The rise and fall of America's education president: George W. Bush's political leadership and the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act

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THE RISE AND FALL OF AMERICA'S EDUCATION PRESIDENT:
George W. Bush's Political Leadership and the Passage of the No Child Left Behind Act

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I pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter I: The Case for Leadership and the Genesis of Reform</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Missing Dimension</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrasting Models of Leadership in Education: Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Understatement of George W. Bush</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sputnik, the Great Society, America at Risk, and the Emerging Consensus</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Leadership and the Bush Style of Governance</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Chapter II: The Rise of Compassionate Conservatism and the Path to the Presidency | 31 |
| Inventing the Conservative-Education Governor               | 32 |
| The Education Candidate and the Unprecedented National Agenda | 37 |
| General Election Face-off                                   | 48 |
| A Narrow Victory and a Productive Transition                | 54 |
| Conclusion                                                  | 57 |

| Chapter III: The Grand Coalition and the Road to Passage     | 59 |
| Setting the Tone: A Coalition for Change and the Blueprint for Reform | 60 |
| NCLB's Initial Makeup and the Committee Process              | 67 |
| The Floor: Logrolling and Deal-Making on a Larger Scale      | 70 |
| The Conference Proceedings: Sorting Through the Mess         | 77 |
| 9/11 and the Galvanization of Domestic Policymaking           | 80 |
| Conclusion                                                  | 85 |

| Chapter IV: Political Leadership as a Force for Change       | 87 |
| Perspectives on Leadership and the Situation                  | 87 |
| The Situation-Leadership Dynamic and How it Shaped NCLB      | 92 |
| Reacting to the Situation through Political Leadership       | 100 |
| Conclusion                                                  | 109 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion: Final Thoughts on Political Leadership and the NCLB</th>
<th>111</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Sources: Selected Bibliography                                  | 117 |
Chapter I: The Case for Leadership and the Genesis of Reform

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush proudly signed the “No Child Left Behind Act,” thus ensuring that H.R. 1 became Public Law 107-110. During the signing ceremony, the President triumphantly proclaimed that, “as of this hour, America's schools will be on a new path of reform, and a new path of results.” The legislation, which totaled more than six hundred pages, was intended to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and expand its aim according to four central principles: accountability for results; state and local flexibility; focusing resources on successful methods; and expanding choice. Although substantively notable for its expansive breadth and depth, the bill was also truly remarkable for what it represented politically.

The bill-signing ceremony in Hamilton, Ohio, featured an unlikely assortment of lawmakers, each watching as President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation into law. Although the audience included Senator Edward Kennedy and Congressman George Miller, respectively a liberal Senator from Massachusetts and the other a liberal Congressman from San Francisco, there was no partisan bickering—only fanfare. More consequential, this bipartisan, sweeping transformation of education policy symbolized an enormous legislative victory for President Bush, who had entered the Presidency amidst claims of ineptitude and without the support of the popular vote. Despite these doubts, President Bush had boldly declared since his first days in office that “bipartisan education reform will be the cornerstone of my administration,”—and his relentless efforts leading up to the passage of

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NCLB seemed to validate his assertion. Although this pivotal moment in education policy history was remarkable in and of itself, a thorough understanding of the factors that led to this triumphant ceremony provides a rich and compelling case study in leadership.

The Missing Dimension

In the five years since its enactment, No Child Left Behind has remained a focus of public attention. A simple Google search reveals more than ten million hits for “No Child Left Behind.” Additionally, there have been thousands of books, editorials, and articles written in response to, or about, this law. While not all of the writing about NCLB has been academic or particularly constructive, there has been an increasingly focused effort to better understand this legislation and its implications for education policy, the Bush presidency, and the future of the United States. The overwhelming majority of the existing academic literature has tended to focus on two areas: the successes or failures associated with implementation, often expressed by parents, teachers, state and local governments, principals, or students; or attempts to place this latest policy development in the context of education policy history. In the process of focusing on implementation or policy history, much of the scholarship on NCLB has overlooked the importance of this case as a study in policy and leadership.

The explanations for the enactment of No Child Left Behind reflect the willingness to overlook or ignore leadership as a factor in education policymaking. One common explanation for the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act is that the political environment was ripe for change and that the resulting legislation was the inevitable “next step” in a series of previous policy developments. In No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education

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Policy, 1965-2005, Patrick McGuinn offers a competing theory for why NCLB was successfully passed. McGuinn writes:

The [NCLB] act represents a transformative shift in federal education policy—not merely a new policy but a new policy regime as it embodies a different set of ideas, interests, and institutions for federal education policy. The origins and future prospects of this regime can only be fully understood in the context of a variety of developments in education, electoral politics, and federalism that have unfolded over time and in a way that make it unlikely that this new regime will be replaced in the future.4

Earlier in his book, McGuinn notes that “it would be a mistake to view the expansion of the federal role in education or the shape that role ultimately took as inevitable.”5 Yet, he almost exclusively attributes the success of NCLB to situational factors. While McGuinn’s analysis represents a more holistic approach to understanding the No Child Left Behind Act than the analysis of many other scholars, it too fails to address the leadership dimension. Although McGuinn may be technically correct that changing policy regimes explain the differences, such a conclusion begs the question of who facilitated and nurtured that change in regime? Certainly situational factors have an effect on the outcomes of the political process, but it is the actions of leaders that precipitate these changes.

While the implementation process is fascinating in its own right, the series of events, actions, decisions, and leader-follower-situation interactions that contributed to the passage of NCLB are particularly informative and yet have been surprisingly overlooked. In fact, most of the leadership-based literature related to education focuses on leadership within the public school system at the state and local levels. Meanwhile, almost all analyses of President Bush’s leadership have examined him within the context of the “War on Terror.” As a result, this work

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5 Ibid.
begins with a simple observation: President Bush and the members of his administration were important factors in the successful passage of NCLB.

Specific to the development and progression of NCLB, this case chronicles the rise of George W. Bush and his ideas for education reform. Furthermore, this work examines the factors behind both Bush’s ascension to the status of “education president” and his eventual shift in focus away from education policy. In a broader sense, this work contends that leadership, which can be understood as the practice of motivating groups to achieve a shared goal, is an integral but often overlooked factor in the outcome of policymaking. Furthermore, it argues that the situation, which is defined as the wide array of circumstances and events which contribute to a political context, can affect the outcome, but does so primarily based on how the leader reacts to the situation. Moreover, this case offers a framework for understanding the situation-leadership dynamic, not just in the case of NCLB, but in most leadership situations by contrasting two styles of leadership: eventful and event-making. Finally, this work analyzes a few of the ways in which Bush sought to shape the situation through event-making leadership, and details how his actions affected the outcome of the No Child Left Behind Act.

By examining the factors that culminated in the passage of NCLB through the lenses of leadership and situation, this work aims to provide greater insight in three key ways. First, such an analysis will contribute to the existing body of knowledge about the NCLB act by helping to explain the outcome of this legislation in particular and offering a general model for understanding the way leaders affect the outcomes of policies in general. Second, this type of examination will yield valuable insights about the leadership of President Bush and his administration—especially in the area of domestic policy, where there is a dearth of constructive analysis. Third, by approaching the NCLB legislation as the result of leadership and situation,
this case study will illustrate several important lessons of political and presidential leadership more generally.

The history of education policy contains many pertinent and particularly demonstrative examples of why it is important and useful to include leadership in the analysis of the No Child Left Behind Act. One basic observation is that political leadership in general, and presidential leadership especially, varies in style, strategy, and effectiveness from leader to leader, and issue to issue. Some presidential administrations have set incredible goals for education and achieved little; others have aimed lower and accomplished more. The one common trend observable between presidential administrations and their achievements has been that those who make education policy a priority, and incorporate it into the larger vision of their presidency, have the greatest impact on education policy—regardless of whether it was a critical issue to the voters. If leadership in education policy were displayed on a continuum, Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Jimmy Carter would likely find themselves at opposite ends. While the content of their education policies were consistent with one another, the degree of involvement, innovation, and interest exposes notable differences in the leadership of their administrations. By contrasting these two presidents, the scope and styles of presidential leadership vis-à-vis education reform become more apparent.

Contrasting Models of Leadership in Education: Lyndon B. Johnson and Jimmy E. Carter

The passage of the groundbreaking legislation, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, illustrates how situational and leadership factors are both vitally important to understanding the outcome of education legislation in the political process. ESEA, which was one of the earliest and most substantial pieces of legislation to expand the role of the federal
government in education policy, was included as a central component of President Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” Politically, President Johnson could not have been better situated. In the election of 1964, he garnered a substantial majority of the popular vote in what has been described as “the greatest landslide yet in presidential election history.” Johnson’s comfortable victory afforded him a Democratic-controlled Congress and a great deal of political capital. With a strong edge over the opponents of national education reform and a surplus of public support before ESEA was even introduced, the situation was ripe for reform, but it was up to Johnson to decide how to proceed.

Although the situation was generally favorable, any suggestion that this legislation was the sole product of situation seems questionable upon closer inspection. In fact, “between 1964 and 1972, education reform remained at the bottom (literally) of voters’ lists of the most-important issues facing the country,” and “as a result there was little incentive for politicians to seize on the issue.” In a sense, Johnson helped put federal education policy on the national agenda. Despite the lack of popular demand, however, President Johnson took action to ensure that this policy idea became law. Through an exemplary act of leadership, President Johnson used a favorable situation to change the course of education policy and, although it was not viewed as a policy priority, encouraged a new surge of interest in education policy.

President Johnson’s leadership not only served as the catalyst for the ESEA legislation, but he was also the driving force behind its successful transformation from proposed legislation into law. As one Johnson adviser remarked, the ESEA legislation passed as a result of it being “literally pushed by him.” The crux of President Johnson’s success was his relentless energy

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7 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 40.
8 Ibid.
and style of negotiation, frequently referred to as the “Johnson treatment.” This, in addition to Johnson’s unswerving commitment to change allowed the ESEA bill to overcome the various obstacles and institutional barriers to reform. In the end, Johnson’s commitment to compromise and tireless efforts won out as ESEA passed by a margin of 89-10.\(^9\) Eventually, when it came time for the bill’s implementation, it became clear to many that the legislation’s swift progression and wide margin of support helped contribute to incoherence, which in turn translated into frustrations during the implementation phase. As the case of LBJ illustrates, the situation alone does not generate results though it can make it easier to achieve them. Additionally, Johnson’s leadership in this case illustrates the fact that policy regimes do not suddenly transform themselves and mysteriously cause political reform, but that it is leaders who encourage such changes and facilitate their accomplishment.

Jimmy Carter’s example is more of a cautionary tale than an ideal model. President Carter’s approach to the contentious issue of desegregation and mandatory busing was emblematic of his overarching approach to education policy. Carter’s strategy was summarized by one biographer as “[taking] shelter behind the Supreme Court.” Paradoxically, Carter used the Supreme Court’s decisions as a shield against attempts to severely weaken the busing effort, while simultaneously employing the same decisions as an excuse for not pursuing bus desegregation more vigorously.\(^{10}\) To a great extent, Carter’s education policy was about avoiding the difficult issues with desegregation, and continuing the plan laid forth by Johnson’s ESEA legislation.

Arguably the most notable education-related change that resulted from President Carter’s leadership was the creation of the Department of Education and the accompanying cabinet-level

\(^9\) McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind*, 33.

position of the Secretary of Education. However, Carter's actions in this instance underscored his disinclination to take an active role in transforming education policy. Publicly, Carter proclaimed that the creation of the Department of Education "fulfills a longstanding personal commitment on my part," and that he was "convinced that education is one of the noblest enterprises a person or a society can undertake." Yet Carter's actual involvement in the legislative process was minimal—especially in comparison to President Johnson, who actively devoted considerable amounts of time and effort to personal negotiations and bargaining. Moreover, the policy itself lacked the transformative qualities of other attempts at education reform, due to the fact that it simply reorganized the departments, rather than encouraged a substantial change or innovation.

To a great extent, Carter's failings stem from an apparent lack of interest in, or personal commitment to education policy. According to John Dumbrell, Joseph Califano, a former Carter and Johnson Administration official, frequently "blamed Carter for not acting more like Lyndon Johnson"—in other words for not taking a more active role. Such concerns reflect the fundamental difference in leadership style that existed between the Johnson and Carter administrations in their approach to education. Not surprisingly, the outcome of each case, also differed greatly.

These two contrasting examples expose important lessons about understanding political leadership in education reform—especially as it relates to President Bush's involvement in the passage of NCLB. First, leadership strategies and qualities matter in successful policymaking—even in education policy. Johnson's tremendous political savvy, visionary thinking and aggressive approach to policy allowed him to successfully pursue lasting reform in education, while Carter's wandering interest and poorly-executed attempts to direct Congress and galvanize

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12 Dumbrell, The Carter Presidency a Re-Evaluation, 94.
public opinion were ominous signs of failure for his education agenda. Second, situational factors can augment or diminish a president’s capacity to enact educational reforms. For example, Johnson benefited from far-ranging support and a friendly Congress, while Carter suffered from a series of foreign and domestic policy catastrophes that resulted in waning public approval.¹³ Though Carter’s lackluster performance in education policy stems from many sources, it is evident that his situation was anything but conducive to substantial reform. As these examples make clear, the extent and outcomes of education reform are functions of leadership and situation, with each influencing and shaping the type of policy that results. Paramount, however, is the fact that success is directly related to the leader’s ability to advance his goal in spite of the situation, in which he found himself.

_The Understatement of George W. Bush_

If the leadership of presidential administrations is as important as these examples suggest, then why has the analysis of No Child Left Behind largely omitted any reference to the political leadership of the Bush administration? On one hand, the low expectations for President George W. Bush likely contributed to the tendency to discount the leadership dimension. Although President Bush took an active role in promoting education reform during the 2000 campaign, he was continually haunted by suggestions of his incompetence and lack of intelligence. The press seemed to take every opportunity to question Bush’s capabilities with articles in the _Washington Post_ and other news sources asking outright “is he smart enough?”¹⁴ The prevailing impression

of President Bush as dim-witted, especially during and immediately after the campaign, could explain why many observers attribute the successful passage of NCLB to other figures or forces.

On another note, because President Bush's situation and leadership style are considerably different from those of President Johnson, observers might be inclined to overlook Bush's involvement. In a way, President Johnson was the archetypal political leader, as he demonstrated a visible commitment to education and personally involved himself in the negotiations. Bush on the other hand, chose a more hands-off approach, which while just as successful, garnered considerably less attention. Furthermore, President Bush attempted reform in an era where education was the most important issue rather than the least, which could have led to the misconception that the changes were inevitable or an incremental expansion. In actuality, as will be argued later, Bush's leadership efforts are composed of important aspects of both Carter's and Johnson's approach to education reform. The end-result of these factors has been the understatement of the Bush administration's role in the passage of NCLB, and the tendency to explain its passage as inevitability, when in actuality—as this paper endeavors to prove—the principal cause for change was President Bush's political leadership. In order to understand how situational and leadership factors influenced the outcome of the No Child Left Behind Act, it is critically important to establish the larger context of education policy history.

*Sputnik, the Great Society, America at Risk, and the Emerging Consensus*

The No Child Left Behind Act represents a consequential development in the history of education policy—probably the most transformative since Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. In some ways, the NCLB legislation represents the continuation of a trend in education policy. For instance, the role of the federal government has been expanding—
especially in the past half century. Conversely, in other ways the passage of the NCLB Act represents a new direction for education policy—especially for the Republican Party. The incorporation of a standards-and-accountability-based philosophy at the federal level differs tremendously from past policies and signifies what Patrick McGuinn and others have termed "the new accountability [policy] regime." Due to NCLB’s paradoxical incremental and transformative qualities, a greater understanding of the history of education policy must be acquired if this policy is to be properly understood within its context.

Two centuries ago, the level of federal involvement in education that is currently observed would have been unimaginable. When drafting the document that would serve as this nation’s framework for government, the framers of the Constitution never included language that suggested any federal government role in education—the words "school" or "education" are not once mentioned in that document. In fact, for the first century of its existence, the federal government had almost no involvement whatsoever with education policy. During this era, education policymaking was exclusively a state or local function, while the schools themselves were the primary agents of implementation and accountability.

In the era of state and local hegemony, national legislation dealing with education was sparse. Early national education legislation was mostly confined to encouraging the growth of education through small and indirect funding allotments. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which aimed to ensure that "schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged," required a section of townships to be reserved for schools and provided federally generated funds

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15 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 196.
18 Ibid.
to education, though it did so in a very limited sense. Education as we know it largely did not exist. For instance, the first free, public high school in United States was not created until 1821. Federal legislation related to education in the 19th century continued the policy of indirectly, infrequently, and gently encouraging the creation of public schools and universities through legislation. One example of the role of the federal government in education is provided by the creation of the U.S. Office of Education, which, in a manner that reflects the attitudes toward federal involvement in that era, was under-funded, understaffed, and narrowly confined to data-collection. Paramount among the 19th century's education legislation are the Morrill Act, which sparked the creation of public universities, and the Second Morrill Act, which further expanded the former objectives and helped create several historically black colleges. While many of the aforementioned pieces of legislation had a lasting impact on education in the United States, these tended to be the exception rather than the rule—and even these policies were influential only in an indirect way.

The 20th century would prove to be the turning point for federal involvement in education. Likewise, as Hugh Graham observed, “prior to the 1960s one of the most distinctive attributes of America’s political culture had been the tenacity with which the United States, unlike other nations, had resisted a national education policy.” Nevertheless, there were a

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number of developments earlier in the century, which helped create an environment where this
century-old paradigm could be replaced. Foremost among such legislation was the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which established a federal role in funding vocational- and agricultural-centered education programs.\(^{24}\)

Opinions on education policy also began to change around this time, after several
important court cases and a series of world events thrust educational policies into the national
spotlight. The Scopes Trial would figure prominently among these events, as it pitted
traditionalist creationism against the growing force of evolution.\(^{25}\) The trial would eventually
become a political and journalistic spectacle that would capture the public’s attention, to the
point where, for probably the greatest extent yet, local education policies garnered national
attention.\(^{26}\) Another important event in the slowly materializing trend of federalization was the
Great Depression. With the economy in a shambles, many previously well-maintained schools
and educational programs were drastically reduced or eliminated—most notably kindergarten.\(^{27}\)
Yet, as state and local governments began to lose their capacity to manage education, the ensuing
void was becoming increasingly more conducive to federal intervention.

Also around this time, the creation of the G.I. Bill encouraged a nation-wide expansion of
college education that would eventually help raise the standard for educational norms in the

Agricultural and Extension Education Website, October 14, 2006, available from
\(^{25}\) Raju Chebium, "75 Years After the Scopes Trial Pitted Science Against Religion, the Debate
Goes On," CNN.Com, CNN, July 13, 2000, available from
\(^{26}\) Doug Linder, "75th Anniversary of the Opening of the Scopes Trial," Kansas City, Missouri,
accessed 17 October 2006.
\(^{27}\) "The American Experience: Surviving the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression," PBS, 2006,
available from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dustbowl/peoplevents/pandeAMEX05.html; accessed 4
December 2006; Internet.
United States. The trend toward federalization was also furthered by the landmark Supreme Court decisions in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* (1954 and 1955), which ruled that the existing school segregation policies were unconstitutional. These decisions stirred up a tremendous amount of controversy over the next several decades, which helped education policy rise to an unparalleled level of prominence as an important *national* issue.

