



Bush legacy: shock, awe & atrophy

First drafts in history focus on war, energy, an economy on the brink

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS - I was drawn to my March 13, 2003, pre-Iraq War shock and awe analysis as I set out to write my first draft of history of President George W. Bush. The first four sentences read:

"This is brinksmanship on an epic scale. Within the next month there could possibly be, as the rock band REM might say, the 'end of the world as we know it.' President George W. Bush is taking a huge, calculated gamble, leading the nation into a war a majority of Americans appear to believe is morally correct. The danger lies in its execution, the retribution of our enemies, and the impact on an economy that has been described as 'the dagger aimed at the heart' of the Bush administration."

But it was my seventh paragraph that in retrospect is fascinating: "There have been warnings of budget



deficits topping \$300 billion, an acknowledgment from the Bush administration that his second round of tax cuts likely wouldn't have a near-term stimulus, and an ominous warning from Warren Buffett about derivatives becoming 'time

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Unrealized potential

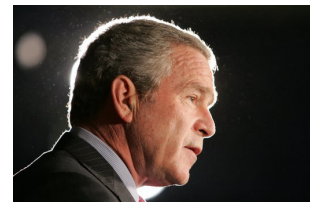
By **MARK SCHOEFF JR.**

WASHINGTON - By two objective standards, President Bush was a failure after eight years in office. He is leaving the country and his party in worse shape than he found them.



History may judge him more generously. It's ridiculous, of course, to try to draw a conclusion before he's even left the White House. In fact, he has pretty much avoided being a lame duck. More so than any president in recent memory, he is wielding power right up to the moment he has to step down.

Although we can't yet draw a conclusion about Bush's tenure, it's not too early to point out missed opportunities.



"I feel an obligation to my successor. I don't think it's good policy to dump on him a major catastrophe on his first day in office."

- President Bush on the Big 3



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We can start with his inherent political skills and his failure to use them for his - and the country's - benefit.

Bush's electoral success has been attributed in part to his ability to connect with people. That may sound strange for someone whose approval ratings have not been north of 40 percent in years. But Bush, certainly more so than his competitors for office, former Vice President Al Gore and Sen. John Kerry, was seen as someone that voters would like to meet for a drink after work.

Indeed, Bush consistently demonstrates a warm personality and sense of humor. He doesn't hold many press conferences. But when he does meet with reporters, he has an easygoing rapport that so far has eluded President-elect Barack Obama.

Also unlike Obama, Bush has shown that he can laugh at himself. The latest evidence is his ability to roll with the punches when a reporter in Baghdad threw shoes at him.

These skills have probably served Bush well when he's met with members of Congress. Sure, the Democratic majorities on Capitol Hill attack Bush every day. But when he meets with members in small groups, it's not hard to imagine that he's charming.

That's why the Bush approach to Congress - and politics in general - over the last eight years is inexplicable. He and his former top adviser, Karl Rove, adopted an us-versus-them mentality. They said to Congress and to the world: You're either with us or against us.

After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Bush had an ex-

traordinary opportunity to reach across the aisle and draw in Democrats as permanent allies on a range of issues. He could have cemented relationships with then-Republican chairmen of key committees. He could have united the country in a way that obliterated the red-blue schism.

Instead, after a brief period of comity, the Bush-Rove tactics of divide and conquer took over. Republicans gained seats in the mid-term election of 2002 because Bush and Rove portrayed Democrats as weak on security.

That was the beginning of the end of any hope that Bush would follow through on an election promise in 2000 to change the tone in Washington. Instead, Republicans became even more combative. That attitude contributed to the hubris that caused the party to lose its congressional majorities in 2006 and to drop even more seats this year.

What if Bush had embraced Congress after Sept. 11? What if he had really worked hard at the relationship? Even if he kept Democrats at arm's length, he could have at least listened to leaders in his own party, like Sen. Richard Lugar.

Such an approach might have created an atmosphere that would have helped build Rove's dream; a Republican advantage in Congress that would last for a generation or more.

But in the end, it was the Hill Republicans who revolted against Bush. Although he was able to bend Democrats to his will until his final days in office on everything from an Iraq time line to the parameters of a financial rescue package, Bush lost control of his own party.

Republicans ultimately scuttled



President Bush with U.S. Rep. Chris Chocola in 2004.



such Bush priorities as comprehensive immigration reform. Bush's divide-and-conquer proclivity also was a staple of his 2004 campaign. He was perhaps one of the weakest incumbent presidents ever re-elected, but he did it by polarizing the electorate and getting his base to the polls.

What if he had run a campaign more like Obama's, which was basically constructive and asked people to join a cause? Bush might have laid the groundwork to ensure that a Republican would succeed him in the Oval Office.

Bush may mangle his syntax, but he is a smart man and a savvy politician. He made a huge mistake by failing to prepare properly for the aftermath of the Iraq war. But he showed that he can overcome errors. Today, a

new strategy seems to be producing results in Iraq, flying shoes notwithstanding.

During his second term, he made course corrections in the way he dealt with the world. His administration became more multilateral and cooperative with foreign allies and more willing to listen to critics at home and overseas. In fact, Bush appointed a defense secretary, Robert Gates, who drew so much bipartisan praise that Obama is keeping him in the Cabinet.

Clearly, Bush had the political skills to create a lasting positive legacy. Instead, he chose to fight when he should have reached out. Now we have to wait for history to determine how much damage he did. ❖

Bush legacy

bombs, both for the parties that deal in them and the economic system' and 'financial weapons of mass destruction, carrying dangers that, while now latent, are potentially lethal' to the banking system."

