Has Sparked Dissent, Infighting,” *The Washington Post*, 09/09/2007.

PETER WEHNER SUGGESTED TOPICS

Prepared by Bryan Craig

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 03/25/2015

Joining the Administration

- How did you first meet George W. Bush? What were your early impressions of him? How well did you know his father?
- How did your prior work experiences in the Ronald Reagan administration prepare you for your appointments in President George W. Bush's administration?
- Discuss the impact of William Bennett on your world view.

Deputy Director Presidential Speechwriting

- What were the circumstances of your appointment to the White House staff as a speechwriter? What kinds of discussions and understandings did you have with President Bush and Mike Gerson about your role? Tell us about your study of JFK's speeches.
- Describe your relationship with Mike Gerson. Whom else did you work closely with in the White House?
- How did the speechwriting office operate? To what extent was President Bush usually involved in speechwriting? Was he typically satisfied to leave the initial drafting process to speechwriters, or did he seek to have early and frequent input into the drafting process?
- How would you characterize President Bush's public speaking style? Was there a tension between the use of high rhetoric and a more colloquial speaking style? Compare and contrast hearing the president's speeches in person and watching them on TV.
- To what extent was religious faith an important ingredient for the president, personally and professionally?
- Discuss more generally the role of rhetoric in the Bush presidency. How did President Bush himself view the role of speechwriters in his administration, and how important did he see speechmaking in the overall context of his presidency? What do you consider President Bush's best written and best delivered speech?

Director of the Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI)

- What were the circumstances of your appointment to run the OSI? What kinds of discussions and understandings did you have with President Bush and Karl Rove about your role?
- Discuss your responsibilities as OSI director. How did you run the office differently from your predecessor Barry Jackson? With whom did you work most closely? How was the vice president's office incorporated into policy creation? Describe your interactions with key administration agencies.
- How was policy strategy determined in the Bush White House?

Speechwriting

- Describe drafting President Bush's first inaugural address and whether, or how, the close election results in 2000 influenced it. Discuss the president-elect's own engagement in drafting that address.
- Are there any addresses between the inaugural and 9/11 that scholars ought to pay attention to as especially illuminating about this presidency?
- What role, if any, did you play in formulating President Bush's policy on stem cell research and his speech on that topic? What were your thoughts about the president's focus on this policy in the early months of his presidency?
- Describe your own personal experience on 9/11 and in the immediate aftermath. Did you have any direct communications with the president shortly thereafter that helped to shape the way you framed his speeches? Comment on drafting the two major speeches in the days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (at the Washington National Cathedral and for the Joint Session of Congress).
- Did the speechwriting and vetting process change in any material way in the aftermath of 9/11, when national security issues returned to the forefront of the White House agenda?
- There has been speculation about how the term "axis of evil" made its way into the 2002 State of the Union address. Discuss the process by which its content was decided.
- President Bush further outlined the perceived threats posed by Iraq when he spoke in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002. How was drafting this speech different from drafting the one given at the United Nations less than one month before?

Policy and Strategic Planning

- Describe the policy meetings you had with President Bush. Did you have a written agenda for each meeting? Did you invite outside experts to these meetings? Recount the process in articulating a "Freedom Agenda" with John Lewis Gaddis and other experts. The president read extensively on Abraham Lincoln. What specifically was he looking for in learning about Lincoln and what he did learn about the 16th president that helped his leadership?
- Tell us about setting President Bush's second term agenda. What did you hope to accomplish and what were the failures?
- Explain your role in Social Security reform? Immigration reform?
- Discuss the decision to invade Iraq. Tell us about the efforts to continue building support for the war. Who were your biggest allies in Congress? Who were your harshest critics? Comment on the surge. How did opposition to the war, as well as controversies over Abu Ghraib, the search for Iraqi WMDs, and Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's resignation, affect your ability to advance the president's agenda?
- Discuss Hurricane Katrina and the challenges you faced in the ensuing relief efforts.
- Describe the vetting and promotion of the president's judicial nominees.

- Tell us about some of the other important domestic and foreign policy issues you worked on that you feel have not received enough attention among scholars and in the press.
- Discuss the circumstances of your resignation.

Campaign Work

- Tell us about your work on the 2004 reelection campaign. With whom did you work most closely during the campaign?
- What was your reaction when you first realized that John Kerry was going to win the Democratic nomination? What were the key issues in the campaign? What were President Bush's key strengths as a candidate running against Kerry? On which issues did you think President Bush might be most vulnerable? What new challenges did the president face running as an incumbent?
- Why do you think President Bush won reelection?
- Tell us about your work in the 2002 and 2006 midterm elections. Comment on the historic GOP victories in 2002. What were the major challenges in 2006?

Comparison with Previous Administrations

- Discuss parallels and differences observed between the Bush administration and the Reagan administration.

The Bush Presidency in Retrospect

- Which were the most challenging issues you worked on during your time in office? Which issues were the most rewarding? What were your biggest accomplishments during your time with President Bush?
- What do you think were the strengths and weaknesses of the Bush administration? What were the administration's greatest accomplishments? Is there anything you think the administration should have handled differently?
- What were President Bush's greatest assets as president? Assess his strengths and weaknesses as a policy-maker, as a legislative leader, and as a world leader.
- What were the most common misconceptions held about President Bush by the general public and the press? How was he viewed by foreign leaders? By Republicans and Democrats in Congress?
- How should the Bush administration be viewed by future scholars?