It was in the wake of this important series of events, policies and decisions that the federal role in education started down the path toward permanent expansion. In 1957, the Soviet Union satellite "Sputnik" successfully orbited the globe. In the process, this accomplishment by the United States' chief adversary in the Cold War sparked a new demand for more federal involvement, and also for a transformative policy solution. The National Defense Education Act (1958) christened the idea of competitiveness as a motivation for education reform, and served as an "important political precedent and psychological breakthrough for advocates of federal aid to education." In a sense, the effect of Sputnik was to ease the way toward greater federalization of education and to create a national stake in education through competitiveness. The public's reluctance to support federal oversight of education policy did not cease as a result of Sputnik, but it did allow for the later opportunities.

Less than a decade later, as discussed above, President Johnson would sign the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Created and envisioned as a

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component of his “Great Society” and “War on Poverty” initiatives, ESEA represented the single largest expansion of the federal government’s role in education in a way that would have been unthinkable only a decade or two before. The legislation was intended to inject equity into the American school system by providing funds for schools that contained large populations of disadvantaged children, popularly referred to as “Title I funding.”

At the signing of the bill, President Johnson claimed to “believe deeply [that] no law I have signed or will ever sign means more to the future of America.” Both the inclusion of education in the “War on Poverty” agenda and Johnson’s assertion about its worth reflect the president’s skill at using political framing and vision as means to advance his goals. Johnson’s rhetoric about the significance of ESEA as a means of attaining a more just society, created a new way in which to discuss education policy and justify the federal influence. No longer was the argument framed in the “reactive” Cold War language, where the impetus for change was a matter of security. Instead, this language had largely been supplanted by posing education as the primary means of social and societal advancement instead of being the short-term reaction to Sputnik. In addition to Johnson’s general rhetorical framing, he also managed to link the ESEA legislation with the New Deal policies of the past. By tying his unprecedented policy to Roosevelt’s well-established New Deal policies, Johnson managed to make his policy more generally acceptable. In the end, the impact of the legislation’s substantive features transformed

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the nation's school systems, just as the policy itself revolutionized the role of the federal government in education policy.

Over the next decade and a half, the policy path laid out by the ESEA legislation was largely maintained and incrementally expanded. Simultaneously, public opinion polls from this era reflected the growing importance of education as a national issue. President Carter's administration quietly continued this policy and created a cabinet-level position and department wholly dedicated to education policy. As Patrick McGuinn notes, the continued piecemeal expansions led to the "centralization, bureaucratization, and judicialization of education policymaking." Further, it led to an "increasing federal involvement in education but also increasingly inflexible and copious regulations and increasingly intrusive court involvement." Eventually the evolution of ESEA began to attract the discontent of conservatives and Republicans who saw the law as another big government encroachment on the states.

The most vocal leader of opposition to the increasingly hegemonic federal government was Ronald Reagan who criticized the burgeoning bureaucracy that controlled everything from education to welfare. From the outset, Reagan was committed in word and action to reducing the size of the bureaucracy in all areas of government, including education. Initially, the Reagan administration was successful in reducing the number of programs as well as many of the mandates required by the federal government. Similar to the way in which President Johnson had advanced his education policy through a combination of vision and framing, Reagan sought to scale back federal influence in education. Through his countless verbal jabs at "big

35 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 39.
36 Ibid.
government," Reagan cleverly established a competing vision for education, which placed an emphasis on state and local autonomy.  

Reagan’s efforts eventually came to a halt due to two unforeseen obstacles. First, Reagan’s attempt to eliminate the Department of Education was met with vigorous dissension from teachers’ unions, liberal members of Congress, and the media. The harder Reagan pushed, the more the opposition seemed to gain traction. Second, and related, was the report issued by Reagan’s Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell, which was entitled *A Nation at Risk*. The report candidly spoke of the enormous disparities, inequalities, and failings of public education in the United States. While both Reagan and Bell expected a different effect, the report ultimately galvanized public support for continuing a federal presence in education policy—exactly the opposite of what Reagan had hoped. Ultimately, the *Nation at Risk* report would come to be seen as “instrumental in causing leaders...to seek solutions to the problems highlighted in the report,” a responsibility which was increasingly seen as belonging to the federal government.  

Ironically, for the first time, education policy had become a national priority of the American public. As a result, Reagan’s attempts to eliminate the Department of Education eventually succumbed because of a variety of situational changes and his inability to mitigate their effects.  

The next major development in education policy came during the presidential campaign in 1988, when George H. W. Bush vowed to become an “education president.” In the wake of the Reagan administration, there was a great deal of tension about education issues. Once

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38 Ibid.  
40 McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind*, 46.  
elected, many of President Bush’s policies had the unfortunate qualities of being too conservative for the liberals in Congress and too liberal for a number of the Reagan Republicans. As a result, Bush’s failure to capture the middle ground left him without a consistent base of support for education reform. Additionally, Reagan’s legacy in education largely consisted of budget cuts, while Bush’s hopes of becoming an “education president” were grounded in the necessity of spending more. In light of this difficult situation, Bush sought out an innovative solution. President Bush’s “education summit,” as it would be known, represented only the third time “in this country’s history...[where] the nation’s governors met as a group with a president to address an issue.” The summit quickly became a public relations spectacle, with the media closely watching every development. But as Bush biographer John Robert Greene has noted, the summit was only “at best a first step.” Despite the initial media frenzy over the summit, little work was actually accomplished and the president’s education agenda now faced an uphill battle.

Once formulated, President Bush’s education plan was called “America 2000,” and called for voluntary national tests to enforce higher standards and a request to business leaders to raise $150 million to help create at least 535 ‘break the mold’ schools.” Ultimately, the pressures of the deficit and a pledge not to raise taxes required the President to tailor his education proposal to match the fiscal realities. The result was a less than dramatic proposal. Yet, “considering the stringent budgetary circumstances, Bush’s promotion of national education standards and his qualified support for growth in education programs were credible steps toward fulfilling his campaign promise on education.”

44 Ibid.
policies did affect the direction of education policy, but whether he was an “education president” remains a matter of perspective.

Bill Clinton’s surprising defeat of President Bush in 1992 was considered by many education policymakers and observers as a chance to expand once again the federal presence in education that had been absent or at least in decline since the Reagan administration. Clinton’s education policy shared a similar standards-based approach to that of the Bush Administration, which is not a surprise because Clinton attended the President Bush’s Education Summit in 1989 as the Governor of Arkansas and was an active participant in, and advocate of the conference.\(^47\) As president, Clinton oversaw the enactment and reauthorization of several important pieces of education legislation. Among these were Goals 2000, Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA), and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act.\(^48\) For the Goals 2000 Act, money was once again a limitation as it had been throughout President Bush’s previous attempts. In essence, the Clinton administration and the Congress retooled the 1994 reauthorization of the ESEA legislation to provide it with a standards-based focus.\(^49\) In the wake of the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994’s so-called “Republican Revolution,” the Clinton administration’s new education policies were adjusted to meet the new political realities.

Eventually, Republican opposition to the expanded education budgets and the ever-increasingly powerful role of the federal government reached its peak after the Republican takeover of Congress. Over the next few years, Congressional Republicans and the Republican nominee for president, Bob Dole, promised to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education. For conservatives, the elimination of the Department of Education would provide a symbolic victory

\(^{49}\) Ibid.
in the ongoing contest over federal involvement in public education. But after Clinton’s defeat of Dole in the 1996 campaign, the Republican Party began to stand down in their attacks on the Clinton administration’s education policies—in part because they recognized that it was damaging to be against an entity so symbolically tied to education.  

One of Clinton’s first education-related actions after his reelection was to challenge Congress to create a voluntary testing program in core subjects—a plan strikingly similar to what President George H. W. Bush had sought. Although the initiative largely failed, the debate over national standards and testing would eventually change to favor an initiative of this type. As Elizabeth Debray notes, “Congress during the 1990s was increasingly partisan, [but] bipartisanship in education legislation survived until 1994.” Once partisanship arose, however, it came with full force and fury.

Toward the end of the Clinton administration, partisan bickering over education policy reached a new high. The legislative battle would eventually focus on the vote to reauthorize the ESEA legislation, which was set to expire in 1999. Surprisingly, the ESEA reauthorization failed to garner enough votes in Congress. Instead, Republicans in Congress advocated the Straight A’s proposal as a viable policy alternative. As Patrick McGuinn notes, the “Republican Party’s Straight A’s proposal marked an important milestone in the history of federal education policy as it represented the first comprehensive GOP plan to use the federal government to bring about school improvement,” though its significance stems from who enacted it much more than its substance.

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50 Ibid.
52 Debray, Politics, Ideology, and Education Policy, 27.
53 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 139.
54 Ibid.
In retrospect, education policymaking between 1989 and 1999 reflected the upheaval of education policy ideology and the last throes of resistance to a national role in education policymaking. This span of time began with President Bush’s attempt to become the “education president,” while the middle years were dominated by congressional Republicans’ attempts to scale back or eliminate several programs as well as the Department of Education. Finally, the decade’s end witnessed the Republicans’ eventual embrace of a role for the federal government in education policymaking. Meanwhile, one of the key effects of these national debates about education was to reiterate the idea of “America’s failing schools” and to firmly establish education policy as a paramount issue in the 2000 Presidential campaign. It was in this context, that the governor of Texas and the Vice President of the United States, Al Gore, began their campaigns for the presidency.

As suggested earlier, the situational events that led up to George W. Bush’s signing of the No Child Left Behind Act were not the primary causes of its enactment. They are, however, important when trying to reconstruct the environment within which the bill was conceptualized, created, and eventually passed. The broad powers of the federal government in education policy did not materialize overnight. Likewise, the standards-based approach to education was not simply the creation of the latter Bush administration. Instead, they represent an incremental expansion that spans the last half-century. Each action that expanded, shrank, or otherwise transformed education policy was the product of both the situation and the leadership used to capitalize on that situation. The aforementioned policy history underscores the importance of the events leading up to the enactment of NCLB, but also the uncertainty about where the trend of education policy was headed.
Presidential Leadership and the Bush Style of Governance

While it is important to understand the direction of education policy prior to No Child Left Behind, so too is it vital to comprehend the nuances, characteristics, and qualities of President George W. Bush's leadership. In order to understand this frequently overlooked and under-emphasized factor in the outcome of NCLB, it is helpful to recall the responsibilities, origins, and shape of the American presidency.

The American presidency has been a focal point of controversy since its inception. In The Federalist Papers, Alexander Hamilton expounds upon the "real character of the executive" by taking care to express the need for a single, central, executive authority, and positing that "a feeble executive implies feeble execution of the government." Particularly noteworthy is Hamilton's prescription for an "energetic executive," which he described by saying:

It is essential to the protection of the community against foreign attacks; it is not less essential to the steady administration of the laws; to the protection of property against those irregular and high-handed combinations which sometimes interrupt the ordinary course of justice; to the security of liberty against the assaults of ambition, of faction, and of anarchy.

Hamilton argued that energy in the executive requires "unity, duration, an adequate provision for its support, and competent powers." A more concrete examination of the presidency can be gleaned from examining the enumerated powers provided by the Constitution which include: making appointments, granting pardons, collaborating with the Senate to make treaties, serving as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, potentially vetoing legislation, and making nominations for judicial vacancies. More important for the purposes of this analysis, the president serves in a number of unstated but critical roles such as the leader of his party, the

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57 Ibid., 60.
agenda-setter, the nation's primary source of communication with government, and the embodiment of the American image at home and abroad. As these examples suggest, the president's duties span from the "execution of laws" to the management of the military. The president's centrality to the American political system ensures that, for better or worse, presidential leadership has a major bearing on the outcome of the political process—more so than any other position. Thus, while the political leadership of U.S. Senators, interest groups, and staff members were vitally important to the success of NCLB, Bush's presidential leadership is the emphasis of this examination.

Although the presidency began with a broad sketch of assorted powers, its current shape represents a combination of the initial framework and the office's ongoing metamorphosis. Yet, as Stephen Skowronek points out, "the presidency is a governing institution inherently hostile to inherited governing arrangements."58 This combination of historical precedent, enumerated powers, and paradoxical duties provides the presidency a vitally important, but unquestionably complex leadership role. The shape, success, and outcome of presidential administrations have been primarily affected by the institutional designs of the office and the personal qualities, motivations, and experiences of those who have been charged with the responsibility of chief executive. Thus, when it comes to Bush's style of presidential leadership in education policy, much can be learned by examining his decision-making styles, communication skills, political influences, and his approach to governing, much can be gleaned about his later leadership actions—especially in education.

George Walker Bush was born on July 6th, 1946 in New Haven, Connecticut. As the son of a war-hero and future president and the grandson of a United States Senator, George W. Bush

entered life as a member of the privileged elite. Although he grew up in Midland, Texas, Bush, like his father before him, would attend Phillips Academy and eventually Yale University. Privileged though he was, it appears in retrospect that George Bush never really enjoyed being at either place. Many years later, he recalled how he “wrote a composition about the wrenching experience of his sister’s death...[but] he was deeply hurt when the instructor ignored the content of his paper and criticized him for the way it was written,” and how “at Yale, he was offended when the college chaplain commented that his father had been beaten by a better man in his 1964 run for the Senate.”  

The practical result of these incidents and others like them was Bush’s growing contempt for the snobbery of the intellectual-elite.

By the time he graduated from Yale, the Vietnam War was in full swing. It was at this time that Bush embarked upon his much documented stint in the Texas Air National Guard. As Wayne Slater notes, “this must have been a moment of enormous conflict for George Bush...How do you, on the one hand, avoid Vietnam -- as he and so many others wanted to do -- but at the same time, stand up for the conservative values and represent the father who was a war hero?”  

Not long after leaving the Guard, Bush graduated from Harvard Business School and returned to Midland to work for an oil company. In 1978, Bush ran for Congress in the Midland area, and lost a close election in a solidly Democratic area. As one observer notes, Bush was “conspicuous as the underachieving son of a superachieving father.” Long a heavy drinker, Bush finally began making efforts to curb his excessive drinking and alcohol related troubles after marrying Laura Welch and becoming a father. This remarkable turnaround coincided with

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Bush's spiritual reawakening, which would have a deep and lasting effect on his personality from that point forward.

While Bush was beginning to straighten out his life, his father was constantly reaching greater heights in the realm of politics. In the lead up to George H. W. Bush's presidential campaign in 1988, Bush sold his faltering business and joined his father's campaign. After the victory, Bush quickly rose to prominence in Texas as he helped a team of investors purchase the Texas Rangers baseball team. Through his position as managing general partner, Bush became a fixture in Texas state news and as a speaker at organizations across the state. After a few years of managing the Rangers, Bush began to reconsider politics for himself. In 1994, he successfully ran for governor against Ann Richards, a popular Democratic incumbent. Bush's campaign for governor exhibited many of the qualities that later made him a successful candidate for president: he emphasized his intent to be a "uniter," he stayed on message, he remained willing to compromise on the details for the sake of the larger goal, and he kept a clear vision for what he hoped to accomplish.  

As governor, Bush was remembered for his "whirl of face-to-face negotiation and persuasion," and commitment to bipartisanship, which was obligatory because of the solid Democratic majorities in the state legislature. Bush had originally campaigned on a select few issues, all of which were enacted in his two terms. Furthermore, many of his legislative accomplishments were achieved through compromise and with the help of the opposition. Among his legislative successes was an accountability-based reform of the state education system, which introduced many of the principles which would later be found in No Child Left Behind. Most of Bush's education policy was borrowed and modified from Ann Richards' own

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 196.
education goals. Bush and his campaign managed to introduce accountability into the debate about education and thereby create a conservative solution to a traditionally Democratic area of concern. Bush’s success is especially highlighted by his landslide re-election in 1998, in which he managed to gain the trust of many traditionally Democratic populations. In Texas, Bush proved to be an able and competent leader, although his qualities and style are remarkably different from his father’s.

George W. Bush’s leadership style has been greatly influenced by his role models in government and leadership, especially Ronald Reagan and his own father George H. W. Bush. Bush has long professed a profound admiration and respect for Reagan, and has gone to great lengths to incorporate a wide range of Reagan-like qualities. According to one observer, “Bush’s admiration of Reagan is evident in his similarly sunny, uncomplicated style.” Yet, Bush’s emulation of Reagan is evident in far more than his demeanor. Bush has sought to become Reagan’s in policy and legacy as well as in style. Bush’s tax policy especially is of the Reagan lineage—not to mention his frequent references to his religious faith. Even Bush’s campaign for the presidency was said to be “patterned... far more on the Reagan model than on that of his own father.” In some ways, it appears as if Bush considers Reagan a political role model, despite their different agendas.

George H. W. Bush also shaped his son’s outlook and style, though in a very different way than Reagan. The lessons from his father’s experience as President of the United States have in many ways served as a cautionary tale and corrective force for Bush’s own political

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endeavors. Nevertheless, the two appear to share a close personal relationship. As his biographer Wayne Slater once commented, George W. Bush “loves [his father] most of all...[because he] is the one who [he] always, always held himself as a model against.” In his early years, Bush struggled to match his father’s extraordinary pursuits, but by the time he had entered politics as a candidate, his father had already departed. This timing ensured that Bush was able to learn from his father’s shortcomings in a way that could help his own career. Nevertheless, Slater also noted that Bush and his father share “a deep, abiding relationship, which is about blood, which is about a family that's very, very close.” This paradoxical dynamic, where Bush remains personally close to his father and yet positions himself as similar to Reagan, is a telling part of Bush’s personality.

The relationship between Bush’s role models is a revealing study in his inner conflicts. On one hand, Bush goes to great lengths to detach himself from his father’s policies and administration, under the banner of Reaganism, while simultaneously incorporating various aspects from both presidents’ agendas and ideologies. As one article notes, Bush tends to “[position] himself more as a conservative in Reagan's mold than in his father's,” yet his advocacy of policies like NCLB have been criticized as “not consistent with Ronald Reagan's views at all.” Reagan, after all, tried to reduce federal influence in education—to the point where he tried to abolish the Department of Education—while Bush enacted a policy that led to the largest expansion of federal power in education in forty years. These tendencies represent more than political positioning or duplicitous behavior; rather, they expose a complicated political ideology composed of conflicting goals, assumptions, and intentions.