The seventh paragraph was prescient. Few Americans were worried about derivatives on the eve of the Iraq War. The final Bush years became a nexus where the Oil Presidency, the loosened regulations on Wall Street, and the utter lack of an energy policy taking into account national security implications, became the perfect storm that howls as Bush and Cheney prepare their exits. There are now \$7.5 billion in funded and unfunded securities. The Washington greenback printing press is roaring. Because of a lack of an energy policy and a federal mandate for the Big 3 to produce more energy efficient cars and trucks, it is now threatening 20 percent of Indiana's economic sector - automobiles. That Bush said in his 2006 State of the Union speech that "America is addicted to oil" comes off in retrospect with virtual childlike naivete.

Here we stand today in the penultimate month of Bush's eight-year legacy. Despite Republican accusations hurled last fall that Barack Obama was a "socialist," we find the "conservative" Bush presiding over an American economy with essentially state-owned banks. Taxpayers might even find themselves as owners of auto companies. In the irony of ironies, it may be Bush who extends a lifeline to the United Auto Workers. As China morphs into capitalism,

the U.S. is morphing the other way. We have witnessed the greatest expansion of entitlements since the Great Society. The budget has gone from a \$431 billion surplus in January 2001 to at \$455 billion deficit on Oct. 15.

In July 2005, Bush spoke at Indiana Black Expo, celebrating a rise in African-American home ownership. "That's good for America," Bush told 3,000 gathered at the RCA Dome. Embedded here - and certainly not constricted

to any particular race - were the seeds of another disaster, the mortgage meltdown. This was Bush's "ownership society" that found a deregulated Wall Street and a snoozing Securities and Exchange Commission presiding over mortgages lent to people who couldn't afford them, then bundled and sold into what would become "toxic" debt that now requires a \$700 billion taxpayer bailout with no guarantees. While the seeds of this deregulation were planted during the Clinton years, candidate Bush

would observe at the Metro Church in Indianapolis in July 1999, "Prosperity must have a purpose. The dream is for you. No great calling is ever easy and no work of man is ever perfect. But we can, in our imperfect way, rise now and again to the example of St. Francis - where there is hatred, sowing love; where there is darkness, shedding light. where there is despair, bringing hope."

Bush ironically brought about "hope" in the form of Barack Obama. His 32 percent disapproval rating created the door for Obama to win Indiana's 11 Electoral College votes this week. Exit polling would show that 60 percent of Hoosier voters saw the economy as the top issue (compared to the 17 percent in 2004's leading issue of "moral



President Bush and President Elect Obama at the White House in November.



values" spurred by the Bush/Rove gay marriage ban wedge strategy) and 52 percent of them voted for Obama. Asked by ABC's Charlie Gibson if he helped Obama win, Bush blamed the Republican Party. "I think it was a repudiation of Republicans. And I'm sure some people voted for Barack Obama because of me. I think most people voted for Barack Obama because they decided they wanted him to be in their living room for the next four years explaining policy."

The near collapse of American capitalism also led to an extraordinary and breathtaking reversal by Bush, who told CNN earlier this week, "I've abandoned free-market principles to save the free-market system." It was almost like Morley Safer watching U.S. soldiers torching Vietnamese villages with Zippo lighters to save them. In statements that could allow him to join the company of President Herbert Hoover, The Decider added that his decisions were made "to make sure the economy doesn't collapse."

"I am sorry we're having to do it," Bush said. "I feel a sense of obligation to my successor to make sure there is not a, you know, a huge economic crisis."

Not a "huge" economic crisis? Bush explained further, "Look, we're in a crisis now. I mean, this is ... we're in a huge recession, but I don't want to make it even worse."

Sen. Dick Lugar told students at the University of Indianapolis last Saturday, "It's too early to tell whether it is of the same magnitude of the Great Depression of 1929 and '30. This is a crisis because it is very huge, but at this point it's not of proportions of many we have seen before. . . . Rather than be consumed by the crisis of fear, we need to really be exhibiting more confidence."

Americans are scared; their fear having incubated for the past few years. When Howey/Gauge began polling in February of 2008, the fear expressed by respondents - well before \$4 a gallon gas and the Wall Street and Detroit collapses - was already palpable.

Thus, a legacy of the second Bush presidency is the direct opposite of Franklin Roosevelt's most enduring quote: "The only thing we have to fear is ... fear itself." The Bush presidency was all about fear. Iraqi drones spraying U.S. cities with anthrax. "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud." Or gay marriage. "Saddam Hussein is a homicidal dictator who is addicted to weapons of mass destruction."

The Oil Presidency

There was to be great volatility with gas prices during this Oil Presidency, with the political price paid on both war and gas in November 2006 when Indiana became the only state to flip three congressional seats from Republican to Democrat. By the end of the Bush presidency, prices rose to \$4.19 a gallon and fueled Barack Obama's improbable victory in November. That they tumbled to \$1.40 a gallon this month is indicative of the wild swings that are buffeting the markets, business owners and consumers. Deflation is now a major worry and a sign of a truly sick economy. While many urged Bush to create an energy tax that would bring a \$60 a barrel floor to oil prices so as not to undercut the ethanol and coal gasification facilities under construction in Indiana, it appears to be another missed opportunity.

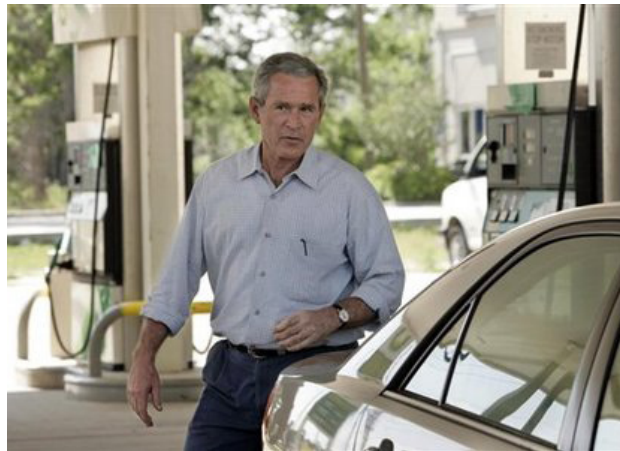
That the bottom dropped out of gas prices this fall at a time when huge commodity trading departments at Bear Stearns, Merrill Lynch and Lehman Brothers disappeared is also telling in the nexus of Wall Street and Big Oil.