66 Slater, “Interview with Frontline,” 52.
67 Ibid.
Bush's complex and paradoxical influences have helped to shape not only his personality and leadership style, but also the expectations for his tenure. From his father, Bush learned not to be distracted from the "vision thing," and instead to articulate a clear plan of action on a specified set of issues. Many of Bush's political strategies and tactics are similar to Reagan's approach, especially with regard to the use of framing and vision. So while Bush's policies may only have some commonality with Reagan's, his strategic understanding of politics and his approach to leadership both have all the hallmarks of Reagan. In short, Bush's influences reveal a complex dimension, too frequently overlooked, which has guided his actions as president.

Another vitally important component for understanding Bush's leadership lies in his style of decision-making and information sharing. Bush has exhibited, with a great deal of consistency, the tendency to be extraordinarily decisive. According to one Bush observer, "he takes on the issue of education as one of a very small number of issues, which is a mark of Bush -- only tackle a few things, and tackle them with intensity...He's very, very successful in emerging as the education governor." Slater characterized the quintessential habits of Bush's decision making this way:

He was a very active governor...When you gather people around him, he did exactly as governor what he does as president. He surrounds himself with a very small group of people he trusts, whose instincts he regards well, whose ideas he'll consider...He wants to hear from a series of people, "What do you think? What do we do about this issue? What do we do?" He distills from those ideas what his decision is...I don't know of any case that I can remember where he's regretted the decision that he's made....a key point in George Bush is that he doesn't study things in a meticulous way, the Clinton way or the way Jimmy Carter did, with the sort of in-detail discussions and understanding of a particular problem. He pays people to understand problems, and he trusts people who are around him...From the series of people, he considers all of the recommendations, makes a decision accordingly and then moves on.

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69 Slater, "Interview with Frontline," 52.
70 Ibid.
As is clear from this account, Bush prefers to operate in a way that allows for a wide range of concise perspectives on a given issue. His detractors have often cited his emphasis on brevity as evidence of his intellectual limitations, but as Slater implies, it is much more about trust and power-sharing than it is about ability. Also apparent is Bush’s tendency to solicit advice and feedback from his inner circle of advisers. Rather than become too immersed in the nuances of a particular policy, Bush prefers to have his trusted advisers concentrate on the finer points, while he ultimately makes the difficult, high-impact decision himself, based on their advice and his instincts.

As is evident in both the background to the history of education policy and the personal development of George W. Bush, neither Bush nor his ideas for education policy were predetermined to succeed. The only certainty was that any attempt at education reform would require a thoughtful and considered strategy for overcoming the obstacles that undermined the success of so many previous attempts. As Bush began to consider a run for the presidency, it was becoming increasingly clear that education was now permanently established as a public policy which demanded national, as well as state and local action. Yet, the course, if any, that education reform would take, and the person who would direct its course were completely matters of speculation.

Conclusion

In the years leading up to the 2000 election, politics seemed to continue more or less on the same track. The 20th century had ushered in a dramatic transformation of federal education policy, but its direction was anything but certain. The Republican Party’s gradual acceptance of a federal role in education in the years prior to the 2000 presidential election suggested that the
federalization of education was likely permanent—yet the scope and strength of national involvement in education remained a matter of intense speculation. As the two major American political parties began to swell with candidates for the presidency, two very different frontrunners emerged. Meanwhile, for the first time in United States history, public opinion polls began to reveal education as the most important national issue. The stage was set for reform and the leader who would take charge was just as unlikely as he was surprising.
Chapter II: The Rise of Compassionate Conservatism and
the Path to the Presidency

At the close of the 20th century, it appeared as if the presidential election of 2000 would be uneventful and unimportant. After all, the leading candidates were bland compared to the vigor of Bill Clinton and the attention, energy, and controversy he generated.\(^1\) One national survey from January 2000, found that sixty percent of the Americans polled labeled the 2000 campaign "boring."\(^2\) Meanwhile, the American public was contentedly enjoying a healthy economy and a relatively peaceful course of world affairs. Yet, the 2000 election would prove to be anything but ordinary or inconsequential. At the dawn of a new millennium, America faced a new set of priorities and challenges and the victor of the presidential election would ultimately direct the nation’s course. It was in this oddly paradoxical setting, that one of the closest elections in history would take place—an election, which would eventually propel George W. Bush to the presidency.

Bush’s campaign for the presidency is critically important to the success of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for two overarching reasons. First, the campaign allowed Bush the opportunity to reframe the debate on education, to articulate his new vision of education reform, and ultimately to set the national agenda with education as the foremost priority. Second, the campaign—along with Bush’s experience as governor—provided him with a range of experiences that would inform his presidential leadership style and prepare him for the varied and rigorous responsibilities that lay ahead. Thus, in order to understand the full extent of

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Bush’s political leadership in advancing the NCLB legislation, we must first determine how Bush and his ideas about education reached the Oval Office.

_Inventing the Conservative-Education Governor_

To a great extent, George W. Bush’s credibility with education policy stems from his experiences as the Governor of Texas. While serving in that capacity, he sought to become an “education governor” and to revitalize the state’s public education system. As governor, Bush regularly drew from his background in business when leading, once summarizing his approach to executive leadership in five simple steps: “set priorities; set clear, understandable, measurable goals; focus on results; align authority and responsibility; and encourage innovation.”\(^3\) For Bush, the problem was simple: these principles “seem pretty obvious to people in the business world...but efficiencies and good practices that are second-nature in business are often second-fiddle in government.”\(^4\) This no-nonsense, business-like approach was especially emphasized in education, where Bush felt that “too many goals meant no goals.”\(^5\) With this simple, but reliable approach to governing, Bush would set forth a narrowly tailored, but ambitious agenda for his two terms in the governor’s office. Beginning with his earliest experiences in politics, education reform was the policy on which Bush would stake his political tenure—first as governor, and then later as a candidate for president.

As is evident from his experience in Texas, Bush possessed a keen awareness of his constituency’s priorities. According to one observer, Bush succeeded in Texas because he

\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid.
"understood that…the most important thing for the voters who are most likely to vote for him is that their kids' schools are good schools and that their kids are getting the best education possible, that the schools are well funded and that their kids are prepared for college." In recognition of this sentiment, Bush commonly asserted that education was his "number one priority." Later, as a candidate for president, Bush recognized a similar yearning for better public education among the American public more broadly.

When Bush first ran for governor, as mentioned above, many of his ideas for education were actually borrowed from his Democratic opponent, Governor Ann Richards. As one Bush observer bluntly noted, Bush "pushes these ideas, which in effect were part of Ann Richards' ideas, and made them his own." One common element of both candidates' education plans was an emphasis on accountability. Accountability, which is more formally known as "standards-based accountability," refers to the movement toward using "standards and tools to assess student performance with the expectation that all children can achieve a certain performance level." In practice the accountability program "sets goals in the form of standards, assigns responsibilities for meeting those goals, and holds the system accountable for its performance." Unlike previous models for governing education, under standards-based accountability "the state's role changes from ensuring compliance with regulations, to providing incentives and offering technical assistance to build school capacity...state officials prescribe the outcomes, but the choices about instructional methods and practices are left for the professional educators to

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7 Bush, "National Center for Policy Analysis."
8 Ibid.
9 Slater, "Interview with Frontline."
11 Ibid.
decide." 12 So while Bush has become the most visible champion of accountability in recent years, he actually began his career in politics by taking the idea from somebody else. In fact, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, which served as the primary mechanism for measuring accountability in Texas public schools—Bush’s proudest achievement—had been introduced four years before he ran for governor. 13

By virtually co-opting these ideas of “accountability” from his opponent, Bush was able to transform the debate about education issues in the state of Texas at a critical time in his political career. While most national Republicans were trying to destroy the Department of Education, George W. Bush would go on to defeat a popular liberal governor using a slightly more conservative version of his opponent’s ideas. He would use this model later as a candidate for president, where he would choose a similar course of being active in education—and, more importantly, constructive. In addition to helping his election efforts, Bush’s co-opting and reframing of education in terms of accountability demonstrated that there was a conservative alternative to the national trend, which did not require a reversal of several decades’ worth of progress and precedent.

Upon entering office, Governor Bush faced a Democratic-controlled State Legislature. 14 Initially, he introduced a bold and comprehensive education reform plan that would have transformed everything from statewide tax collection to teacher certification. 15 Eventually, however, the plan was changed in order to mitigate the concerns of conservative and liberal

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid
15 Ibid.
During this period, Bush forged close personal friendships with his would-be political opponents, including Democratic House Speaker Pete Laney and Democratic Lt. Governor Bob Bullock—each of whom became unlikely but vital friends. Reaching across the aisle to accomplish reform—reform increasingly demanded by citizens—took patience, civility, and a thick skin. Rather than insist upon the narrow confines of his legislative plan, Governor Bush eventually made concessions on some points and convinced lawmakers of the merits for other portions. This method of putting forth an ambitious agenda for education reform, but remaining flexible as to its final shape would prove to be a critical strategy for preserving legislative success in a highly partisan environment—not to mention a nice story for his eventual presidential campaign speeches.

Bush’s two terms as governor occurred at an important time in the development of education policy in the state of Texas. While Governor, Bush formed a close working relationship with Rod Paige, who was then serving as the City of Houston’s school superintendent. Together they oversaw what would later become known as the “Texas miracle.” As the name implies, the period in which Bush was in office was marked by significant statistical progress in dropout rates, test scores, and other education indicators. Later, during his campaign for president, Bush’s political advertisements would tout the successes as “the most fundamental in a generation.” Bush’s foray into education policy while serving as a state executive became his proudest and most heralded accomplishments as governor. Although

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16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Mintz, “Texas’ Miracle Doubted.”
recent publications have questioned the validity of these claims, the fact is Bush’s education-related successes in heavily minority or impoverished areas had a remarkable effect on shaping his election prospects and his perspective on education policy.\textsuperscript{22}

Another hallmark of Bush’s leadership while in Texas was his tendency to commit large amounts of personal time and effort to education policy. Bush was relentless. He would later recall, “to further [education reform], I traveled Texas – using the bully pulpit to make sure parents and teachers and school boards and superintendents understand what is expected.”\textsuperscript{23}

Beyond just ensuring the enactment of new legislation, Bush also made a concerted effort to ensure the successful implementation and execution of education reform. The experience and familiarity with education policy that Bush acquired during his terms as governor would prove to be critical assets during his later presidential campaign. On one hand, he was able to cite the tangible success stories in Texas, like the fact that “Texas is one of two states that has made the greatest recent progress in education, according to the Congressionally-mandated National Education Goals Panel.” Meanwhile, he could also legitimately claim bipartisan successes, due to the fact that these policies were constructed and enacted in conjunction with the opposition party in the state legislature.\textsuperscript{24}

Through a mixture of clever framing, continued personal appeals, and intellectual openness, Governor Bush was able to facilitate the passage of education reform in Texas. Ultimately, Bush’s education policy endeavors as governor would come to shape his views about how to deal with the national problems in public education. Although his proposals were

\textsuperscript{22} Mike Dobbs, "Scandal in Education 'Miracle,'“ \textit{MSNBC.Com} 7 Nov. 2003; available at http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3403664/; accessed on 2 Dec. 2006; Internet.

\textsuperscript{23} Bush, “National Center for Policy Analysis.”

changed significantly and the full extent of the reforms were never reached, Bush’s experience with education reform at the state level provided critical lessons and experiences in political leadership that would not only help him get elected, but would also help him succeed once he reached the presidency.

*The Education Candidate and the Unprecedented National Agenda*

As the presidential election of 2000 entered its earliest stages, conventional wisdom tended to favor the Democratic frontrunner, Vice President Al Gore. One observer even referred to him as “the best-positioned nonincumbent presidential candidate since Dwight Eisenhower.”25 After all, Gore had been an integral part of the Clinton administration, which was coming off of a period of record economic growth. Furthermore, in spite of President Clinton’s scandalous final years in office, he had remained an incredibly popular president. In addition, “Bill Clinton’s loyalty to Gore [was] remarkable and commendable,” not too mention helpful.26 By contrast, the Republican field was relatively open during this same span of time. While Gore was beginning to position and maneuver for the presidency, eventual Republican nominee Governor George Bush remained wary and noncommittal.27 However, as time went on it became clear that Bush was merely waiting in order to announce at the most opportune time. By the close of the Texas legislative session in the summer of 1999, Bush’s intentions were clear, though unofficial: to seek, and win, the presidency.28

26 Ibid.
After the end of Texas's 1999 legislative session, Bush began to focus his efforts on his bid for the presidency rather than his position as governor. On June 12, 1999, he unofficially announced his intentions to become President of the United States. Although his announcement was hardly a surprise, it would prove to be a pivotal moment in his campaign. In his speech, Bush articulated the ethos of his political legacy. Bush began by describing his views as "compassionate conservatism," a phrase that would serve as the ideological backbone of his political agenda. Early in his speech, Bush characterized his vision for the country by saying:

I'm running because our country must be prosperous. But prosperity must have a purpose. The purpose of prosperity is to make sure the American dream touches every willing heart. The purpose of prosperity is to leave no one out... to leave no one behind. I'm running because my party must match a conservative mind with a compassionate heart. And I'm running to win.\(^{29}\)

As his choice of words suggest, Bush sought to reframe the American conception of conservatism. During his speech, he highlighted several national problems, but he especially emphasized the importance of public education which he characterized by saying, "failed schools are creating two societies: one that reads and one that can't; one that dreams and one that doesn't."\(^{30}\) This powerful imagery served both to echo the concerns of American citizens and demonstrate the candidate's commitments to ensuring action on this issue.

The next major portion of his speech moved from his assessment of public schools to his vision for where the schools ought to be heading. On this point, Bush proclaimed that America must make a "solemn commitment" to ensure "that no child will be left behind [and] that every child will be educated."\(^{31}\) Continuing, Bush established his overarching prescription for how to address the problems with education and how to move toward his vision by stating the following:

\(^{29}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) Ibid.
\(^{31}\) Ibid.
I believe in the power of high standards and high hopes. I have seen what works in my state...As president, I will give more flexibility and authority to states – but encourage local folks to measure results for every child. I will praise success – but shine a spotlight of shame on failure. If schools fail, we must be bold enough to challenge the status quo...Everyone must have a first rate education, because there are no second rate children, no second rate dreams.\(^{32}\)

This powerfully worded charge for education represented a change in the political dynamics on education. For the first time, a major Republican presidential candidate had intimated a national solution to educational inequity. Although many of the plan’s details would not be finalized until he entered office, Bush’s initial effort began with him raising awareness and placing education, through the prism of compassionate conservatism, atop the national agenda. In Texas, Bush had managed to co-opt his opponent’s education policies during the campaign; now at the national level, Bush had co-opted the very issue of education, traditionally regarded as a “safe” Democratic issue. As was evident from this early speech, Bush clearly intended to establish himself as the education candidate.

After dedicating a significant portion of his speech in Iowa to education policy, Bush sought to further develop his credibility in this issue area throughout the primary campaign. One way in which he continued this effort was through a handful of education-focused speeches during that fall. Despite the fact that the summer of 1999 had been a time of great success in enacting the largest tax cut in Texas history, Bush waited until after he had delineated his education policy before devoting an official address to that subject. In a series of speeches delivered between September and November of 1999, Bush methodically laid out the four tiers of his plan for reforming the American education system and in doing so made education the centerpiece of his new ideological framework and agenda. As is indicated by this “education-
first” commitment, Bush and his advisers recognized the principal importance that education policy would play in the outcome of the campaign.

True to his message of compassionate conservatism and outreach to minorities, especially Hispanic Americans, Bush’s first speech, entitled “No Child Left Behind,” was delivered in California in September 1999. In the speech, Bush carefully articulated his vision for education and proclaimed that “education has been and will be a priority for me. I will carry a passion for high standards and high hopes to the highest office in the land.” In what would become a theme of his presidential campaign, Bush frequently reminded voters that “unlike past fads and fashions, these reforms are proving that public education can be improved — swiftly and dramatically.”

One month later, Bush delivered a speech entitled “A Culture of Achievement,” in which he established the doctrine of national accountability and local flexibility. The accountability component was especially critical because, as Bush would state, “the federal government will no longer pay schools to cheat poor children.” Perhaps the most powerful portion of the message came with Bush’s assertion that “the final object of education reform is not just to shun mediocrity; it is to seek excellence. It is not just to avoid failure; it is to encourage achievement.” As the primary elections neared, Bush’s dedication to education policy would establish him as a viable Republican candidate for the upcoming national election. Furthermore,

33 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
the rhetorical and ideological framework established in this series of speeches would afford Bush not only evidence of his commitment, but a new, conservative, reform-based framework for advancing his education policy.

Many observers and commentators have labeled “compassionate conservatism” as political drivel, but the phrase and its accompanying ideology were undoubtedly useful in communicating Bush’s new brand of conservatism—especially with regard to education reform. Bush’s conception of compassionate conservatism represents a combination of his earnest beliefs and his recognition of the obvious: conservative candidates for national office could no longer afford to position themselves against education policies—they had to be for something constructive. As Patrick McGuinn notes, “Bush had been one of the first Republicans to recognize that the party’s position on education was problematic politically...[and] Bush had begun talking about the importance of education to the Republican Party’s national electoral strategy as early as 1996.”37 In fact, Bush’s success in becoming the education candidate was possible primarily because he had proven his worthiness in his role as governor where his personal zeal for the issue of education was the hallmark of his tenure.

The “compassion” element was readily evident when Bush described education as a means of providing opportunity, hope, and success to America’s minorities and underprivileged. Bush stressed this element by frequently emphasizing quality, universal education as a moral imperative, such as when he stated that “our nation has a moral duty to ensure that no child is left behind.”38 Yet, rather than simply mimic the traditional Democratic understanding of social problems, Bush’s ideology emphasized classic Republican principles like encouraging greater state and local government control, ensuring greater efficiency with public money, and

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38 Bush, “Presidential Announcement.”
establishing a system of benchmarks for measuring progress and failures of programs. With education, these exact principles were employed as Bush underscored local input, fiscal restraint, and the introduction of accountability measures. In this sense, Bush’s ideological framework combined seamlessly with his political platform—especially with regard to education.

Bush also realized through his state government experience that minorities could be persuaded to adopt conservative solutions to traditionally liberal issues. Ever since his first term as Governor, Bush had established education as his top priority, but now, as a candidate for president, he was able to base these claims on his successes uplifting minority students in Texas public schools. This served the dual purpose of supporting his claim of “compassionate conservatism” and strengthening his position for the presidential election. More importantly, however, Bush’s Texas experience and campaign focus allowed him to present a vision for education that appealed to all Americans, regardless of party or ideology. During one speech touting his education plan, Bush took great care to examine the issue and propose a solution from a minority-intensive perspective:

I want to start where educational failure has its highest price. I want to begin with disadvantaged children in struggling schools, and the federal role in helping them. Their voices are not the loudest in our education debates. But we owe them the pride and promise of learning. Our new economy – requiring higher and higher skills – demands it. And so does our conscience. No child in America should be segregated by low expectations ... imprisoned by illiteracy ... abandoned to frustration and the darkness of self-doubt.39

These lofty words complemented Bush’s record as governor, which as one observer notes, was largely defined by the way he “championed the state’s stringent accountability plan as a means to ensure that all children—especially Hispanic and black children and those in urban areas—were

39 Ibid.
receiving an adequate education." As a result, Bush achieved a balance few, if any, national candidates could boast—especially among Republicans.

Considerably more important than the obvious electoral implications was the fact that Bush could now use "the credibility he earned with his staunch support of accountability and his successful effort to reach out to minority communities...to advocate school choice, oppose significant increases in educational expenditures, and criticize the public school establishment," without losing supporters. Prior to Bush’s presidential candidacy, Democratic opponents and teachers’ unions labeled many conservative candidates as “anti-education.” Bush, however, managed to avoid such accusations during both the primaries and the general election for two important reasons. First, he took care to use the “compassionate conservative” framework to be critical-but-constructive about education. Second, Bush’s aforementioned depth of experience offered a firm record of reform and progress, with which no other candidate could reasonably compare. Thus, Bush attained an unparalleled degree of strength and flexibility on education policy compared with other previous Republican candidates.

During this period of the campaign, George Bush was in competition with both the Democratic frontrunner, Al Gore, and an unusually strong primary challenger in Republican Senator John McCain. Gore and Bush enjoyed a distinct advantage over their primary challengers—primarily because of their fundraising edge and their status as the "establishment candidates." As the primary race got underway, Bush quickly established a strong lead over McCain. This success was largely due to the fact that Bush became “the most prolific fundraiser

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40 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 153.
41 Ibid.
in presidential campaign history," raising over thirty million dollars in a six-month span.\(^{43}\) By comparison, John McCain raised only four million dollars during that same period.\(^{44}\) Although his financial standing afforded him an edge in the primary stage, it was Bush's domestic-focused agenda—especially with regard to education—which would help him secure the nomination over his primary opponents.

McCain's strength as a candidate was largely derived from his status as a maverick and his widely respected independent views. In what would become a symbol of his candidacy, McCain trumpeted his independence from the religious right and emphasized his closeness to the American people as he traveled the country in a bus named the "Straight Talk Express."\(^{45}\) Like Bush, McCain recognized the fundamental importance of education to the voters. In what would summarize both the overall message of his candidacy and his views on education, McCain stated in his announcement speech that "fixing a broken political system is the key to necessary reform in almost every area where the government touches your life...but nowhere are the stakes greater than in the education of our children."\(^{46}\) In terms of his policy proposal, McCain went on to suggest that America “return control of education back to parents and teachers. We can do this by sending ninety percent of all federal education dollars back to community classrooms rather than wasting it on Washington bureaucrats. Let's put your child's education back in the hands of someone who knows your child's name.” In the specific case of increasing localism, McCain’s

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\(^{44}\) Ibid.


plan resembled the plan offered by Bush. Yet, Bush ultimately had an advantage on education policy.

Although McCain was known as an outsider and an ardent reformer, Bush was able to fend off most of McCain’s attempts to gain an upper hand vis-à-vis education policy. Bush’s credibility on, and experience with education reform gave him an immediate advantage over McCain on this issue. Despite the fact that McCain had spearheaded important reform-legislation and possessed an unquestionably strong personal story and appeal, his interest in education never matched that of Bush. Furthermore, Bush’s exclusive dedication of several policy speeches to the issue of education combined to provide him with the strongest hold on that issue among the Republican primary candidates. Finally, Bush’s plan of federal accountability and local flexibility struck a better balance and offered greater promise than Bush’s other proposals—besides he had staked his name on these issues first. Although education cannot be seen as the sole factor in Bush’s eventual victory, it is evident that his stance on education was vital to his effort of fending off McCain’s reform-based primary challenge.

As the actual primaries began, Bush cruised to an easy victory in the Iowa caucuses. Yet, within a week he suffered a surprising and devastating loss to McCain in the New Hampshire primary on February 1, 2000. As February wore on, Bush maintained a slight edge by winning South Carolina and Delaware, although he soon lost to McCain in Michigan. By early March it was clear that Bush’s lead would hold and that McCain’s war chest was nearly

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49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
empty. On March 9, McCain unofficially yielded to Bush. After overcoming tough losses in the New Hampshire and Michigan primaries, and in spite of McCain’s spirited challenge, Bush eventually won the Republican nomination, which was made official when McCain endorsed him on May 9.

During this same period, Gore also faced competition from an “outsider” candidate. Bill Bradley, a progressive Senator and former basketball star, would prove to be Gore’s major intra-party opposition. For Gore, the problem was one of personality. As one columnist noted, even the relatively quiet and subdued Bradley, simply “by being sentient, vertical and not Al Gore...can expect to start with 35 percent or so support in contrarian-friendly New Hampshire.” Yet, compared with McCain’s unique personal story and reform-intensive agenda, Bradley’s campaign largely continued because of what he represented in contrast to Gore. As one observer noted, “for Democrats nervous about Gore or alienated by Clinton, Bradley offer[ed] a safe escape route...he challenges the Democratic status quo without challenging the foundations of that status quo.” Unlike McCain, Bradley was narrowly defeated in the New Hampshire primary—a loss that would have a devastating ripple effect on his campaign.

Without the financial backing or publicity that could have been gained by an early victory in the primary, Bradley’s candidacy quickly fizzled out. By March, Bradley had suspended his
campaign options as it became clear that his chance at success had come to a close. On July 13, Bradley officially endorsed Gore’s candidacy for President.\(^{56}\) Like Bush, Gore successfully fended off an intra-party challenge by capitalizing on his financial and organizational strengths. Furthermore, Gore benefited from the fact that he was a well-connected, institutional insider whose candidacy was popular with a large portion of his party’s base. Although the similarities between the Democratic and Republican primaries are noteworthy, he faced stiffer competition. Furthermore, Bush’s victory in the presidential primaries was more a result of policy than was Gore’s. To a great extent, Bush entered the summer of 2000 having already informed the American public of his policy priorities. As a result, Bush had managed to make up considerable ground—especially on education policy—against his Democratic opponent.

As Gore and Bush neared the general election, the polls began to suggest an extremely close race. By late summer, Bush held a small but steady lead over Gore in most national polls (but frequently within the margin of error).\(^ {57}\) In spite of this lead, most observers regarded the election’s outcome as unpredictable and the frontrunner to be subject to change. Due to the narrow margins which separated the candidates, the final months of the campaign were especially critical in deciding the outcome of the campaign. Thus, with each candidate now vying for precious votes, critical issues like education reached their greatest prominence yet.


General Election Face-off

By the time Bush had reached the Republican National Convention, his education policy and background had become the unquestioned focal point of his campaign and source of his political strength. Gore also recognized the increased saliency of education policy, and began to fashion his own plan for reform. In previous elections, education would have been considered a secondary issue, but in 2000, for the first time in U.S. history, education was identified by the public as the most important issue facing the nation [See Chart One].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Issue Voted Most Important</th>
<th>Ranking of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Recession</td>
<td>17th of 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>8th of 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>5th of 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>2nd of 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1st of 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart One: Roper Center for Public Opinion Online

In years past, the public's interest had been focused on economic or foreign policy issues, but the relative peace and prosperity that marked the tenure of the Clinton Administration ensured that the public's attention was squarely focused on domestic issues. Meanwhile, national surveys conducted during the summer of 2000 showed that sixty-six percent of respondents graded the state of American public schools as "C" or below—in short, education was the priority. The combination of a growing concern about public education and the era's relative peace combined to ensure that Americans would use education policy as a factor in their vote for president. Thus,

58 "Research and Polling," Roper Center for Public Opinion Online. May 2000; available from http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/hsrun.exe/Roperweb/pom/StateId/RJwQEAR9TmO3MABVt6Owt_Xr1OAN-VCLK/HAHTpage/Summary_Link?qstn_id=428999; accessed on 22 Jan. 2007; Internet; found in

59 Ibid.
in 2000 the political fates of the presidential candidates largely depended on their ability to convince the American people that they were capable of presidential leadership in education policy.

From the outset, both the Bush and Gore campaigns recognized the central role that education would play in the campaign. Yet, prior to this election few political observers could have predicted that this issue, which a half-century before had been almost completely ignored at the federal level, would take center stage. Ironically, as governor Bush had once declared that "education is to a state what national defense is to the federal government—our most urgent challenge."60 Coming into the 2000 election, education was now a top priority of both the federal government and the states. As it turns out, this dynamic would soundly favor the Texas governor.

Another revealing indicator on this issue is found in a series of surveys that measured the public’s perception of each party’s credibility on education issues. Traditionally, this context would have heavily favored the Democratic candidate, but Bush was poised to reverse this conception. In 2000, respondents found that voters placed almost equal trust between Republicans and Democrats on education—compared with a twenty-nine percent Democratic edge in the same poll only four years before.61 Although there was no clear victor on the education issue, the virtual tie that Bush had helped establish, was in essence a Republican victory. For, even if Bush only matched Gore’s support on the issue of education, Bush would in effect succeed in winning voters, simply because the issue had been so solidly Democratic in the

61 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 150.
past few presidential elections. Heading into the Republican convention, it increasingly appeared as if Bush might prevail in the election.

The 2000 Republican Party National Convention was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and featured a wide array of speakers and supporters all intent on buoying Bush’s candidacy enough to win in November’s election. On the first night, Laura Bush made an impressive presentation in which she described her husband’s candidacy with a special emphasis on his educational policy background and experiences. She told how she “watched [her] husband make a difference as Governor, not by giving one speech about reading, but by giving one hundred speeches about reading -- directing time, money and resources to our schools.”62 As for the type of leadership on education he offered, Mrs. Bush asserted that Bush—as president—would “set great goals, and...work tirelessly to achieve them.”63 She also offered that her husband “stood on these principles as Governor, and he worked with Republicans and Democrats to build consensus and get things done,” while also being sure that he “shares credit and doesn't cast blame.”64 Finally, she insisted that “he sets a tone that's positive and constructive, a tone that is very different from the bitterness and division that too often characterizes Washington D.C.”65 Laura Bush’s convincing narrative was strengthened by the fact that she had worked as an educator for many years. This characterization of Bush’s leadership style—especially on education policy—proved to be a powerful and convincing story that appealed to the nation’s hope for bipartisanship and recognized Bush’s past record. By beginning this important political

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
event with such a strong emphasis on education, Bush managed to frame himself as both an education-focused governor and now as a presidential candidate.

Also established early at the convention was the Republican Party's new platform for 2000, which was constructed upon Bush's ideology of compassionate conservatism. While Gore's campaign had centered on the question "are you better off financially than you were eight years ago," the Republican Party posed another question: "are our schools better off than they were eight years ago." By trying to reform public education, the Republican Party endorsed Bush's accountability-based "Texas-model" and sought to implement it on the national level. In a sense, the GOP's acceptance of Bush's plan for education represented the party's pragmatic realization that the federal role in education could be reformed, but not removed entirely. Yet, in a larger way, the upgraded platform reflected the principal importance Bush placed on the issue (it was, in fact the first issue addressed in the platform). The remainder of the convention consisted of strong words of support from his former primary opponent John McCain, Colin Powell, and Senator Bill Frist. For Bush's part, his speech at the convention largely reiterated the points he had expressed previously. Just as in other speeches, he emphasized the failings of public education and the hardships of those who suffered the consequences. But, as was showcased in his convention speech and in those of his supporters', Bush had clearly sought to establish himself as a reformer. This designation would prove to be a powerful means for Bush to distinguish himself from Gore in the general election.

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
In recognition of education’s central importance to the voters, Bush and Gore each spent a considerable amount of time trying to outmaneuver the other to become the education candidate. Yet, with regard to the actual substance of their plans, the candidates exhibited only a few significant differences. In fact, the education policies offered by the Bush and Gore campaigns were substantially more similar than any had been for decades. These plans each shared aspects of the “accountability doctrine,” with both candidates asserting that “federal funds should not go to chronically low-performing schools.” Furthermore, the Bush and Gore campaigns each “proposed to require states (as a condition of receiving federal education funds) to produce annual report cards detailing the performance of every one of their schools.” The net effect of these similarities was as Patrick McGuinn notes, “a remarkable degree of convergence on the issue of education as both candidates called for a substantial federal role in education reform and increased spending but also standards accountability and choice.”

Yet, the Bush and Gore plans did have a few substantial divergences. One such difference related to the proposed alternatives to funding underachieving schools. In reality, Bush’s proposed policy was merely a national version of his Texas model, which emphasized the doctrine of choice, strictly maintained standards, and penalties for failing schools. For this reason Bush suggested a program of vouchers, whereby parents of students in failing schools would be given funds which would allow their child to attend a better educational institution.

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71 McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind*, 164.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
Bush also advocated using reading diagnostic tests as a means of deciding, based on performance, how federal money would be distributed.\textsuperscript{75}

Meanwhile, Gore preferred a system of introducing new leadership and standards in failing schools, as opposed to removing federal funds.\textsuperscript{76} In general, however, Gore’s plan accepted many of the “accountability” tenets expressed by Bush. Gore sought to differentiate himself from Bush using a conventional Democratic paradigm— Recommending greater federal spending.\textsuperscript{77} Eventually, he called for more than one hundred billion dollars to be spent on education and ensuring “high achievement standards.”\textsuperscript{78} While this was a traditionally sound strategy, Bush’s carefully cultivated reputation as a “reformer” tended to undercut much of the force behind Gore’s platform.\textsuperscript{79} In essence, Bush sought to achieve many of the same goals that Gore emphasized, but managed to frame his strategy through the lens of efficiency—a particularly convincing narrative compared with the \textit{status quo}.

More than any other factor, however, it was Bush’s own observable and unyielding commitment to education that would prove to be the critical asset in distinguishing him from Gore on education policy. As one observer noted, “Bush emphasized his commitment to education by talking about the issue more than any other, by putting forward a detailed education plan, and by visiting more than one hundred schools in the first fourteen months of the campaign.”\textsuperscript{80} For example, one source reported that “Bush designated ten days—the most for any issue” to exclusively discussing family and education policy.\textsuperscript{81} Furthermore, research has

“has found that thirty-eight percent of Bush’s [press] releases devoted special attention to education, more than any other issue.” Bush’s personal effort to establish himself as credible on education policy was in many ways simply a continuation of his efforts as governor of Texas. Even still, the extent of his experience and the substance of his plan combined to make him one of the strongest Republican presidential candidates on education in several decades.

As a result of these factors, Bush was well positioned to challenge the perception of education as a “liberal” issue. The fact that Gore’s plan matched the stereotype of liberal politicians’ tendencies and the fact that he failed to offer a clear alternative further strengthened Bush’s claims as a reformer and further eroded the Democrat’s electoral advantage on education issues. Thus, while their plans were similar, Bush’s extensive experience with, and dedication to education policy allowed him to establish a rapport with voters and enhance the tractability of his ideas thereby further narrowing the already close campaign of 2000.

In the final days and weeks of the campaign, each candidate worked overtime to try and gain an advantage. During the final months of the campaign, education remained an issue of paramount importance. While a variety of issues were debated during this period, the unparalleled primacy of education meant an entirely new dynamic for the 2000 election. Leading up to Election Day, many observers and commentators recognized that the candidates were polling neck-and-neck, but few could have predicted the spectacle that would ensue.

A Narrow Victory and a Productive Transition

On November 7, 2000 voters across the United States went to the polls in a manner similar to every other presidential election. Unbeknownst to the nation, the results would not be clear by the following day. Yet, by 8:00 PM on election night, many of the major news networks.

82 Ibid, 163.
predicted that Al Gore would be the next president of the United States.\textsuperscript{83} As the night wore on, the networks reversed their initial statements. By late that night it was obvious that Florida would be the pivotal state for determining the election’s victor. Early the next morning it appeared as though Bush had prevailed in Florida and would become the next president.\textsuperscript{84} Accordingly Gore called Bush to congratulate him on his victory and to concede.\textsuperscript{85} Nevertheless, this too would be quickly reversed and so began a protracted and bitter battle to decide the outcome of the election.\textsuperscript{86}

After more than a month of legal maneuvering, nonstop international media attention and a halted recount in Florida, Gore finally conceded the election on December 13.\textsuperscript{87} In addition to postponing Bush’s victory speech, this ordeal had a seriously divisive effect on the American public. In his eventual victory speech, Bush carefully sought to remedy the situation by underscoring his commitment to working together, saying that “Tonight I chose to speak from the chamber of the Texas House of Representatives because it has been a home to bipartisan cooperation. Here in a place where Democrats have the majority, Republicans and Democrats have worked together to do what is right for the people we represent.”\textsuperscript{88} During his speech Bush stated that “together, guided by a spirit of common sense, common courtesy and common goals, we can unite and inspire the American citizens.”\textsuperscript{89} Next, he outlined his policy objectives—symbolically beginning with education where he promised that “together, we will work to make

\textsuperscript{84}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89}Ibid.
all our public schools excellent, teaching every student of every background and every accent, so
that no child is left behind." By striking a conciliatory tone in this critical hour—specifically
on education—Bush established a bipartisan standard for education policy before ever entering
office. This would prove to be a critically important decision for the advancement of his prized
education policy.

Bush’s newly acquired status as president-elect after the long delay not only marked the
end of a hard fought campaign, but it also meant that the responsibility for governing had to
begin immediately. Initially, the Bush team was allotted 5.2 million dollars and three floors of
office space in the nation’s capital to begin work on the presidential transition. In what would
prove to be both politically expedient and vitally important to the effort of governing, Bush had
ordered the transition to begin a few weeks before the official election results had been
finalized. Such a strategy would prove instrumental in pulling off the impossible: transitioning
in half the time usually allotted for incoming presidents.

One effort specific to education which took place during the transition was Bush’s
hosting of a conference in Austin, Texas. Among those invited were Democratic Senators Joe
Lieberman and Evan Bayh, as well as liberal Democratic Congressman George Miller. By
inviting these prominent members of the opposition party to discuss his domestic policy priority,
Bush was reiterating his commitment to bipartisanship—even in the critical time before he
became president. At this meeting, Bush expressed his desire to ensure the passage of a

90 Ibid.
Feb. 2007; Internet.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 166.
95 Ibid.
bipartisan education reform bill. Just as he had in Texas, Bush began by extending a hand to the opposition, and stressing the importance of policy over politics. Not long after, Bush also hosted a meeting with Republican governors, which he used to begin promoting his plan for national education reform.96

Also during this period, Bush began making important strategic decisions about who to place in education-related positions. For the position of Secretary of Education, Bush chose his trusted colleague and education-policy ally, Dr. Roderick Paige from Houston, Texas.97 Finally, the core of the eventual “No Child Left Behind” legislation began to be molded during this period. In order to ensure a speedy and smooth takeover once inaugurated, Bush’s team had composed an education “blueprint” prior to him officially taking office. As will be shown later, this strategy of unveiling his policy goals for education was both strategic and beneficial. With his transition efforts now fully underway, Bush now faced the arduous task of governing. Finally, after a long, hard-fought, and masterfully executed campaign and transition, Bush had the opportunity to advance the principles of NCLB on the national stage.