Lugar said at the Purdue University Energy Summit in August 2006, "Neither American oil companies, nor American car companies, have shown an inclination to dramatically transform their businesses in ways that will achieve the degree of change

we need to address a national security emergency. Most importantly, the federal government is not treating energy vulnerability as a crisis, despite an increase in energy related proposals."

Lugar has long blamed the Bush administration for a lack of a cohesive energy policy. "Our failure to act will be all the more unconscionable given that success would bring not only relief from the geopolitical threats of energy-rich regimes, but also restorative economic benefits to our farmers, rural areas, automobile manufacturers, high technology industries, and many others," Lugar explained. "We must be very clear that this is a political problem. We now have the financial resources, the industrial might, and the technological prowess to shift our economy away from oil dependence. What we are lacking is coordination and political will. We have made choices, as a society, which have given oil a near monopoly on American transportation. Now we must make a different choice in the interest of American national security and our economic future."

Lugar told the Deloitte Energy Conference in May 2007, "The president's energy activities are barely register-





ing in the American consciousness. In large part, this is because there is no energy campaign upon which he has visibly and repeatedly staked his reputation and legacy. With the possible exception of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, there is nothing in the Bush domestic energy program that a well-informed American would identify with this administration."

Osama bin Laden's Sept. 11 attacks were aimed at destroying the American economy. The attacks caught the unprepared Bush administration by surprise. The U.S. and Western response was measured in tens of billions of dollars, and a near collapse of the airline industry. Bin Laden's stated goal was oil at \$150 a barrel (it rose to \$147 a barrel last summer), and the destruction of Western economies. Even as he hides in his Pakistani cave, it's not hard to argue that he's come close to his goals.

Iraq War

The Iraq War represents Bush's greatest gamble and, perhaps, his best chance of improving his standing among our 43 presidents. There was no WMD in Iraq, as weapons inspector Scott Ritter warned at the time. The White House induced "group think" and a passive press (which is now facing its own era of atrophy and bankruptcy) helped pave the catastrophic route. The idea of preemptive war became a facade for a president's personal vendetta against a dictator who once tried to kill his father. Great American presidents ranging from Lincoln to FDR endured bad military leadership and stunning defeats before the Grants, Shermans, Eisenhowers and Pattons emerged. Bush has his David Petraeus, but not until he goaded the insurgency as Lincoln and Roosevelt never did: "My answer is, bring 'em on," he said as the Iraq insurgency gathered over the July 4 weekend in 2003.

Or "Dead or alive." Mission accomplished. Sophomores in power.

Hoosiers heard the warnings of Sen. Dick Lugar, who became a man firmly outside the circle of power. It was alarming when Newsweek reported in July 2003 that Lugar was worried about the American people being blindsided by the true costs of blood and treasure. "This idea that we will be in Iraq just as long as we need and not a day more is rubbish!" Lugar was quoted in 2003. "We're going to be there a long time. Where does the money

come from? How is it to be disbursed and by whom?"

Nina Easton would write in the Boston Globe in July 2003 that Lugar discovered the "haphazard" way in which American reconstruction costs were being handled. The White House needed "the discipline of actually constructing

a budget for years," Lugar said at the time. "We need to fill in the blanks. We cannot have numerous surprises, a sort of 'gotcha trail' as we keep running out of money."

Last Sunday, the New York Times reported on a 513-page, unpublished draft of a federal report that depicts the American-led reconstruction of Iraq as "an effort crippled by Pentagon planners who were hostile to the idea of rebuilding a foreign country and then molded into \$117 billion failure by bureaucratic turf wars, spiraling violence and ignorance of

the basic elements of Iraqi society and infrastructure."

Once again, in the last few weeks, Bush has blamed the tragic miscues in Iraq to "intelligence failure" even though authors like Bob Woodward, Michael Gordon and Thomas E. Ricks (along with former Bush communications director Scott McClelland) documented the hyped intelligence that sold the war.

Vice President Cheney would say in Nashville in 2002, "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us. Time is not on our side. The risks of inaction are far greater than the risks of action." In his book "**Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq**," Ricks noted that retired Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni "nearly fell off his chair" when he heard Cheney speak. "In my time at Centcom, I watched the intelligence and never - not once - did it say, '(Saddam) has WMD.' It was never there, never there."

ABC's Gibson asked Bush earlier this month: "You've always said there's no do-overs as President. If you had one?"

Bush responded, "I don't know -- the biggest regret of all the presidency has to have been the intelligence failure in Iraq. A lot of people put their reputations on the line and said the weapons of mass destruction is a reason to remove Saddam Hussein. It wasn't just people in my administration; a lot of members in Congress, prior to my arrival in Washington ... during the debate on Iraq, a lot of leaders of nations around the world were all looking at the



Sen. Lugar and President Bush embrace at the Indiana State Fairrounds in May 2003. (HPI Photo by Ellen M. Jackson)



same intelligence. And, you know, that's not a do-over, but I wish the intelligence had been different, I guess."

If the intelligence had been right, would there have been an Iraq war?

Bush answered, "Yes, because Saddam Hussein was unwilling to let the inspectors go in to determine whether or not the U.N. resolutions were being upheld. In other words, if he had had weapons of mass destruction, would there have been a war? Absolutely."

Gibson pressed, "No, if you had known he didn't."

"Oh, I see what you're saying," Bush responded.