Conclusion

From the announcement of his candidacy to the final days before his inauguration, George W. Bush worked diligently to ensure he would go from being an “education governor” to being an “education president.” As one observer reported, at the end of “eighteen months and more than one billion dollars, the 2000 race for President had come down to just one five-thousandth of one percent of the vote”—and yet the work on education reform was just

96 Debray, 86.
97 Ibid.
Although a vibrant economy, a relatively tranquil political environment, and the lack of other major hot-button issues helped to bring education to the forefront, it was Bush’s shrewd political maneuvering, creative use of his experience, and personal leadership on education that allowed for his ascendance to the presidency of the United States.

Thus, while it hardly a stretch to suggest that Bush benefited from a favorable context, it is evident that his candidacy, and his ideas, prevailed in the 2000 election for reasons other than luck or a favorable situation. More important was the role his leadership style played in positively shaping the debate and convincing voters to his adopt his vision for education reform. In the most fundamental sense, Bush’s 2000 campaign illustrates the underlying principle this case study establishes: political climate, previous experience and personal philosophy can work to a candidate’s benefit or detriment, but creative leadership generally makes these factors positive forces and mitigates potentially adverse effects. After having proven this principle on the campaign trail, Bush was ready for the next stage. Although many obstacles lay ahead, Bush’s campaign had demonstrated several important skills, while also suggesting the popularity of national-initiated reforms to public education.

Chapter III: The Grand Coalition and the Road to Passage

After one of the oddest political contests in American history, many Americans had returned to a state of normality by the time George W. Bush took the oath of office on January 20, 2001. Compared to the drama of the preceding months, Bush’s inauguration, transition, and eventual takeover were relatively mundane and conventional. Yet, despite his narrow margin of victory and quiet start, Bush was committed to a swift and ambitious legislative agenda. True to the spirit of his campaign, the new president’s foremost policy objective was education. Although Bush’s commitment to education policy had aided his bid for the presidency, many observers wondered whether he was capable of navigating such a monumental piece of legislation through Congress. After all, historically almost every previous attempt at comprehensive education reform had fallen short.

The roots of these doubts were manifold. First, Bush was presiding over a divided nation that had just undergone a tumultuously close election. As Al Gore’s campaign manager, Donna Brazile, remarked during Bush’s earliest days in office, “there are still a lot of raw emotions and a lot of hard feelings.”

Beyond the divided sentiments, Bush faced questions about his competency and intellect—even before he had a chance to take office. Finally, at the beginning of Bush’s presidency the Republican Party’s slim majority in Congress was perceived by many as vulnerable to party infighting. Yet, not all indicators were negative. After all, the 2000 presidential campaign solidly demonstrated that the American public strongly supported education reform and America’s legislators were now potentially attuned to that fact. The campaign had also revealed an unparalleled degree of overlap between the two parties’ visions.

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for education. Thus, while No Child Left Behind was anything but assured in the early days of the 107th Congress, there was some reason for hope.

In recognition of the difficulties which lay ahead for his plans for education reform, Bush acted quickly to ensure that it became a priority for Congress and that his efforts were made clear to the American public. When the 107th Congress entered session in January 2001, the proposed No Child Left Behind Act was scheduled as the first bill to be discussed in both chambers of Congress. Additionally, during his inaugural address, Bush named education as the first in a series of national priorities. In effect, the new president began by solidifying the message he had projected on the campaign trail: the time for education reform was now. Bush’s strategy throughout the bill’s progression would follow the two-pronged strategy of working with Congress while simultaneously mobilizing the American public.

*Setting the Tone: A Coalition for Change and the Blueprint for Reform*

The first and most critical decision Bush made with regard to his strategy for education reform had been articulated earlier. Namely, Bush deliberately framed his proposed policy goals as politically moderate and his efforts as bipartisan. Although this approach had been promised during the course of the campaign, it was unclear until Bush took office how deep his commitments to compromise and bipartisanship really were. After all, the handful of differences that distinguished Bush’s and Gore’s respective platforms had already proved themselves to be sticking points for previous attempts to advance such legislation in Congress during the Clinton

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administration. In anticipation of his upcoming legislative efforts and in recognition of his narrow victory, Bush underscored his commitment to establishing a bipartisan relationship with Congress by stating in his Inaugural Address that he intended “to advance [his] convictions with civility.” More substantially, Bush harkened back to his days as governor by employing a carefully targeted campaign of winning allies from both sides of the aisle.

The coalition-building efforts Bush undertook during his transition would provide the foundation for a coalition of Republican and Democratic members of Congress. Ultimately, Bush’s overtures would prove to be critically important in advancing No Child Left Behind past the many obstacles it would encounter. To a great extent, these interpersonal efforts were planned and orchestrated by Sandy Kress, a moderate ally from Texas, who served as Bush’s “education reform coordinator.” This allowed Bush to focus outreach efforts on moderate and liberal members of Congress with a strong interest in education policy. It was Kress who recognized the importance of including Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and Congressman George Miller (D-CA) in any attempt at a bipartisan education bill, and he set about constructing the coalition based on their involvement.

The strategies for gaining support varied greatly. In order to gain the support of George Miller, Kress saw to it that Bush invited him to the summit in Texas, prior to his inauguration, which focused on the proposed legislative efforts on education. Miller, who had been a key player in past reform efforts, was keenly aware of the need for reform, and quickly became an important member of the coalition. Meanwhile, in an effort to reach out to the iconic liberal Ted

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5 Bush, “First Inaugural Address.”
Kennedy, Bush initiated what was referred to by the media as a “charm offensive.” According to Fred Greenstein, his efforts to woo Kennedy culminated when “Bush invited the Kennedy family to the White House for a screening of a film on John F. Kennedy’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis and naming the Justice Department building for Robert Kennedy.” The advantages of including Kennedy and Miller in the coalition were obvious: their liberal credentials, key committee assignments, and knowledge of education policy. Also, their inclusion meant that the coalition would have greater reach. Their involvement would eventually help to insulate the legislation from excessive partisan logrolling. By giving the traditional opposition a stake in the bargaining, Bush cleverly preempted potential liberal dissent by giving that faction a sense of ownership in the historic legislation.

Coalition-building efforts were also directed at moderate members of Congress who did not serve on key committees but were identified as potential supporters. Among these were Senator Evan Bayh (D-IN) and Congressman Rob Andrews (D-NJ), each of whom had expressed openness to an Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bill that incorporated Bush’s valued principles of accountability and greater local flexibility. Here, again, Kress orchestrated their involvement in the pre-inauguration education summit in Austin. On the Republican side of the aisle, Bush’s congressional support was anchored in Congressman John Boehner (R-OH), a former opponent of any federal interference in education, who had recently acquiesced to the Bush education doctrine. In addition to his strong loyalty, Boehner was important because he was serving as the chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor.

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8 Ibid.
9 Debray, *Politics, Ideology, and Education*, 84.
10 Ibid.
In the United States Senate, the President’s intra-party coalition was less consistent in its support. In contrast to Congressman Boehner’s steadfast loyalty, Senator James Jeffords of Vermont had a tenuous relationship with the White House and the Republican Party more generally—mostly over ideology. To a great extent, this fragile relationship posed a potential threat to the NCLB deliberations in the Senate. This relationship was subject to further stress due to the fact that Jeffords was serving as the chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Yet, the Bush administration’s relationship with Jeffords notwithstanding, they found a staunch ally in the Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), who, despite not being a committee chairman, helped to organize and maintain a coalition of moderate Republicans who could support the passage of NCLB.

Ironically, the leaders of the Republican Party proved to be more difficult to convince than might be expected. Initially, the House and Senate Republican leaders resisted Bush’s calls for a bipartisan bill, on the grounds that it violated the conservative principle of smaller government and local and state autonomy. Over time, as the bill gained momentum and the White House continued to push the legislation forward, the Republican leaders silenced their criticism of the legislation and began to focus their efforts on molding the bill, primarily through amendments, to better accommodate their concerns. While their criticisms were largely kept behind closed doors, it was evident to many observers that the party leadership would have preferred an aggressive and more conservative approach to education.

Bush’s efforts at coalition building were greatly aided by two important strategies. First, he made a consistent effort to demonstrate his willingness to compromise, even on issues important to the conservative base. Second, and closely related, Bush’s previous efforts to re-frame the debate about public education inspired an unparalleled degree of convergence of

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otherwise disparate interests. As one observer noted, "cooperation among legislators was made possible by the willingness to move past divisive issues—itself possible because the conversation was newly framed by a common vocabulary centered on 'accountability.'" Furthermore, "accountability was hard to be against, but elastic," and as a result the new language for education could be used to generate support from political moderates and centrists who might otherwise vote strictly along party lines.

Beyond the decision to build a coalition of congressional leaders, the Bush administration made an obvious effort, in a more general sense, to establish a clearly bipartisan relationship with Congress. Upon entering office, Bush enjoyed a rare occurrence in American politics—single party-rule. Although technically tied in the Senate, the Republican Party controlled both houses of Congress as well as the executive branch. Not surprisingly, the conservative elements of the Republican Party began clamoring for a wave of conservative policy changes. In addition, conservative members of Congress recommended that the president try to force through a "conservative bill that contained vouchers, block grants, and other controversial items that Democrats strongly opposed."

In spite of the pressure, Bush maintained his distance from the Republican base, and publicly acknowledged the permanence of a federal role in education and remained publicly and privately committed to working on bipartisan education legislation.

Although Bush's motivations were varied, a few overriding considerations were apparent. First, in spite of the narrow majority, Bush realized that a no-compromise approach might seriously jeopardize the bill's chances of enactment. Second, and just as important, a bipartisan approach

13 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
was more likely to gain the support of the American public, who would be both thankful for reform and—once mobilized—able to keep the legislation moving forward in spite of obstacles. With these considerations in play, Bush confidently moved in the direction of progress and avoided the temptation of partisanship.

Another important decision the Bush administration made during the earliest days in office was to depart from the usual means of introducing legislation to Congress. Traditionally, when the president had a piece of legislation that was to be made a priority in Congress, the appropriate staff or department would actually draft the language of the proposed bill. Yet, on his second full day in office, Bush sent Congress an “education blueprint based on his campaign proposals.”

This blueprint was composed with the help and guidance of his team of education policy experts during the abbreviated transition. The document, which was nearly thirty pages long, provided Congress with an overview of Bush’s education proposal.

Although seemingly only a subtle break from the conventional process, the blueprint represented an important token of faith on the part of the incoming Bush administration. Rather than hand down the specific language for a bill, Bush instead offered an “outline,” which could be molded and changed by Congress. Furthermore, the letter from the president, which accompanied the blueprint, expressed Bush’s promise that “bipartisan education reform will be the cornerstone of my Administration.”

On the subject of the blueprint specifically, President Bush noted that the outline it presented “does not encompass every aspect of the education reforms I plan to propose,” but that it would instead “serve as a framework from which we can all work together, Democrat, Republican, and Independents, to strengthen our elementary and

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
secondary schools."¹⁹ Bush closed the letter with the assurance that he was “very open to working with Members of Congress who have additional ideas to meet our shared goals."²⁰ To a great degree, as his letter sought to make clear, the blueprint was intended to invite additional ideas, demonstrate the administration’s commitment to compromise, and further establish a bipartisan tone for the legislative session.

In another sense, the decision to send the blueprint had a few important practical implications. As Patrick McGuinn notes, “Bush retained the flexibility to negotiate with all of the different players as Congress debated ESEA reform.”²¹ Furthermore, “by focusing on broad goals such as accountability and flexibility and indicating his willingness to compromise from the outset, Bush could claim credit for negotiating in a bipartisan manner and for whatever legislation Congress ultimately approved.”²² On the other hand, the blueprint offered a means of forcing Congress to “shoulder the blame for any breakdowns in the process.”²³ Due to the fact that the Bush administration had placed the burden of crafting the legislation’s language on the members of Congress, Bush was able to advocate the basic principles that had, to a large extent, allowed him to be elected to the presidency without being swept up into the minutiae that had doomed previous efforts. In contrast with Clinton’s forwarding of draft legislation, the Bush administration had managed to strike a balance between active involvement and letting Congress do the work of lawmaking.²⁴ Ultimately, this strategy would prove to be pivotal as Bush sought to reduce the tensions between the most conservative and most liberal members of Congress. In sum, Bush’s decision to give Congress a blueprint instead of a draft of legislation and his visible

¹⁹ Ibíd.
²⁰ Ibíd.
²¹ McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 168.
²² Ibíd.
²³ Debray, Politics, Ideology, and Education, 86.
²⁴ Ibíd.
commitment to creating a bipartisan coalition were critical first steps in the advancement of NCLB.

NCLB’s Initial Makeup and the Committee Process

With regard to the actual substance of the plan, it was, at its inception, mostly an amalgamation of previous Republican and Democratic policies, with a renewed emphasis on accountability. More specifically, the blueprint proposed that states be required to create annual testing, establish minimum standards, incorporate measures of teacher quality, and devise a state and federal mechanism for addressing the problem of failing schools. According to one observer, the content of the blueprint was a combination of “several competing proposals made in the waning years of the Clinton administration.” According to an aide to Senator Joe Lieberman, “Bush essentially plagiarized our plan.” The net effect was that most members of Congress found a substantial portion of the plan worth supporting. In the end, the many facets of the blueprint broadened its appeal and aided Bush’s attempts to create a coalition of “Republicans, New Democrats and Democratic regulars.”

The plan’s greatest potential for partisan conflict was concentrated in two provisions. The first, which established a voucher system where students in failing schools would be able to transfer to private schools, was tremendously popular among conservative think tanks, voters, and members of Congress. As Patrick McGuinn observes, “many conservative groups and members of Congress saw the Republican control of Congress and the White House as a historic

25 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 168.
26 Ibid.
27 Rudalevige, “The Politics of No Child Left Behind.”
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
opportunity to pass voucher legislation." However, the Democratic base had been firm in its opposition to any voucher plan for more than a decade. Second, the original plan for legislation contained a proposal for block grants, which would in effect allow states to exercise a great deal of autonomy in distributing federal money to public education. As with vouchers, the liberal wing of the Democratic Party was decidedly against any variation of the block grant proposal, while conservative groups were adamantly in support. Due to these potentially divisive provisions, the early stages of NCLB deliberations were fraught with setbacks and near-catastrophes.

As a result of these tensions, the Bush administration encountered a difficult dilemma. On one hand, the White House had an obligation to its conservative base, which ardently supported vouchers and block grants, and would most likely be disappointed and disillusioned if they were not included. On the other hand, it was also clear that an uncompromising commitment to vouchers could doom both the coalition Bush had labored to create and any hope for comprehensive education reform. In the end, Bush opted for a strategy of compromise and consensus. The administration, as Undersecretary of Education Eugene Hickok put it, was unwilling "to sacrifice accountability on the altar of school choice." Although the Bush administration would draw the ire of conservative lawmakers, interest groups, and pundits, the decision to stay the course of compromise would have a profound effect on the shape and outcome of the legislation.

After a series of efforts concentrated at persuading key members of both parties, the Bush administration began to carefully use the newly established coalition in an effective fashion. One of the most important ways in which this was accomplished was through the establishment

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30 McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind*, 173.
31 Rudalevige, "The Politics of No Child Left Behind."
of an ad hoc negotiating committee in the Senate, one which would include members of both parties, some of whom had no affiliation with the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (HELP). In most cases, the responsibility for molding a particular piece of legislation was the carefully guarded right of the relevant committee—but not with NCLB. Instead of the usual process, the replacement committee was created in order to produce a substitute bill that would generally appeal to the Senate’s various factions.\(^\text{32}\) During this same time, the HELP committee was laboring to create a version of the bill that would be acceptable to the various factions in Congress. In reality, however, the committee was bypassing many of the most controversial issues to produce a higher margin on the vote out of committee. Furthermore, the committee was, in effect, being virtually replaced by the negotiating committee which was in more regular and consequential communication with the White House, much to the chagrin of Chairman Jeffords.\(^\text{33}\) Yet, for the most part, similar to his experiences as governor, Bush’s initial period of governing was largely defined by his observable commitment to establishing a cooperative relationship with congressional Democrats.

By March 2001, the Bush Administration and the coalition it had assembled managed to dampen the forces of conflict by continuing to stress the importance of the ultimate goal and underscoring the value of bipartisan compromise. As a result, the legislation’s supporters had a much easier time navigating the bill through the House than the Senate. This was primarily because the House had more focused leadership, a stronger consensus on the committee level, and a less deliberative-friendly set of rules and procedures.\(^\text{34}\) While the Republican leaders in the House were able to restrict the number of amendments Democrats could offer, the Senate leadership lacked the procedural mechanism to do so.

\(^\text{32}\) Debray, \textit{Politics, Ideology and Education}, 87.
\(^\text{33}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{34}\) Ibid.
Also during this time, the White House and the Republican leadership's tenuous relationship with Senator Jeffords, then serving as chairman of the HELP committee, was further strained as the Bush Administration chose to deal with Kress's non-committee negotiating group instead of HELP. Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott was applying increasing pressure on Jeffords to have the bill out of committee by the end of March. Remarkably, through a combination of persuasion and coercion, the initial House and Senate versions of NCLB were in fact moved out of committee by the end of March. Yet, in an unconventional but anticipated twist, Kress's negotiating committee unanimously enacted a manager's amendment, which supplanted an almost entirely new bill, also known as a "substitute bill," in the place of the HELP committee's version.

The Floor: Logrolling and Deal-Making on a Larger Scale

Shortly after the bill reached the Senate floor, a series of setbacks nearly destroyed any hope for the education reform legislation. The first of these occurred in April, when Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) became a universal point of disagreement among policymakers. The AYP principle was intended to serve as the benchmark by which to measure schools and districts over a period of time. In its original form, the Senate version of the bill "required annual progress by each individual subgroup of students in such a way that all would become proficient within ten years." For the White House and many members of Congress, these standards represented an important measure of accountability and means for encouraging progress. As a result, these individuals tended to support a tough and ambitious set of guidelines, which would,

35 Ibid., 88.
36 Ibid.
38 Rudalevige, "The Politics of No Child Left Behind."
in effect, ensure a swift and decisive response from state governments. Meanwhile, these same actions had been viewed with increasing skepticism and concern on the part of state governments, which “worried that too many schools would be identified as failing—an expensive, and embarrassing, label.” Furthermore, Senator Jeffords and his staff began an awareness campaign about the possible unintended consequences that could result from the original wording for the standards. As one observer noted, the Jeffords staff propagated “analyses claiming that a majority of schools, even wealthy ones in states that invest heavily in education, would ‘fail’ under the bill’s formula.” Additionally, academic researchers from UCLA, Dartmouth, and the Congressional Research Service also issued stern warnings about the current makeup of the AYP standards, primarily because their research had shown that even the best states would have failed to meet the mark in more than ninety percent of the schools. These conflicting notions of appropriate standards strained the coalition’s commitment to compromise, as the many parties to this conflict struggled to find common ground.