"You know, that's an interesting question. That is a do-over that I can't do. It's hard for me to speculate."

Eighty-eight Hoosiers - from Richard Blakely, 34, to Nick Idalski, 23, to Zachariah Gonzalez, 23 - would pay the ultimate price.

It is Iraq, however, that could salvage part of the Bush legacy. If Barack Obama and Defense Secretary Robert Gates can orchestrate an orderly drawdown, and Iraq becomes a stable democracy and prolific oil producer, Bush's standing in history will certainly improve from today's brutal first drafts.

The hallmark claim of the Bush presidency is that since Sept. 11, 2001, he has kept the U.S. "safe." The 9/11 Commission Report authored in part by Hoosiers Tim Roemer and Lee Hamilton, called the attacks, "a shock, but they should not have come as a surprise. By September 2002 the executive branch of the U.S. government, the Congress, the news media and the American public had received clear warning that Islamist terrorists meant to kill Americans in high numbers." CIA Director George Tenet described it to the Commission as "the system was blinking red" in the spring and summer before the attacks.

Even as Bush exits, Roemer warns that America might see a WMD attack within the next five years. In its **"World at Risk"** report issued earlier



President Bush during the Sept. 11 attacks at a school in Sarasota. (White House Photo)

this month, the Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism explained that "the U.S. government has yet to fully adapt to these circumstances and to convey the sobering reality that the risks are growing faster than our multilayer defenses. Our margin of safety is shrinking, not growing." This is part of the Bush legacy with an unknown ending.

Bush Successes

There have been some Bush administration successes. It has been the most aggressive presidency

fighting AIDS with former Lilly CEO Randy Tobias leading the way. If you are pro-life, the Supreme Court of Hoosier-born Chief Justice John Roberts is closer than ever to a repeal of Roe vs. Wade. The federal bench is much more conservative.

There have been many other controversies: the more than 700 presidential signing statements, the handful of vetoes as Congress went on a spending rampage, the expansion of government after candidate Bush campaigned on conservative economic principles and against nation building. The true central front of the War on Terror - Afghanistan - is an eroding situation and one of the biggest challenges facing the Obama presidency. So, too, is a conclusion to the U.S. role in Iraq. The other hallmark is that George W. Bush didn't reach out beyond his circle. In all the books on Iraq, Lugar - despite his role as chairman

of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee - barely shows up in the footnotes. The aforementioned authors describe President Bush as intellectually incurious at a time when the stew of ideas and discussion should have been intense.

Thus, the Bush administration of today has brought us an America gripped in economic crisis and potential depression, an economy where Americans have seen the values of their homes and cars shrink for the first time in modern history, where the next generation may not live as well or as long as the previous 10 generations. We find No Child Left Behind under-funded and America facing a science and math student



President Bush as he names Indiana native John Roberts as U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice.



shortage. His stem cell research ban may have slowed the search for cures of the cruelest diseases. There has been no remedy to the immigration controversies. We have the two wars with unknown endings. GNP and savings are down; poverty is up. Bush has taken a compliant and mute Republican Party into a new wilderness while blaming it for his own excesses, hype and shortcomings.

Politically, Indiana is now a blue state with a 6-3 Democratic congressional delegation - something almost unfathomable eight years ago. This is not the bottom line to the Bush-Cheney years that anyone could have comprehended when it all began.

Postscript: They Didn't Like Ike

I was born in 1956 under President Eisenhower, whose own first drafts of history had consigned him to the ranks of the mediocre bottom third. Like Bush, he often mangled syntax and wasn't seen as an extraordinary or creative chief executive. As he left office, he faced a con-

trast with the Camelot presidency of John F. Kennedy.

Since the first Eisenhower historical drafts, he has ascended into many historians top ten lists as as one of our country's best presidents. Eisenhower kept the nation out of four wars, ended the Korean conflict, built the interstate highway system and started the space program. As historians finally accessed his papers, they found a probing, intellectual chief who in retrospect made many wise decisions.

Thus, beware of these first drafts of history, for time will certainly alter perspectives, supply clues to mysteries and answer the most elusive questions we have today. The flash of crisis can alter perspective. There is no access to the presidential papers. It's like a political poll: a snapshot in time that can burnish subject and author as either a prescient seer beyond the horizon ... or a fool with a keyboard. ❖

Publisher's Note: Howey Politics Indiana extended an invitation to a number of Republicans to contribute to this edition on the Bush presidency. Most took a pass.

A dismal legacy

By SHEILA KENNEDY

Before we rush to bid a not-so-fond farewell to the Bush Administration, it may be instructive to examine the legacy of the past seven years.



Bush took office in 2001.

During the previous eight years, Gross Domestic Product had grown an average of 4.09% annually. Over the past seven years, GDP growth has averaged 2.65% per year.

The national debt was \$5.7 trillion in 2001. It is \$9.2 trillion in March (\$10.6 trillion on Dec. 17). Over the three years preceding 2001, the government had actually managed to amass a \$431 billion surplus; during these last three

years, we've had a \$734 billion deficit (it was \$455 billion on Oct. 14).

The Clinton Administration created an average of 1.76 million private sector jobs each year during its eight years in office; the Bush Administration has averaged 369,000 per year.

In 2001, there were 31.6 million Americans living in poverty, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Today, the Bureau reports there are 36.5 million.

When Bush took office, there were 38 million Americans without health insurance; today there are an estimated 47 million, and the average annual family health insurance premium has increased from \$6,230 to \$12,106.

Median household income was \$49,163 in 2001; it is \$48,023 today. Meanwhile, gas prices have increased from \$1.39 a gallon to \$3.07, and the cost of college tuition has gone from \$3,164 to \$5,192. Consumer debt has nearly doubled, from \$7.65 trillion to \$12.8 trillion.

When we turn from domestic matters to international ones, we see an equally dismal landscape: our trade deficit has soared from \$380 billion to \$759 billion, and the value of the dollar has declined precipitously. In 2001, a dollar would buy you 1.07 Euros; today, it will get you .68. We are more dependent on foreign oil. Our armed forces are stretched dangerously thin. And don't even ask about our international reputation: a recent Pew poll of ten nations charted dramatic declines in the percentage of people in those countries holding a favorable view of America.

What these statistics from government agencies - the Treasury Department, Bureau of Labor Statistics and the like - can't and don't take into account is the damage done to America's governing institutions by this Administration's unremitting assaults on the rule of law. How does an accountant quantify cynicism? How do we measure distrust, or value lost accountability?

It is hard to imagine that anyone running for President in 2008, on either ticket, could do a worse job. But whoever wins will face daunting challenges. The next President must restore fiscal sanity, address our multiple problems, repair our international reputation, and - most important of all - make us believe in America again. ❖

Kennedy teaches at IUPUI. This column was originally published on March 3, 2008 in the Indianapolis



Will Bush follow path of Truman?

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND - President George W. Bush, with unwavering faith in his beliefs and himself, is convinced of his place in history. His critics also are convinced of his place.



There's agreement. Not on where he'll place eventually among the presidents after historians look back at results and ramifications of his policies and accomplishments or lack thereof. But Bush and his detractors do agree that he is leaving office as a very unpopular president.

Bush, certain that war in Iraq was justified and just, has suggested that he will be vindicated in history, same

as historians have come to appreciate Harry S. Truman, another president who led the nation into war and left office with approval ratings plummeting amid widespread dissatisfaction over conduct of the war, conditions at home and the level of competency in the White House.

While Truman rates high now, with greater appreciation for his courage to make tough decisions, critics of Bush say a comparison with Truman is ludicrous because Truman was competent, not bumbling, and left the nation stronger, not weaker. They put Bush in the "failed" category of reviled or weak presidents the likes of James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Millard Fillmore, James Polk and Franklin Pierce.

Although it's far too early to affix a lasting rank among the presidents for Bush, still with a month left in office, a poll of historians by History News Network found 61 percent of those surveyed evaluating Bush as "worst ever."

Critics say Bush misled the nation about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and tricked us into a long and costly war that squandered U.S. military might, diminished influence and respect abroad and left Iran as the real winner. They blame Bush economic policies for devastating the middle class, running up record deficits and bringing on the worst recessionary times since the Great Depression.

Some of the harshest critics clearly go too far, re-

garding Bush as "evil," knowingly doing things to harm the nation.

The president never told former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld: "Rummy, I want you to mess up the occupation of Iraq, lose as many troops as possible and keep that thing going badly." His mistake was not removing the inept Rumsfeld long before he finally did. Bush was stubborn, but not intent on evil.

President Bush stuck with his beliefs about the best course for the nation after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Even some severe critics of failure to know what to do in Iraq after reaching Baghdad, after initial military victory, concede that the "surge" he ordered after finally finding the right general has been at least a significant factor in reducing violence in Iraq.

Nor, despite what some Bush haters seem to believe, did he ever order: "Let's redistribute the wealth, take it all away from the middle class and give it to the wealthiest, especially friends of mine and Dick Cheney in the oil business. And let's eliminate regulations so wheelers and dealers can do whatever they want."

Again, he believed he was pursuing the right course, counting on tax cuts and less regulation to spur the economy and bring jobs to the middle class and the poor as well as provide more opportunity for the wealthy.

Recently disclosed White House talking points to promote a positive Bush legacy stress that he responded

quickly and decisively after 9/11 and has "kept us safe" from further terrorist attacks in America.

Indeed, he did order quick and decisive action in Afghanistan. As in Iraq, the problem was not with the initial military action but with failure to realize the need for follow-up "nation building" to secure victory.

And it's a fact that the

nation thus far has escaped the series of follow-up terrorist attacks that many feared and predicted. Should Bush be credited for this? Even if his policies are not the sole reason, if he is to be blamed for all that went wrong on his watch, shouldn't he in fairness get credit for results that were better than expected?

Defenders of the president say the huge deficits



President Bush with Vice President Cheney and CIA Director Tenet. (White House Photo)



and many present economic woes are due to a needed war on terror, not to failed Bush economic policies. That's one of the parts of the Bush record that historians will explore.

How much of record spending was needed to fight terrorists? A lot, certainly, especially in Afghanistan. How much was wasted. A lot, certainly, especially in the long, chaotic and ineffective stumbling in Iraq after initial defeat of Saddam Hussein's military forces. But was the whole expenditure to invade Iraq in the first place a waste? Or was the ousting of Saddam, even if he didn't have weapons of mass destruction, a worthwhile endeavor? Historians will look and try to evaluate all of that.

Other Bush spending has become controversial even with his conservative base, with critics on the right saying he turned out not to be a conservative.

They cite what they call the greatest growth of government since the days of Lyndon Johnson. They cite the Medicare prescription drug plan as too costly and No Child Left Behind as improper federal intrusion in local education. They cite growth of the federal bureaucracy and failure of Bush to veto big spending bills approved while Republican congressional leaders were running amok with lobbyists.

Still, some of the programs that miff those on the right could be viewed as proof that those on the left are unfair in portraying Bush as nothing but a cold-hearted right-wing ideologue.

As the president completes his final weeks in the White House, as his last chance at legacy building draws to a close, he has again shown that he cannot be described as an anti-government ideologue. With the recession worsening, his administration has taken action to counter the downturn, with massive government intervention and spending. He also seeks, after Senate Republicans blocked help for the automotive Big Three, to keep them from going bankrupt.

This president is determined not to be remembered as "another President Hoover."

He will not be haunted by a "Monica" and questions about morality but by a "Katrina" and questions about competence.