Meanwhile, this same point of contention was easily avoided in the House. Congressman Miller, who had long been an advocate of stringent accountability provisions, showed no hesitation in his support of the stricter version of the AYP standards; in fact, he was among the most vocal supporters of the legislation and a major reason why the House bill contained stronger wording. In the end, the White House was able to mitigate the fierce struggle over AYP in the Senate by facilitating a compromise. The plan would now allow twelve years for the subgroups to reach proficiency and create a system whereby progress was averaged over three years, thus ensuring that schools were not judged on the basis of a single point, but rather on the

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Debray, Politics, Ideology, and Education, 98.
While it managed to save the coalition in the short-term, the compromise had ensured a conflict between the House and Senate versions of the bill during the conference deliberations. As mentioned earlier, perhaps the most decisively partisan component proposed by the legislation was vouchers (or "school choice") which would allow students to transfer from failing schools to private schools with the support of public money to pay for their tuition. School choice was a nagging issue throughout the deliberations because of the strong reactions it invited from the two parties. By the spring of 2001, vouchers were a favorite of conservative policymakers, who had spent the better part of the last decade advocating their inclusion in the public education system. During the debate on vouchers, Congressman Boehner remarked "that we build ships with lifeboats, but we don't give kids a way out of dangerous, poor-performing schools," a comment which encapsulated the conception of vouchers among many conservative Republicans.

Meanwhile, for most Democrats, support for vouchers was almost nonexistent. Ideologically, many Democrats viewed vouchers as means of weakening public education, a vehicle for overcoming the wall of separation between church and state, and as a policy that would hurt, not help, the worst schools. The Democratic opposition to vouchers was further entrenched because of the strong opposition expressed by the party's traditional constituencies. The National Education Association (NEA), for example, still publicly decries vouchers "because they divert essential resources from public schools to private and religious schools, while offering no real 'choice' for the overwhelming majority of students." During the congressional deliberations over No Child Left Behind, it became increasingly clear that

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42 Ibid.
43 Debray, Politics, Ideology and Education, 94.
vouchers would be a deal-breaker for many Democrats for reasons of both politics and principle. The tension created by the Republicans’ ardent support of vouchers and the Democrat opposition ensured that the legislation and its backers would have to carefully navigate this contentious issue if it were to ever have a chance at passage.

The debate in Congress was shaping up to be a fierce battle. In the House, Boehner led the way on vouchers in spite of intense opposition from Democratic lawmakers and interest groups. Several of Boehner’s efforts to insert “school choice” provisions, were parried during the committee process by Democrats like Miller.45 Later, on the House floor, Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX) offered similar amendments but each met the same fate as Boehner’s earlier efforts. At this same time, the debate in the Senate had gone a slightly different route. Similar to the House, the effort to adopt vouchers provisions in the committee deliberations was unsuccessful. Seeing that a thoroughgoing school choice program would not garner enough votes, Senator Gregg sought to establish a trial “school choice” plan, which would allow for a provisional voucher program in three states.46 Ultimately, Gregg’s proposed amendment met defeat on the floor of the Senate. Yet, in the end, his attempt did initiate a bipartisan effort to find a compromise.

The compromise came in the way of supplemental services and at the urging of Bush and his advisers, who evidently preferred the passage of the bill to extended debate over the inclusion of vouchers. Supplemental services “allowed federal dollars to be used by the parents of students in schools not showing improvements for three years to purchase tutorial services from non-school-based providers, including religious groups and private companies.”47 According to one education expert, the supplemental services provision appealed to conservatives because “for

45 Debray, Politics, Ideology, and Education, 94.
46 Ibid, 95.
47 Ibid.
those who think that choice and competition are the key to school reform, the afterschool intervention is the most promising vehicle currently available." For moderates and liberals, the supplemental services agreement offered a way of avoiding conflicts between sparring groups like the teachers’ unions and conservative think-tanks who had, at least in part, intensified the debate on vouchers to the point where compromise was impossible even for a trial school choice program. In this way, the Bush administration and the advocates of NCLB in Congress managed to head off another major obstacle, while still maintaining the coalition’s general support for the legislation.

Although initially well received, testing provisions became the source of criticism once the legislative session entered its first summer. The legislation’s use of testing as a means of ensuring accountability was a source of agitation for many in state government. Governors, state legislators, and a handful of interest groups, openly challenged the efficacy of federally mandated testing and questioned whether testing alone could improve performance. Ironically, the congressional opposition to testing was mostly composed of members on opposite ends of the political spectrum, many of whom were still in disagreement over the inclusion of vouchers. In the House, opponents of testing introduced the Frank-Hoekstra amendment, which would have completely removed the annual testing requirements from NCLB.

As the criticism of the testing provisions intensified and the supporters of the Frank-Hoekstra amendment rallied support, the Bush Administration countered with a carefully executed, multifaceted reaction. In response, the Bush Administration deployed adviser Karl

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49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
Rove and chief of staff Andrew Card in an attempt to personally convince congressional Republicans that testing was both a positive and a necessary inclusion in No Child Left Behind.  

Meanwhile, Secretary of Education Rod Paige wrote a strongly worded response in which he referred to the opponents of testing as “apologists for a broken system.” Sensing the possibility of a frustrating defeat, Bush also used his bully pulpit to rally the American people behind his preferred version of NCLB, by making public speeches and pressuring Congress. Ultimately, the Bush Administration’s efforts proved to be enough, and the Frank-Hoekstra amendment was eventually defeated.

With all of these contentious issues coming to the forefront of congressional debate in such a close span of time, it was no surprise that the content of the House and Senate bills diverged. In instances where the House and Senate pass different versions of the same bill, a conference committee is assembled to create a single, commonly worded piece of legislation which is voted on again in each chamber. Even in April, several weeks before the original legislation was voted on, it became increasingly clear that the conference committee would play a vital role in devising the shape of the final bill.

In the midst of this web of compromises, bargains, and negotiations, Senator Jeffords made the historic decision to switch his party allegiance from Republican to Democrat, thus providing the Democratic Party with a narrow, one-vote majority in the Senate. Although Jeffords had always been a moderately liberal Republican, his departure was in part because of the Bush administration’s legislative strategies for No Child Left Behind. By overtly prioritizing its negotiations with Senator Gregg and downplaying the importance of Jeffords’ role, the Bush Administration had inspired feelings of alienation in Jeffords. Most importantly, Jeffords was

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51 Debray, *Politics, Ideology and Education*, 104.
52 Ibid.
frustrated with the White House’s treatment of special education. So much so that, as one observer notes “when he learned that the final Bush budget plan offered no new education spending at all...he knew he had to bid the GOP farewell.”

Although the Bush administration’s legislative strategy was partially responsible for the Jeffords switch, the prospects for passing No Child Left Behind were little changed. Through a keen combination of foresight and luck, the Bush administration’s relationship with Kennedy would now be even more important as Kennedy became the new chairman of the HELP committee. As a result of the strong relationship forged between Kennedy and Bush, the Democratic takeover of the Senate had only minimal effects on the immediate outcome of the NCLB deliberations. But, the Jeffords switch also meant that the Democrats would have greater leverage in the deliberations. The full extent of the change would not be realized until the bill had already passed for the first time and once the conference committee convened to decide its final shape.

On May 23, 2001, the proposed No Child Left Behind Act passed in the House with relative ease. Finally, after months of conflict, compromise, and deliberation, the bill passed the Senate on June 14, 2001. NCLB passed the House by a margin of 384-85 and the Senate by 91-8. During July 2001, the House and Senate agreed to let a conference committee settle the differences between the versions of the bill—a necessary step to advancing the legislation further. However, the respective paths to passage were not the only notable differences between the House and Senate bills. In fact, one observer found that there were “some 2,750 divergences between the House and Senate versions,” which would have to be streamlined by the conference

54 Debray, Politics, Ideology and Education, 112.
committee. Thus, even though the legislation managed to survive a number of obstacles and receive a lopsided amount of support, much work remained to be done.

The Conference Proceedings: Sorting Through the Mess

From late July until December, the conference committee would be charged with sorting through the plethora of differences between the two versions of NCLB. The challenge before the conference committee was as multifaceted as it was rigorous. In addition to the obvious difficulties of ironing out more than two thousand differences between the two bills, the conference committee had to maintain the bills’ bipartisan quality. The difficulty in this task lay not in the sheer number of divergences, but rather in the contentious issues which had impeded the bills’ previous progression through Congress. On several divisive issues throughout the bills’ progression, supporters chose to hold off on the inevitable conflict until the conference committee met. Furthermore, the final product ideally also had to be a coherent and workable policy that could be successfully implemented once passed. On top of it all, the Jeffords switch meant that the Republican Party no longer controlled both chambers of Congress—now two parties would be at the negotiating table, each with political interests to represent. Finally, the committee would have to handle the pressure from the American public, the mass media, and the White House as it went about its task. In short, while supporters of NCLB were encouraged by the initial legislative successes, it was clear to many that the conference phase would be critical to the outcome of the No Child Left Behind legislation.

The makeup of the conference committee would have important implications for the result of the negotiations. Once assembled, the committee consisted of an unprecedented thirty-nine members—considerably larger than most others in recent memory and one of the largest

ever appointed. The Senate itself had sent twenty-five members to the negotiating table—which was, as one observer pointed out, made up of an astounding one-fourth of the entire Senate membership. The logic behind the unusually large committee was obviously closely related to the reality that the various coalitions in the House and Senate had to be represented on the conference committee if there was to be any hope of maintaining the diverse, but fragile coalition in Congress.

The committee was composed of the congressional coalition's primary negotiators throughout the previous steps of the legislative process. These individuals included what the media termed the "Big Four": Senator Judd Gregg, Senator Edward Kennedy, Congressman John Boehner, and Congressman George Miller. The other members were the entirety of the Senate's HELP committee, and the committee's chairman, Jim Jeffords. Centrist Democrats like Senator Lieberman (D-CT) and Senator Bayh (D-IN), along with moderate Republicans like Senator Wayne Allard (R-CO), Senator Mike Dewine (R-OH), and Senator John Ensign (R-NV) were also carefully selected because of their importance to the coalition. In total, the House conferees consisted of eight Republicans and six Democrats, each of whom had been critically important in navigating the House version through the first time. Bush's advisers Sandy Kress and Margaret Spelling represented the Administration as unofficial, but de facto, parties to the negotiations. However, as Elizabeth Debray points out, Kress would play a less direct role than he had previously due to "burnt bridges" between Bush's adviser and some congressional members.

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57 Ibid.  
59 Ibid.  
60 Ibid.
Over the next several months, the committee and its staff members would have to meet daily in order to achieve the compromises required to keep the legislation moving forward. One of the first problems that had to be attended to by the conference committee was the grueling task of sorting through the minor differences—numbering around 2,500—that existed between the two versions. The minor problems were primarily related to the wording and sequence differences between the two bills. For instance, one issue was whether to refer to “school completion” or “dropouts,” which indicated exactly the same statistical measure, but carried different connotations.\(^{61}\) While many of these minor differences might seem trivial in retrospect, they would play an important role in the bill’s eventual implementation and thus still had to be addressed. Even though countless hours were spent attending to these divergences, the conference committee had yet to address the larger, more consequential policy differences between the two bills.

One of the most important problems that had to be rectified early on in the negotiations had to do with the same accountability measures and standards which had been such a struggle in the deliberations in the Senate. A midsummer report published by the General Accounting Office (GAO) would again throw deliberations into turmoil. The GAO’s report detailed how “thousand of schools would quickly be labeled ‘in need of improvement’ under the current parameters defining proficiency and adequate yearly progress (AYP)—two of the foundations of NCLB.”\(^{62}\) As a result of their findings, the GAO encouraged the legislators to create a policy that “allowed states more flexibility in defining proficiency and an AYP starting point to help alleviate some of the difficulties state education systems may face.”\(^{63}\) By August, several

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\(^{61}\) Ibid., 119.


\(^{63}\) Ibid.
interest groups, state and local leaders, and academicians had become vocal opponents of the accountability standards being proposed (in some form or another) in the bill. The consensus seemed to be that the House version was much too strict, while the Senate version was too complex.\textsuperscript{64}

One of the greatest criticisms of voiced by the bill's opponents was that both versions of the bill required an unyielding trend of progress, year-after-year, or else the states would face punishment.\textsuperscript{65} Not surprisingly, this implication drew the ire of a large number of state and local leaders who feared the possibility of being held to an impossible standard. Yet, in spite of the severity and the volume of these concerns, the blowback led the "House and Senate conferees to tinker with their formulas, not to abandon the model altogether."\textsuperscript{66} In recognition of the importance of setting both appropriate standards for progress and a reasonable timeframe, the conference committee set about working to attain a compromise between the various parties.

9/11 and the Galvanization of Domestic Policymaking

At this point in the negotiations, tensions were running high and the negotiators' patience was being pushed to the breaking point. Although the year had seen much progress on education reform, the deliberations were at an impasse. That August, Bush responded with the "Back to School, Moving Forward" tour, which had Secretary Paige, Deputy Secretary of Education William Hansen, and Under Secretary of Education Eugene W. Hickok traveling the nation and meeting with parents, students, teachers, and business leaders in an effort to mobilize public

\textsuperscript{64} Debray, \textit{Politics, Ideology, and Education}, 88.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 116.
support for education reform. As the events were timed to coincide with the beginning of the school year. In a speech at the first of these events, Paige proclaimed: “as our children return to school to capture the promise of new opportunities to learn and grow, we must embrace these simple principles for reform.” As Bush and the Department of Education officials traveled the country, they sought to encourage not only America’s children back to school, but also its legislators back to work after a lengthy August recess. Yet by September negotiations seemed to be at a standstill.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Bush was scheduled to appear at Emma E. Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida. Originally, this day was supposed to be spent promoting the president’s education policy. As one newspaper put it, “Sept. 11 was supposed to be what White House strategists call a ‘soft’ day—no big speeches, just a few events to highlight Bush’s education plans.” However, in what would prove to be a crucial moment in Bush’s presidency, Chief of Staff Andrew Card interrupted Bush’s event to inform him that “America is under attack.” Then, symbolically, Bush left the classroom to see the media reports and consult with his advisers. Minutes later, Bush returned to the classroom, with a new course and a new focus for his presidency. Bush proclaimed to the students and to the press that “this is a difficult moment for America” and that “terrorism against our nation will not stand.”

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68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
the school to prepare for war. In a matter of minutes, the president’s number one priority had shifted from education to national security.

Although the order of his priorities had seen a dramatic shift, education was anything but forgotten. In fact, the terrorist attacks actually quickened the pace of the deliberations and stiffened the resolve of the congressional negotiators. As Bush observed in his speech on the night of September 11, “The functions of our government continue without interruption. Federal agencies in Washington which had to be evacuated today are reopening for essential personnel tonight, and will be open for business tomorrow.”73 The message was clear: America must show its strength by continuing undeterred. In the post-9/11 political arena, partisanship was viewed with skepticism. In this newly unified context, which demanded a legislative victory as a symbol of triumphant defiance, No Child Left Behind was the perfect solution. As a result, the conferees quickly redoubled their efforts and work was again underway, this time with profoundly greater motivation for success. After September 11, the conference committee still had to resolve differences in overall funding authorization levels, funding requirements, and a few miscellaneous policies in order to reach a final compromise bill.

One of the most pressing discrepancies that still had to be negotiated was the striking difference in funding between the House and Senate versions of the bill. For instance, as passed, the Senate bill appropriated an increase in federal education spending of $14.4 billion.74 The House bill only called for an increase of $4.6 billion—less than one third of the Senate’s proposed increase.75 Other funding divergences existed with special education, for which the

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75 Ibid.
Senate bill had required full funding and the House bill had offered none. Not surprisingly, the Senate and the Republican House eventually came into tension with one another over the sharp funding differences. The Bush administration sought to downplay this friction. Ultimately, however, the conflict became a public spectacle when, in an attempt to garner media attention, Senators Ted Kennedy, Tom Harkin, and Chuck Hagel helped transport the families of children with disabilities to Capitol Hill—on the very day the conferees were to vote on the subject. Although the Democratic proposal on mandatory full funding for special funding was met with the bipartisan support of the Senate conferees, Bush lobbied the House conferees and was able to defeat the measure by a narrow margin.

In another conflict over funding, the Bush administration also managed to negotiate a compromise for the K-12 funding authorization levels to be granted in the final bill. The final amount of $26.5 billion represented an almost even split between what the president had recommended and what the Democrats proposed. In each of these cases, Bush’s compromise-focused leadership, in conjunction with the feelings of unity and urgency, which stemmed from America’s reaction to 9/11, helped to avoid the potentially grave consequences of these disagreements.

As Elizabeth Debray has noted, funding was not the only obstacle to overcome. The agreement on the need for education reform was not enough to settle the differences between Democrats and Republicans on social issues. In recognition of the fact that funding was the greatest leverage with state and local education officials, Republicans and Democrats on the committee each proposed a series of conditions, which would have to be met in order for states

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76 Debray, Politics, Ideology, and Education, 119.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 117.
and localities to receive federal appropriations for education. The Republican version of these conditions were: "to require schools to show that they were not banning constitutionally protected school prayer, to withhold funding from districts discriminating against the Boy Scouts or groups that barred homosexuals, and to assure nondiscrimination in hiring religious providers of supplemental services." Democrats on the conference committee countered by offering an amendment which would require "provisions preventing supplemental service providers affiliated with religious groups or churches from discriminating against both children and employees." Although seemingly inconsequential, the stakes were high: vast portions of funding could have been lost by school districts not in compliance. As a result, tensions were heightened as well. In the end, the crisis was resolved and a compromise attained, though it was reported that "the civil rights provisions could have killed the whole process."

Working mostly through its close alliance with Senator Gregg, the Bush administration managed to advance its vision for block grants in public education, although in a drastically reduced form. Other issues like teacher quality and "corrective action" were deliberated during the post-September 11th conference committee phase, and for the most part resolved through some variation of old-fashioned horse-trading. Throughout these deliberations, the White House became increasingly distant from the negotiations. As one observer noted, "September 11 may have replaced compassionate conservatism as the defining theme of Bush's presidency." Suddenly, "the George W. Bush of the campaign trail who had reached out to moderate swing

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
voters with soft issues such as education,” became the “post-September 11 Bush who emphasized law and order and security concerns that had been the staple of Republicans in the past.” With a new hierarchy of priorities, President Bush now seemed to be more interested in quickly passing an education reform bill than in shaping its contours.

Finally, after several heated arguments, near-splits, and months of deliberation, the conference committee concluded its work on December 11. On December 13, the more-structured and less debate-friendly House adopted the conference report by a vote of 381-41. Meanwhile, the Senate managed to pass the report on December 18, by an equally impressive margin of 87-10. Just after the holidays, on January 8, 2002, the years of work and effort culminated in Hamilton, Ohio, where Bush signed No Child Left Behind, the most thoroughgoing education reform legislation in almost four decades.

**Conclusion**

From the day that he took office, George W. Bush was determined to accomplish his goal of national education reform. True to the style he forged in Texas, the president was careful to limit his goals to a few major priorities and then relentlessly pursue them until they were attained. He also maintained his commitment to bipartisan policymaking—at least on education policy. Although he was not directly involved in the legislative process the same way that President Johnson had done with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Bush managed to strike a balance between his strong personal commitment to education and his strategy of allowing Congress to be responsible for filling in the details. Despite the potentially disruptive effects of September 11, Bush did manage to frame the NCLB legislation in a way that

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88 Ibid.
prioritized a renewed commitment to passage. However, the long-term effect of September 11
was to permanently change the focus of the Bush administration from domestic to foreign policy.
Chapter IV: Political Leadership as a Force for Change

Although the substance of this case deals almost exclusively with policymaking, the lessons it provides are also applicable to an understanding of political leadership. The most pertinent of these lessons can be separated into two closely related categories. First, the example of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) underscores an important point about the nature of leadership, especially presidential leadership. More specifically, this case demonstrates a number of important points about the interplay between leadership and situational factors, also known as the situation-leadership dynamic. Although it is commonly recognized that both the situation and leaders affect political outcomes, this example suggests a model for understanding the relationship between these two factors. Second, the case of No Child Left Behind also provides a variety of lessons about the practice of political leadership—namely a few select ways in which leaders can attempt to shape the situation through leadership.

Perspectives on Leadership and the Situation

Robert Tucker once observed that “for good or ill, leadership influences events.” This simple, yet critically important observation serves as the cornerstone of this examination of the passage of NCLB. Although the previous chapters have detailed the series of events and developments which led up to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, this chronicle only represents an explanation of how the events unfolded, not why. For some observers the root causes of NCLB’s passage seem obvious: the context in which it was passed happened to be one of unprecedented policy convergence. Put another way, these observers believe that the alignment in education policy views meant that everyone more or less agreed on the proposed

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policy and thus worked to ensure its passage. Nevertheless, as this paper has endeavored to establish, the causes for NCLB were far more complex than that, especially when considering the unprecedented array of challenges and changes President Bush experienced during the period leading up to NCLB’s enactment in 2002.

While the concept of a political and situational convergence implies a favorable context for reform, the truth is that many situational factors were actually impediments to progress. For instance, after weathering the protracted election of 2000, Bush had to contend with a shortened transition period, an evenly divided Senate, and accusations of administrative incompetence and electoral fraud. Later, he would have to endure Senator James Jeffords’ historic party switch, which ceded control of the Senate to the Democratic Party. Then, just as his prized education bill entered the conference committee phase of negotiations, the unexpected carnage of the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001 changed the American political landscape. As these examples suggest, the path toward passage was strewn with obstacles, which required leadership in order for the bill to move forward. Ultimately, the enactment of comprehensive education reform was, first and foremost, the result of leadership. This, however, is not to suggest that the situational factors were irrelevant. In fact, the central lesson that this case study demonstrates is that political outcomes are contingent upon how leaders cultivate, mold, or otherwise react to the situation at hand. A good point of departure by which to illustrate this principle can be found in the classic anecdote of the Gordian Knot.

As the story goes, there was a knot in the ancient city of Gordium, which had no end and as such was perceived as impossible to untie. However, it was prophesied that any individual who could untie the knot would become the king of Asia. While traveling through the region,
Alexander the Great went to see the legendary puzzle. According to Leo Braudy, Alexander was up to the challenge:

Either by slashing it apart with his sword (depending on the story) or pulling out the linchpin that held yoke and pole together, Alexander cut the Gordian knot. By stepping outside the traditional terms of the puzzle, Alexander had created a new solution. It was a scene that immediately became proverbial, propelling him once again beyond the usual triumphs of kings and conquerors into the realm of the imagination.  

In this parable, the influence of the situation appears to weigh against Alexander, because the puzzle is virtually impossible within the context of using orthodox methods. Rather than accept the confines of the situation, however, Alexander ingeniously overcame the obstacle and managed to use the situation to advance his goals.

Especially with intricate issues like healthcare or education, “slicing the knot” tends to be an overstatement. Thus, while rarely this dramatic, the relationship between leadership and the situation has a profound influence on the outcome of the political process. Rather than allowing the situation to dictate the outcome of conflicts or policy debates, leaders transform these situational factors to advance their goals. Although not all leaders are successful in their attempts, the fact is that outcomes, especially in politics, are the result of multiple leaders and followers reacting to the situation. In the case of NCLB, legislators, interest groups, and the White House each sought to capitalize on a favorable situation in order to advance their preferred version of education reform. In the end, the final product was the result of both leadership and situational influences.

Further insight on the situation-leadership dynamic is provided by Robert Tucker in *Politics as Leadership*. Tucker begins his work by alluding to Sidney Hook’s conceptualization of leadership, which was based upon two contrasting notions of leaders. According to Tucker,

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3 Ibid.
Hook believed that there were two types of leaders, the eventful and event-making hero, and that each appeared at the "forking points" of history. The difference between these two individuals was that the eventful hero was merely the "one who happens to be present at a turning point," while the event-making hero was the "one who causes events to take a different course from that which they would likely have taken if he had not been present." In essence, Hook’s distinction was founded on the premise that leaders are distinguished based on their reaction or non-reaction to the situation at hand.

Later in his book, Tucker makes a caveat to this dichotomy, stating that history is "hardly divisible into the few ‘event-making’ ones who impose their personalities and make it go their way and, on the other hand, the ‘eventful’ ones who only help it follow the course it was going to take anyhow." Instead, Tucker seems to believe that these types of leaders exist on a continuum, with variations in different contexts. But for the purposes of this analysis, it seems more reasonable to differentiate on the basis of leadership style, than on the types of leaders. In other words, because leaders are dynamic and their style of leadership or tactics may change from situation to situation, it is more instructive to apply these concepts to leadership rather than simply to leaders. For example, President Bush’s leadership during the education reform negotiations was defined by his tendencies to favor bipartisanship, compromise, and to employ careful political framing. At the same time, his approach to passing the proposed cut in income tax was considerably more about strength than finesse. Thus, the case of NCLB suggests the need to differentiate according to leadership style, not type of leader.

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4 Tucker, Politics As Leadership, 30.
5 Ibid., 28.
6 Ibid., 30.
With regard to the specific varieties of leadership, the distinction between eventful and event-making remains useful. In this case, eventful leadership represents the conventional approach; that is, trying to solve the problem within the strict confines of the present situation. Meanwhile, event-making leadership represents the imaginative use of what is available in order to overcome the situational obstacles. More specifically, event-making leadership is focused, creative, adaptive, and considerate of the long-term implications of particular actions whereas eventful leadership tends to be the opposite. In the case of the former, the situation defines the bounds of action, while in the latter the leader’s response shapes both the situation and the outcome. To a great extent, the outcomes along the road to the passage of NCLB were directly related to how successfully Bush managed the situation—in other words, how well he was able to employ event-making leadership.

One competing model is provided by Stephen Skowronek in *The Politics Presidents Make*. Skowronek theorizes that the leadership-situation dynamic is considerably more focused on the type of situation. In what is the central tenet of his argument, Skowronek argues that “a president’s political authority turns on his identity vis-à-vis the established regime; warrants for exercising the powers of the office vary depending on the incumbent’s political relationship to the commitments of ideology and interest embodied in preexisting institutional arrangements.”

Skowronek combines this thesis with what he calls “the age-old patterns of breakthrough and breakdown” to explain the behavior of presidents and the outcomes of their tenure. Thus, Skowronek’s conceptualization of this dynamic is founded upon the notion that leadership is defined against the larger backdrop of the situation.

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9 Ibid.
The fundamental difference between Tucker's model and Skowronek's model is not found in their composition, for they include the same elements, but rather in the order of causality. With Tucker's depiction of this dynamic, the reader is instructed that the situation happens and is changed in accordance with the leadership actions taken by the pertinent leaders. Conversely, Skowronek's theory explains the same dynamic as the function of patterns, suggesting that leadership is secondary to the prevailing power of the situation. Although each contention is informative, this examination of No Child Left Behind strongly supports Tucker's configuration. Throughout the events leading up to the passage of NCLB, the defining aspects of the case were shaped primarily by the leaders' relative ability to manage the situation. For better or worse, when situational factors threatened to impede progress or have a negative effect on the quality of NCLB, the continuation or cessation of progress was directly related to President Bush's reaction.

The Situation-Leadership Dynamic and How it Shaped NCLB

Due to the fact that the enactment of NCLB was such a formidable challenge, the case lends itself to an analysis of this dynamic. The three turning points which best illustrate these aspects are first, the campaign; second, the legislative negotiations; and third the impact of the 9/11 attacks. Bush's variations between eventful and event-making leadership in the course of these examples, had a profound effect on the final shape and outcome of NCLB.

Toward the beginning of his presidential campaign, Bush's goal of reforming public education was inextricably linked to his efforts to become president. To a great extent, these aims were made more attainable because of a relatively favorable blend of situational factors. At first, the favorable context was primarily result of good luck. For example, the fact that the
Republican Party was undergoing a transition meant the lack of extensive intra-party opposition. In a different context with a different intra-party dynamic, Bush would have had to endure a divided base and a limited source of fundraising, which could have prevented his ascension to the presidency.

While the situation tended to play to Bush’s strengths for much of the campaign, Gore suffered the opposite fate. As mentioned above, Gore benefited from Clinton’s popularity and a strong economy, which was enjoying a period of record growth. Due to Gore’s early lead and good footing, few expected Bush to have a strong chance at winning the election. Early on in the race, the conventional wisdom was that “whatever the electoral appeal of Bush’s policies...he was unlikely to defeat Gore.”\(^\text{10}\) After all, “the vice president represented the incumbent administration in a period of prosperity, he had far more governmental experience than Bush, and he was a formidable debater.”\(^\text{11}\) Even though the economy had initially been a positive force for Gore’s candidacy, an economic downturn near the end of the campaign helped erode Gore’s momentum.\(^\text{12}\) Although it was not the direct result of either Bush’s or Gore’s actions, the economy would also help to direct the course of the election in Bush’s favor.

Other factors undoubtedly contributed to the outcome of the campaign. Among these were Bush’s extraordinary success with fundraising and the edge that gave him; Gore’s uninspiring campaign; and—as evidenced by the narrow margins in Florida—luck.\(^\text{13}\) Additionally, Bush was aided by his top-notch advisers who effectively managed many of the campaign’s finer details. For education specifically, Bush was aided throughout the campaign by

\(^{10}\) Greenstein, The George W. Bush Presidency: An Early Assessment, 6.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
Barnett "Sandy" Kress, Margaret Spellings, and Sarah Yousseff, each of whom helped Bush shape a national vision for education based upon the Texas model.  

While this array of situational and miscellaneous factors were important to Bush’s election and the rise of NCLB, his brand of event-making leadership was also responsible for the outcome. The unparalleled national importance of education to the American people during the 2000 presidential campaign had provided Bush an opportunity, but it was up to him to capitalize on it. Not only did Bush seize the chance to advance his presidential campaign, but he also managed to use the situation in order to advance his goal for national education reform. Due to the fact that education was so prominent, Bush’s success, and that of his ideas, could be understood as the result of Bush simply benefiting from a favorable situation—to an extent that is undeniably true. Missing in such a cursory outlook, however, is the fact that it was Bush’s creative leadership that helped to prioritize education the national agenda and that it was his event-making leadership which earned him distinction as the "education candidate."

Over the past few decades, as discussed above, conventional wisdom had held that education was an issue on which Democrats were better positioned to win. But though a reliance on an event-making style of leadership, Bush opted to use the situation for his purposes rather than let it work against him. Instead of accepting the traditional conservative mindset that education was a state and local issue, Bush creatively capitalized on the situation by using experiences in Texas to create a new, conservative education policy at the national level. In a policy decision that defied decades of Republican precedents, Bush not only accepted the role of the federal government in education, he proposed a national plan for public education reform. Then, Bush devoted countless hours, press releases, and speeches to developing and spreading his vision for education. Eventually, as the campaign progressed, Bush began to emerge as the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.}\]
education candidate. Additionally, Bush used the campaign pulpit to advance his candidacy but also his vision for education reform. Thus, Bush’s success in overcoming the twenty-nine percent disparity between the public’s trust in the parties’ abilities to handle education is inexorably linked to his event-making leadership.  

Simply put, there is no single cause of Bush’s victory or of the dramatic ascension of his ideas for education policy. But, in truth, Bush’s chances of success were improved because of situational factors, which placed a great deal of emphasis on his strengths as a candidate. Thus, as Bush began to promote his candidacy based upon his experiences with education reform in Texas and his ideas for nationwide reform, the saliency of education aided his efforts. Yet, it is also clear that Bush’s leadership qualities and actions—in conjunction with carefully manipulated situational changes—were absolutely critical to the successful outcome. So while this context created an opportunity for Bush to apply his experiences in education to the campaign, it was his bold actions that undoubtedly factored into his eventual victory and the success of his ideas for reform. Had Bush been less innovative, less active, or less shrewd in his decision-making during this phase—even if situational factors had been more weighted in his favor—there is little question that Gore could have prevailed, and that NCLB might never have happened. As such, Bush’s leadership was the difference in the outcome of the election. Through his subtle and nuanced brand of “event-making” leadership, Bush was able to lead his party toward a new approach to education and lead the nation toward the development of a new national education policy.

Once Bush’s campaign idea had become an actual policy proposal for Congress, the situation continued to exert a great deal of influence on the bill’s progression. However, not every situational factor had a positive impact on the advancement of No Child Left Behind. In

15 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 158.
these instances the challenge for Bush, his advisers, and the other leaders involved was not so much to capitalize upon the effects of the situation as it was to mitigate them. Such was the case with the potentially disastrous switch of party loyalty by Senator James Jeffords during the summer of 2001. The Republican Party’s loss of a single caucus vote in the U.S. Senate meant that the control of that body would switch to Democratic hands. At this critical point in the deliberations on No Child Left Behind, a Democratic takeover of the Senate posed a potential hazard to further progress. Now, NCLB was in a potentially more vulnerable position, than it had been before. The threat was not that the Democrats would suddenly change their minds about NCLB’s core tenets, but rather that partisan disagreements over the bill’s details, or the spillover from disagreement on another piece of legislation, could lead to the fragmentation of the bill’s supporters. As is obvious, these situational changes left the Bush Administration with little on which to capitalize.

Faced with the potentially dire consequences of this change in situation, Bush and his advisers worked diligently to ensure that the change in control would only have a minimal effect on negotiations. On one hand, the effort to avoid serious delays or disruptions was aided by Bush’s extensive efforts to construct a bipartisan coalition for NCLB and to make the bill agreeable to each of the important blocs in Congress. Additionally, the Bush Administration worked closely with the new Democratic leaders of the Senate to remind them of the bill’s political and policy importance, as well as to gain assurances that the legislation would proceed as planned. Lastly, Bush also made a concerted effort to reiterate both publicly and privately his administration’s commitment to bipartisan compromise.

As a result of Bush’s extensive efforts to consult the members of the coalition and accommodate the newly empowered Democrats, the proceedings continued more or less on
schedule. Although, this example contains less of the dramatic flair that other examples of event-making leadership might include, Bush managed to mitigate the potentially damaging effects of this sudden situational change, which was vital to the bill’s eventual success. Without these preventive measures, it is possible that the deliberations could have erupted into bitter disagreement and stalemate. Thus, while it lacked a theatrical quality, this example demonstrates how subtle, but thoughtful leadership efforts can help a leader shape the situation in a way that allows for the advancement of a goal.

Yet, the most important example of the leadership-situation dynamic’s role in the NCLB proceedings came later that fall. While deliberations were at an impasse in September 2001, the larger political context underwent one of its most substantial changes in a decade. Just as partisan tensions began to affect the deliberations about the NCLB legislation’s future, the enormous ramifications of the September 11 attacks created an entirely new mindset for America’s leaders. The chaos, tragedy, and sorrow that ensued left the world’s most powerful nation in a state of shock. In fact, Bush emerged with a decisive plan for action. Rather than simply mourn those who had been lost, Bush issued a powerful charge, saying that “Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.”

In essence, Bush sought to mold the situation from one of sheer tragedy, to one which served as an impetus for change. Although Bush’s priorities had now shifted substantially, he managed to continue with the goal of passing No Child Left Behind. The Bush Administration’s first post-9/11 action on

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education policy was to encourage the conference committee, which was working to resolve the legislation’s many conflicts, to continue its work with an even greater sense of purpose.17

Meanwhile, this same event would have the long-term effect of causing the Bush administration to change its priorities and place greater trust in the congressional negotiators to craft a workable policy. To a great extent, September 11 helped to unify the lawmakers and negotiators behind the idea of passing the legislation. However, they were not necessarily constructing a well-designed piece of public policy, which would have required considerably more time and effort. The sense of urgency that 9/11 encouraged on Capitol Hill, led lawmakers to agree on a swift set of compromises rather than endure more thorough and lengthy deliberations. For example, Bush reversed his stance on class-size reduction and school construction—going from adamantly advocating their removal, to allowing for their inclusion in the final bill.18 The bottom line was that “Bush and Boehner reiterated their willingness to make the necessary compromises to gain bipartisan passage of the bill.”19 Ultimately, the conference committee renewed its commitment to finding common ground and went on to reach final agreement on the legislation.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks, Bush became more focused on gaining a post-9/11 domestic policy to champion, than he was concerned about its final substance. To a great extent, the reasons for this were well-founded. After the terrorist attacks, the confidence of the American people was shaken, and the success of NCLB would signal to the public and to the world that America’s work was continuing undeterred. Nevertheless, it appears today that the expediency of the original solution has contributed to countless headaches for the federal, state, and local governments during the implementation phase. The hasty series of compromises and

17 McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind*, 176
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
combinations led to the final bill being cobbled together with little coherence and many flaws, which conceivably could have been addressed with greater time. Thus, the example of 9/11’s effect on NCLB provides both an instructive and a cautionary tale for presidential decision-making and political leadership. On one hand, Bush’s ability to channel the powerful situational changes toward something positive, like the renewed commitment to passing NCLB, demonstrate how good leadership can find good even in a terrible situation. On the other hand, this case also demonstrates how the integrity of a leader’s goals can be compromised by a changing situation.

As a whole, the complementary combination of a very favorable situation and a series of carefully orchestrated leadership actions were the primary factors in the successful passage of NCLB. As these examples illustrate, the situation can contribute to opportunities for leaders to innovate, inspire change, or advance a policy. However situational changes can also have the effect of inhibiting these same efforts. Another observation that can be made based on this case study is that the critical determinant in shaping the outcome of a given context is how the leader reacts to these variable and often unpredictable situational changes. Even in cases where the situational change is earth-shattering, the greatest force behind the eventual outcome will be the responses and reactions of leaders. Finally, through the exercise of event-making leadership, leaders can better accomplish goals in spite of situational changes.