Despite what harsh critics say about his place in history, President Bush, with unwavering faith in his beliefs and himself, is convinced of a presidential ranking eventually somewhere near Harry S. Truman. That high? Somewhat lower? Dead last? Somewhat higher? Most of us have our own views. In the long run, historians, with advantage of hindsight and revelations yet to come, will have theirs. ❖

Colwell has covered Indiana politics for more than five decades for the South Bend Tribune.

Prevent defense vs. aggressive engagement

By **KEVIN KELLEMS**

CANAAN, Ind - The face-off between my former colleague Scott McClellan and the White House establishment over his book, "What Happened," reminds me of the title of former Indiana GOP Chairman Rex Early's delightful book, "It's a Mighty Thin Pancake (That Don't Have Two Sides)."



In our daily West Wing meetings and informal conversations, I got the impression Scott was in an uncomfortable position - swimming upstream against strong currents amid some very big fish. Under

enormous pressure and without full backing from some above him in the food chain, McClellan toiled doggedly to get the ball back over the net each day - taking great care to stay on script.

Like all press secretaries, he did his share of bellyaching behind the scenes about particular members of the so-called mainstream media (e.g., Tim Russert successor David Gregory of NBC, UPI's incoherent warhorse Helen Thomas, and the New York Times and Knight-Ridder bureaus). But with McClellan, what shone through behind closed doors was frustration with being on a short leash, and having such little meaningful information to share.

The role of the presidential press secretary has evolved from one in which creativity, wit and offensive risk-taking was rewarded (e.g., President Clinton's extraordinarily effective Mike McCurry who engaged in genuine debate) - into one in which something more like an automaton reads pre-scripted bites of anodyne boilerplate from a tabbed binder hidden neatly on the podium.

But don't let current White House Dana Perino's telegenic presence and disciplined delivery fool you: she is a domestic policy wonk with remarkable retention and an unfailingly uplifting disposition. Then there was Scott's talented predecessor: the relentless offense and permanent grin of the Mr. Teflon, Ari Fleischer (husband of Greenfield's very own Becki Davis, a former aide to OMB Director Mitch Daniels and Indiana Secretary of State Sue Anne Gilroy), drove seasoned reporters batty.

In light of the context in which these folks have operated, they at least held their own against tall odds in



what has become perhaps the second most difficult job in the entire Executive Branch.

But their work was made more difficult than it had to be. Why? Because the Bush Administration too often employed a retrograde form of prevent defense in the policy communications arena. Instead of empowering and protecting its professional communicators and senior policymakers, the tendency was to limit their maneuverability, permit inconsistent access, compartmentalize information, avoid reasonable risk taking and encourage group think. To discourage aggressive engagement, and focus on defense at the expense of a more effective offense.

These flaws were not limited narrowly, however, to the work of spokesmen; they reflected a broader preference among the cautious inner circle for protecting the principal and limiting overall exposure to the vagaries of free and open public debate of serious issues.

Part of this surely was the product of President Bush 43 watching how Papa 41 was treated by the so-called Mainstream Media (in reality now the Opposition Media) as a young man and as an active participant in his father's fatal re-election campaign.

It is also the product of habit: the Texans who ran two brilliant gubernatorial campaigns and terms in office brought the playbook and core personnel with them to Washington, and played a version of the same game – with the exception of Karl Rove, who understood that re-election requires confident forward movement, bold thinking and public engagements.

When you leave an administration, everyone wants to know what it was like and how it works on the inside. It is important to let time pass before answering, and to continually test one's objectivity. And, of course, it is best to wait until the administration's work is largely done.

Obviously, any analyst is influenced by his vantage point; no one is truly objective. I am proud of having served and respect the vast majority of those who peopled this somewhat star-crossed administration. From the vantage point of having worked at the Pentagon from 2001-2003 and White House from 2003-2005, here are some preliminary summary conclusions - oversimplified and without nuance, for the sake of brevity:

Biggest Achievements:

1. No follow-on attack after 9/11 - a colossal achievement for which the President does not yet get credit, but which will loom large with the passage of time.
2. Liberating tens of millions of people from geno-



cidal tyrannies in Iraq and Afghanistan (ditto).

Biggest Failure:

No enduring governing coalition; unmet goal of being "Uniter, not Divider."

Strengths:

1. Unwavering, cold-blooded focus on security of the homeland and steadfast commitment to take the fight to the enemy around the globe.
2. Decisive presidential leadership style.
3. President Bush's drive to win and personal campaign skills.

Weaknesses:

1. Relations with Congress (talented senior staff worked hard but some key senior policymakers didn't make it a priority or take it seriously enough).
2. Presidential personnel practices and several key appointments.
3. First term dysfunction of the National Security Council policy process (infighting).

Mistakes:

1. Avoiding the key debate over evidence of Saddam Hussein's ties with international terrorists - out of fear of selective leaks to the media from members of the intelligence community.
2. Appointment of Jerry Bremer as "Viceroy" of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, with nearly unchecked authority and presidential reporting line
3. Not swinging the big club more often (Vice President Cheney's unrivaled ability to distill complex national security policy and explain it logically and powerfully to the public) ❖

Kevin Kellems served in the Office of the Vice President from 2003-2005 and Office of the Secretary of Defense from 2001-2003.



W for ‘wrong track’

By **DAVE KITCHELL**

LOGANSPORT - For those who haven't seen the latest Oliver Stone movie "W", I won't spoil the storyline.

Stone and Bush have something in common - they both went to Yale. After watching the movie, which will probably rank as the best Stone work to date, Bush supporters will be left yelling "Boo" while the vast majority of Americans who claim the country is on the wrong track could echo that famous Yale cheer, "Boola, boola."

With apologies to Hoosier-born Yale Cole Porter of Peru who penned some of his early works at the Connecticut campus, Bush's legacy appears to be one that will stand for "W" as a record percentage of Americans think the country is on the wrong track as he leaves office.



That may be a bit harsh considering he has had to deal with the worst attack on American soil since, and eclipsing, Pearl Harbor. The Iraq War, skyrocketing oil prices, a collapsing auto economy, corruption from World-Com and Enron to the latest \$50 billion Ponzi scheme to shock the economy have all been part

of the perfect storm, along with what really was the perfect storm, Hurricane Katrina. That's a lot on a presidential plate regardless of the president.

Yet Americans have come to expect the government to respond, solve big problems and comfort their fears. When General Motors and Chrysler are warning of needed bailouts to cash flow for their operations, the sentiment is anything but comforting with the electorate.

The Bush legacy may very well come to be known as the last of the well-capitalized candidates elected in part because of name recognition. Voters elected Bush in part because he was the higher ground moral alternative to the Clinton administration's legacy. Al Gore happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Bush was the exact opposite, even though he lost the popular vote in the 2000 presidential election. The event of 9/11 probably served to do more to rally Americans around Bush than he could have done on his own. And that may be exactly what foreign enemies had in mind - eight years of Bush.

Throughout the past four years in particular, a column I wrote before Bush was elected the first time comes to mind. Back when he was quizzed about the leaders of other nations, and unable to respond with the right

answers, there was concern that he might not be up to the job. As I wrote at the time, the presidential conveyor belt was producing a result that would give us the man who would have to deal with serious world issues daily even though he had never won a World Series in his favorite occupation as the owner of the Texas Rangers.

For Americans, Bush has been a man voters would like to have a beer with instead of Gore or John Kerry. To our enemies, and even our allies in some cases, he has become a sort of cowboy willing to go it alone and take on all comers in the Middle East. Yet it's unclear how much his decision to invade Iraq was clouded or motivated by his father's involvement there and the failure of the rest of the world to support "getting Saddam" when the Persian Gulf War erupted. History may be kinder to him if Iraq becomes an important ally against Iran, but there is no guarantee.

His legacy as a public speaker may be that he was the all-time worst, save for Calvin Coolidge who at least knew going into 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. that to say nothing or little was a safe way to go. Bush's elocution skills, or lack of them, made "terror" and "nuclear" words with fewer syllables in the White House than before he arrived.

In the big picture of domestic policy, the Bush legacy will be one that proved the lack of government interference, the reluctance to veto legislation by a Republican Congress, and the downsizing of government into the Department of Homeland Security were all philosophical positions that doomed his popularity. The federal deficit

soared under a Republican Congress, prompting voters to replace the party once referred to as "tax and spend" by its critics, to majorities in both houses. Lack of oversight on Wall Street led to bank closings nationwide.

Lehman Brothers became a casualty and banks such as National

City and Wachovia found new owners. AIG, the world's largest insurance company, became a bailout poster child because the government was the only insurance coverage it had that it wouldn't go under.

The Bush Legacy has yet to be written and is much like the final scene of Stone's "W" - even George W. will be leaving office wondering how history will one day portray him. ❖



Dave Kitchell is a veteran Indiana political writer who teaches journalism at Ball State University



Tom Bevan & John McIntyre,

Real Clear Politics: In an exclusive Oval Office interview with RealClearPolitics last week, President George W. Bush sat down to offer his thoughts about this year's elections. "I don't think we got overwhelmed at the ballot box like previous elections," President Bush said about the November 4th results, contrasting this year's "defeat" to the "shellacking" Republicans suffered in 1964. "On the other hand," the President said, "I think we should learn some lessons from it." Asked about the significance of Republican strongholds like Indiana and Virginia voting Democratic for the first time in 44 years, President Bush credited Barack Obama with running a good campaign, saying he "energized pockets of people and had an organization that was capable of following up to get them out to vote." The President called Virginia a state in "transition," saying that parties must be aware of the shifting political landscape and "be able to take advantage of those shifts without changing philosophy." President Bush went on to say that "a lot of times after a period where there's been political success, people become complacent at the grassroots level and at the national level, for that matter." "I still think we're a right-of-center country," the President responded when asked whether the election offered proof that the ideological center of the country had shifted to the left. "I think most Americans want their government to be effective, results-oriented, efficient," the President said. "They would like to pay as little a tax as possible. They want their military to be strong, viable, and effective. They want their public leaders to promote personal responsibility by living responsible lives. Most people are - from the cultural side, believe in an Almighty. The question is how you take those basic beliefs and explain them, either through policy or words, in a way where there's common understanding." We also asked the President how big of a problem the illegal immigration debate poses for the Republican Party, particularly in light of the election results in Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Florida. "If you're labeled 'anti'-people as a party, you will lose votes," the President said flatly. "Parties have got to be positive. Parties have got to be hopeful places. And the immigration debate in certain states caused us to be labeled 'anti.'" The President suggested that Republicans were failing to reach a threshold of trust with Latino voters that allowed the party's message to resonate fully. "Caring about people is an integral part of getting people to believe in you. A guy says, 'they don't care about me, they don't respect my heritage' - you can't get their vote no matter what your philosophy is," the President said. The President argued that once Republican candidates can make that connection and get Latino voters to trust that "this is a person that understands my con-

cerns, or, this is a person that respects my issues, then the notion of small business entrepreneurship or lower taxes or whatever becomes more palatable." Overall, though, the President said he thought Republicans paid a price politically over their handling of the issue. "I was very worried about being views as 'anti'-Latino - fair or unfair," President Bush said. "That's where the debate left our party in certain sectors, and so it hurts." ❖



Sylvia Smith, Fort Wayne Journal

Gazette: On the surface, then, Reps. Mark Souder and Mike Pence would seem to have a similar political approach and similar regional economic concerns to help shape their votes. Yet Souder supported the \$14 billion bridge loans for the car makers last week while Pence opposed it. In fact, Souder was one of just 32 House Republicans who supported the package. Like him, most of the other R's who backed the deal represent districts that have a significant auto-industry base, be it an assembly plant, parts manufacturers or new car dealers. For Souder, it was a matter of economic survival for northeast Indiana. Beyond the obvious issues of people whose livelihoods are directly connected to the Big Three, Souder saw other factors: The General Motors plant is the biggest taxpayer in Allen County. The auto industry is the largest employer of people with disabilities. GM workers are the largest cohort of local United Way donors. If GM drowns, the social services in the region would be strained dramatically and probably collapse. If GM drowns, the property taxes from the plant would have to be made up somehow - either by higher taxes on everyone else or in service reductions: police, fire, ambulance, garbage collection, water service. You name it. Presumably, Pence weighed those same considerations. He arrived at an entirely opposite conclusion. Pence's statements in opposition to the rescue plan focused on a wider perspective than what might happen in his Muncie-Anderson district. "It exposes the American taxpayer to more debt, fails to reorganize the domestic auto manufacturers to ensure long-term success and does not fix the immediate credit crisis," he said. Souder's explanation was Fort Wayne-centric: "My job is to defend my region." In addition, Pence is often more libertarian when it comes to economic and fiscal policy. Souder is often more pragmatic. That's why Pence often takes the view that government is the bottom of the pile in terms of competence, ability and execution. He'll say things like this: "Trusting a Washington bureaucrat, who probably never tightened a lug nut, with fixing what ails the American automotive industry is not the answer." Souder will say things like this: "I'm skeptical of government but see its uses." ❖



Roob replaces Feltman; Stiver resigns at BMV

INDIANAPOLIS - Gov. Mitch Daniels today announced leadership changes at three executive agencies. The changes are as follows: Nathan Feltman, Secretary of Commerce and CEO of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), has informed the governor he will leave his position effective at the end of the year. Mitchell Roob, secretary of the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), has resigned from his position with the agency and will become the Secretary of Commerce and CEO of the IEDC. Anne Waltermann Murphy, currently FSSA deputy secretary and chief of staff, has been named to replace Roob as FSSA secretary. Ron Stiver, commissioner of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV), has informed the governor he will resign from his position at the end of the year. Andy Miller, the governor's director of the Office of Disaster Recovery and former director of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), will become the new BMV commissioner.



Bayh says Indiana could lose 140,000 jobs

FORT WAYNE - U.S. Sen. Evan Bayh traveled to Fort Wayne on Wednesday to tout his plan to make Indiana the technological leader in the automotive industry (Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). But the autoworkers, parts suppliers and others who assembled for the meeting were more concerned about the industry's – and the economy's – immediate future. As the closed-door session was supposed to end and a news conference was

supposed to begin, the group still had questions about how the government would deal with deepening financial challenges. Bayh was visiting a region that has seen mass layoffs and plant shutdowns in the past two months, most in the automotive and RV industries. General Motors Corp. and Chrysler have said they'll run out of money in the coming weeks if Congress doesn't lend them \$14 billion to make it through to the inauguration of a new president and seating of a new Congress. Bayh said he doesn't know when the car companies would go broke without a government loan, but he said the U.S. Treasury was examining its books Wednesday. He said failure of the American automakers would cost Indiana 145,000 jobs.

Think money woes impacts Enerdel

INDIANAPOLIS - Indianapolis battery maker EnerDel's biggest customer has run out of cash four months after EnerDel began preparing to send it high-tech car batteries (Indianapolis Star). Think Global, an electric-car maker in Norway, halted production Monday after the Norwegian government refused to bail out the 200-employee company struggling amid a worldwide credit crunch. No layoffs were announced at EnerDel. Plans now call for shifting production to supply two other undisclosed customers. EnerDel employs about 130 hourly and salaried employees in Indianapolis and Noblesville. EnerDel's \$70 million supply contract is in place and has not been broken by Think executives, who are considering resuming electric-car production before the end of March, said Ener1 Chief Executive Charles Gassenheimer in an e-mail.

Bayh, Lugar supported Bush more than others

WASHINGTON - Indiana's two U.S. senators were more sup-

portive than most lawmakers of President George W. Bush during his final, largely unpopular year in office, according to an independent analysis of congressional votes (Gannett News Service). Republican Sen. Richard Lugar voted with the president more often than any other senator, according to Congressional Quarterly. His support of Bush's veto of farm program legislation helped make him among the top Bush backers in a year when Bush's positions prevailed less than half the time. Bush's success rate was one of the lowest for a president since Congressional Quarterly started tracking rates in 1956. Democratic Sen. Evan Bayh's backing of a domestic surveillance program with retroactive legal protection for phone companies was the main reason he ranked third among Senate Democrats in siding with the president on votes on which the White House took a position. Bayh was also one of only two Democratic senators who voted in September against a \$56.2 billion stimulus package the White House also opposed. "The package included billions of dollars in deficit-financed spending of questionable stimulative value, including \$925 million for a U.S. polar icebreaker and \$250 million for the next-generation NASA spacecraft," Bayh spokesman Eric Kleiman said. In addition to backing Bush more often than most Democrats, Bayh also crossed party lines more often this year than any other Senate Democrat. He opposed his party on 35 percent of votes on which a majority of Democrats faced off against a majority of Republicans. Bayh voted with his party 65 percent of the time and with Bush 47 percent of the time. While Bayh voted with Bush more often than the vast majority of Senate Democrats, his level of support for the president's positions was lower than it had been earlier in Bush's presidency. Likewise for Lugar, whose 87 percent support for Bush was tops in the Senate but below the 100 percent by Lugar during Bush's first two years.