Thus, it is clear that the leadership-situation dynamic is a highly intricate relationship, which has a very real effect on the outcomes of politics and policy deliberation. The case of NCLB demonstrates that this dynamic is one of mutual interaction, with leadership shaping the situation and vice versa. In the final analysis, it also suggests that leadership is the principal factor in the equation.
Reacting to the Situation through Political Leadership

In addition to the complex, but critically important lessons that NCLB exposes about the situation-leadership dynamic, this case study also reveals some important lessons about how leaders seek to engage the situation through event-making leadership. While the examples are specific to this case, the principles they establish have broad applicability. These lessons can be divided into four areas: political entrepreneurship; vision; political framing; and strategic focus. Though not exhaustive by any means, these examples highlight a few select strategies George Bush incorporated with the intent of exercising event-making leadership.

Political Entrepreneurship

Politics is often viewed as an arena where partisan leaders fervently struggle to advance their policy agendas. While sometimes accurate, these conceptualizations fail to capture the nature of the debate over education reform detailed in this case. One of the principal reasons why the deliberations tended to avoid this type of divisive tone was that, to a great extent, President Bush circumvented many sources of potential conflict. In the case of NCLB, the president exemplified what could best be termed a policy entrepreneur, as he sought to fashion the existing education policy ideas, which had previously failed to generate a successful outcome, into something that appealed to all of the parties involved. Similar to the parable of the Gordian Knot, Bush recognized that the situation would require a measure of creativity if his goal of education reform were to be accomplished. Instead of composing a piece of legislation that was founded upon partisan and ideological aspects of education policy as had been attempted in the past, Bush synthesized the common ideas for education reform as the logical
starting point. As a result of Bush’s efforts, the NCLB deliberations resembled a model of civility and bipartisanship rather than acrimony.

To a great extent, Bush’s entrepreneurial skills led him to co-opt both Democratic ideas for education policy and the issue of education reform itself. Although “co-opting” might sound negative, such connotations are neither intended nor relevant. This act of “co-opting” policy ideas is a frequent practice in political leadership, though it often goes unrecognized. In fact, leadership in general and political leadership in particular, commonly features leaders making adaptations or innovations as important means of advancing policy solutions. Bush’s tendency to co-opt was, in essence, no different from Bill Clinton’s strategy of “triangulation.” After all, Clinton’s success on welfare reform was achieved through a similar approach.20

As mentioned earlier, Bush’s ideas for education reform at the state level were, in a very real sense, borrowed from his Democratic opponent Ann Richards and then adapted to include a few minor conservative components. In this sense, George Bush represented the consummate policy entrepreneur, as he co-opted Ann Richards’s ideas for education reform and based his successful gubernatorial campaign on those ideas. In addition to employing it during the campaign for governor in 1994, Bush also used a more sophisticated version of this method during the 2000 presidential campaign. As a candidate for president, Bush further exemplified the “entrepreneur” figure by transforming his party’s stance on education, and successfully marketing those ideas to the American public. In many ways, Bush’s actions vastly expanded his importance as a party leader during the campaign, and helped to transform the Republican Party’s conceptions of, and language about education policy, which would soon become valuable sources for winning the public’s confidence.

20 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 14.
For the most part, Bush's political entrepreneurship represented a keen diagnosis of, and reaction to the situation. In a sense, the "entrepreneur" represents a mindset which leaders adopt to adapt the situation in order to make it more favorable for them or their goals. In this case, Bush was aware because of his experiences as governor that education was not exclusively a Democratic issue. Furthermore, he recognized that the national situation was ripe for education reform, but that it would require a measure of innovation to avoid being bogged down in Congress by the same issues that had sunk so many similar efforts in the past. By using his own experiences with education policy and amalgamating them with ideas from various policies, Bush managed to craft a national education policy that was strong on education without sacrificing the conservative doctrine of smaller government. In a sense, Bush's entrepreneurial actions represent the creative element of event-making leadership and demonstrate how vital this aspect is to enacting public policy.

**Vision**

Another important way in which leaders can try to manage the situation, is the through their ability to create, articulate, and advocate a vision. There are many possible meanings of vision, and many skills that contribute to this quality. Here, the term "vision" refers to the leader's interest in a given policy and their ability to compose a set of goals, inspire the interest and support of followers, and place the vision to transform a clear agenda. Bush's strengths and shortcomings with regard to vision had a major bearing on the progression and final shape of NCLB.

Unlike his father, who admittedly never had the "vision thing," George W. Bush was adept at fashioning clear goals for education.\(^{21}\) In fact, throughout his political tenure, Bush exhibited an uncanny ability to devise a simple, but meaningful vision and then apply it to his

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leadership efforts—especially with regard to agenda-setting. For example, early in the campaign, Bush used his vision for education to capitalize on the relative peace and prosperity of the late 1990s to help make education reform a national priority. Also, Bush’s consistent message ensured that the priorities of his presidency were clear from the beginning. In speech after speech, Bush continuously emphasized his commitment to education reform through bipartisan compromise. As Fred Greenstein has noted, “Presidents who stand firm are able to set the terms of discourse...[and] serve as anchors for the rest of the political community.”22 For much of the time leading up to the passage of NCLB, Bush managed to do just that, and as a result Congress and other political insiders tended to go along with his vision for reform—often in spite of some perceived drawbacks.

On another note, Bush’s vision for education had the remarkable quality of being flexible and inclusive. In a sense he managed to present his education reforms in such a way that citizens of every age, class, race, or creed could embrace his ideas as worthwhile. His vision’s inclusive qualities also had the practical effect of encouraging the development of a bipartisan coalition of legislators willing to lend the legislation their support. Although few people credit Bush for his keen sense of empathy, it was critically important to the development of his successful vision for public education. Despite his privileged upbringing, Bush managed to approach education from a variety of perspectives which allowed him to connect his rhetoric with greater breadth and depth than would have otherwise been possible. Furthermore, Bush was able to take these different priorities, concerns, and hopes, and shape them into a simple, yet desirable vision for education policy.

Although Bush’s vision was a source of strength for most of the time he was pushing for NCLB, the September 11 terrorist attacks had a considerably disruptive effect on his vision for education policy.

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22 Ibid.
education. As Greenstein points out, “the costs of vision free-leadership include internally inconsistent programs, policies that have unintended consequences, and sheer drift.”

Although it is unclear how many of NCLB’s unintended consequences or inconsistent programs are the result of Bush’s distracted vision, it is evident that—to an extent—Bush allowed the situation to shape the context for education reform. In a sense, the post-September 11 breakdown in vision for education can be seen as the major cause of some of NCLB’s implementation challenges. As this example suggests, vision, if rigorously maintained, can be a strong mechanism for overcoming situational changes. On the other hand, it also details the perils that can result when the situation is allowed to disrupt a leader’s vision.

Frequently, intellect and intelligence are used as barometers for who would make a good president. Yet, with George W. Bush, who never really appeared to possess an extensive mastery of the ins-and-outs of education policy, it was vision, not brainpower which allowed him to succeed. As Greenstein remarks, Bush’s strength is found in his “propensity to set goals and to be tireless in their pursuit,” which he says was Bush’s “practice before he threw himself more intensively into his responsibilities after September 11 and it remained so thereafter.”

The difference, however, was that the focus of these goals changed as the result of September 11, in manner which made his vision for security the priority to the long-term detriment of his vision for education reform. Thus, as these examples illustrate, vision was vital to Bush’s ability to channel the situation toward success.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 216.
Political Framing

In political leadership, leaders are frequently challenged with the task of marketing their ideas and themselves. This process, which is herein referred to as political framing, is an integral part of presidential leadership. In his analysis of public deliberation and political leadership, David Mathews describes the importance of this concept by saying that “for the public to relate to an issue, it has to be framed in terms of what is valuable to people in their everyday lives, not just in terms of technical considerations.” In essence, framing refers to the way in which leaders present their ideas, policies and goals. In the case of No Child Left Behind, political framing was critically important in the two distinct contexts of campaigning and governance. In each case, Bush’s ability to frame both his political ideals and his education proposals helped advance NCLB.

Bush’s most identifiable framing was of his political ideology, which he packaged as “compassionate conservatism”—a catchphrase he would use to advance his unusual combination of policy priorities. By framing his domestic policy through the lens of compassionate conservatism, Bush managed to capitalize on his education experience and the issue’s unprecedented saliency. Rather than accept the existing Republican language for education, which was founded in the elimination or deconstruction of the existing policies, Bush framed his education policies as the constructive version of conservative education policy. In many ways, Bush’s framing of the No Child Left Behind legislation within the language of his compassionate conservative ideology was similar to President Johnson’s framing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Rather than present ESEA as an education bill,

Johnson helped connect the idea of to his larger social and domestic policy. Bush’s framing achieved a similar balance with NCLB.

In the context of campaigns, political framing is vital to the outcome. Everything from the opponent’s character to the candidate’s agricultural policy is the subject of political framing in one way or another. Especially during campaigns, the line between advocating the public good and political maneuvering is often blurry. Nevertheless, in this instance Bush’s ability to reframe the issue of education into constructive and conservative terms represents a keen act of leadership in addition to demonstrating an acute sense of political awareness. First at the state level, Bush spent a considerable amount of time lobbying legislators, traveling to schools, and persuading the public. Later, as a candidate for president, Bush maintained this strong commitment by visiting schools, making education policy a visible priority, and emphasizing his experience. Bush was recognized because, “for the first time in decades, the Republican candidate knows more about the education issue than his opponent does, has been more directly involved with proposing and implementing education reforms, and is more comfortable expressing deep-felt views on what the next administration should do to improve the nation’s schools.”

Through his creative framing of education policy, Bush undoubtedly increased his own electoral chances and capitalized on the situational factors, the combination of which would prove to be just enough to ensure his election.

From the moment of Gore’s concession speech until the signing of NCLB, Bush and his advisers carefully and consistently packaged a message of reform in education. Through employing traditional means like public addresses and press releases, and more grassroots methods like visiting schools, Bush framed education reform as a top national priority and his solution as the best hope for a meaningful reform. Bush’s efforts at framing were further

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bolstered because of the fact that he backed his words with actions. As president, Bush continued to make a visible commitment to success in education reform. From his first day in office, Bush’s actions as president clearly and sincerely reflected an earnest desire to accomplish change. Whether he was visiting schools or meeting with legislators, Bush’s actions reinforced his message. This continued commitment to education convinced many that his efforts to advance education policy were founded in the public interest and not in mere political gain—an accusation originally circulated by several liberal detractors.

Bush’s framing of NCLB in the days after 9/11 was perhaps his most masterful example. In the time of chaos and tragedy, Bush managed to portray NCLB as a necessary step in getting on with life. When speaking with legislators, Bush framed his education policy as a powerful way to restore the confidence of the American people, which in turn further encouraged the swift enactment of NCLB. Thus, political framing represents a powerful tool for leaders to help shape the situation to suit their goals or purposes. Rather than accept 9/11 as simply a tragedy, Bush seized its profound influence and directed it toward the cause of education reform. This example demonstrates how creative leaders can channel even negative situational factors toward the accomplishment of important goals through the employment of political framing.

Strategic Focus

Although the NCLB legislation was eventually signed into law, the road to passage was not without its perils. On several occasions, the legislation was nearly lost because of unpredictable changes in the situation. One of the key ways in which President Bush managed these potentially hazardous situational changes, was by maintaining his strategic focus. Although it might be understood other ways, here strategic focus refers to a leader’s ability to
concentrate energy and resources toward the execution of a stated goal. In its most basic sense, strategic focus is about the leader's ability to maintain perspective and see the big picture rather than get lost in the details.

In the case of NCLB, Bush's strategic focus saw both highs and lows. As governor, Bush maintained a high level of strategic focus, which allowed him to navigate a statewide education reform through the Texas legislature. This same strength would be exhibited once Bush ran for, and later became President of the United States. Rather than become overly concerned with the trivial aspects of policy or ideology, Bush was able to stress the importance of the larger goal over the minor disagreements. Sometimes Bush's adherence to his strategic focus would require him to compromise by sacrificing a favored project or program—but the benefits were far-reaching. For instance, as documented earlier, with the contentious debate over school choice during the NCLB's original congressional deliberations, Bush, who was personally an advocate of vouchers, sought a compromise through supplemental services in order to ensure the legislation's continued progress. Another example of Bush's willingness to act in accordance with the big picture is evidenced in the way in which No Child Left Behind was introduced to Congress. As noted, the Bush administration communicated an outline of ideas in the form of a blueprint, rather than dictating its preferred policy word for word. This strategy allowed Bush to participate in the debate about the larger policy without becoming bogged down in the minutiae of lawmaking. Thus, as these examples illustrate, Bush's reform efforts were substantially bolstered by his ability to withstand situational changes through his steadfast strategic focus.

Although the majority of Bush's efforts dedicated to NCLB were marked by his disciplined adherence to strategic focus, the events of September 11 had a profound impact on his focus and that of his administration. Compared with his pre-9/11 oversight of the NCLB
proceedings, Bush’s involvement in the negotiation process waned significantly. As noted previously, his reaction to the situation was the deciding factor in how 9/11 shaped NCLB. Instead of stubbornly forging ahead on the same course, Bush instead reapplied his energies toward fighting the global War on Terror. At this point, Bush’s loss of strategic focus was offset by the galvanizing effect of 9/11 on congressional policymakers—especially those seeking a compromise education bill. Although immediate side-effects were avoided as a result, the final composition of the legislation ultimately reflected the way in which it was cobbled together in the months after September 11. Thus, strategic focus emerges as a principal means of withstanding the influence of situational changes. As a result, a steady commitment to strategic focus can be seen as an integral part of event-making leadership.

**Conclusion**

The passage of No Child Left Behind signaled an important moment in American politics. The political paradigm for education had shifted, a comprehensive overhaul of education policy had been successfully enacted, countless obstacles had been overcome, and implementation was soon to emerge as the next great challenge. These changes had been facilitated as a result of the primarily event-making leadership of an unlikely coalition of political figures, led by an “accidental” president. Although most analyses of NCLB have ignored or downplayed the role of leadership in the outcome, the fact is that George W. Bush and the type of leadership he employed were major factors in the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. Furthermore, while there are a number of different models for explaining the interplay between leadership and the situation, the contrast between eventful and event-making leadership provides an important insight into how leaders approach the situation. Although the
situation underwent both minor and profound changes which significantly affected NCLB's chances of passage, Bush and his congressional counterparts successfully managed the situation and persisted in spite of these challenges. Through various strategies that were intended to mold, counteract, harness, or channel the influence of the situation—such as political entrepreneurship, vision, strategic focus, and political framing—Bush sought to apply the situational influence toward his efforts whenever possible, and mitigate its potentially hazardous effects whenever necessary. To a great extent he was successful.
Conclusion: Final Thoughts on Political Leadership and NCLB

Recently, the coverage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has tended to focus on criticizing—or less frequently, complimenting—the law’s effects on the public education system as well as the details of its implementation. Once widely popular, NCLB is now the subject of intense scrutiny and harsh criticism by an array of interest groups, state and local officials, and members of Congress. Even academic studies into the law’s effects have cast doubts about its value, with one recently conducted by the Civil Rights Project concluding that NCLB “hasn't improved reading and mathematical achievement or reduced achievement gaps.” In addition, the interest in, and critiques of NCLB are likely to increase further as the legislation begins to be considered for reauthorization.

At this point, many observers have speculated that the legislation will, in some form or another, be reauthorized. Yet, just as with the original NCLB legislation, it is unlikely that the reauthorization will be attained without an incredible amount of effort, creative leadership, and some measure of good luck. Besides, many obstacles have emerged as the debate on reauthorization approaches. For example, the coalition of congressional moderates that helped to secure the bill’s passage the first time around appears to be crumbling. Furthermore, the ongoing struggles with the war in Iraq and the recent Democratic takeover of both houses of Congress have changed the political dynamic on Capitol Hill. Additionally, a number of Republican members of Congress have begun to withdraw their support for NCLB, including Senator Lamar Alexander of Louisiana, who recently remarked that “No Child Left Behind represents the high-water mark of federal involvement in the management of local schools...It

runs against the historic grain of American education, and its been tough to swallow for a great many people.” In short, as these new developments reflect, President Bush and his allies will have to face a new set of challenges if NCLB is to be reauthorized. Although judgment of the law’s overall success or predictions about its future might be premature, the current debate provides an opportune moment for reflection on the factors that contributed to the passage of the law. As it stands, the case of NCLB yields important insights in the three important areas: education policy, the legacy and leadership of George W. Bush, and political leadership more generally.

Less than a century ago, the depth and breadth of reforms proposed by No Child Left Behind—not to mention the extent of federal influence it implied—would have been unthinkable. In fact, just over a decade before Bush took office, Republican President Ronald Reagan had actively tried to eliminate the vestiges of federal involvement in education. Although Reagan’s ideological objections were maintained with some congressional Republicans, by the 1990s education policy was generally trending toward greater federal involvement, not away from it. Despite this tendency, many of the congressional debates on education were bitter and acrimonious during this period. By the time George W. Bush arrived on the national scene as a candidate for president, the Congress and the American public had grown tired of the partisan conflict and impatient for reform in education. The consequent passage of the No Child Left Behind Act meant a new era of education policy, rooted in the principles of standards-based accountability.

The profound transformation of public education policy in the last half-century has meant an upheaval of the traditional role of the federal government in education policy. This case

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reveals a few important lessons about education policymaking in this new era, many of which will be relevant as Congress seeks to reshape and reauthorize the NCLB legislation. First, despite the protests of many conservative members of Congress, the federal government will most likely continue to have an important role to play in education policymaking. Second, reform in education can, and should only be attained through bipartisanship and compromise. This is both a pragmatic and a prescriptive conclusion. In essence, the wide variety of views about education even within parties necessitates a bill that has a strong base of appeal in both parties. Third, it is evident that success in education policy specifically, and public policy more generally, relies heavily on an intense focus on attainable goals, a constant reevaluation of the process, and a thorough examination of possible side effects. Without this continued focus, the final product is likely to lack the coherence demanded of an effective public policy.

With regard to George W. Bush specifically, the case of NCLB provides unique insights into his leadership and his presidency. Since his earliest political enterprises, Bush has been mocked by political opponents and targeted by the media for his perceived incompetence and lack of intellect. Nevertheless, everything from his unexpected defeat of Ann Richards in 1994 to his narrow victory in 2000 to his triumphant signing of NCLB in 2002, suggests that Bush's political career has been defined by his ability to defy expectations. But, in spite of his many feats, such questions have hardly abated since Bush became president; in fact, as the war in Iraq has worsened, the claims of incompetence have grown more numerous. Even with education policy, many observers have criticized NCLB, citing its imperfections. As a result, most observers are content to label Bush as mediocre at best; but in doing so they ignore the many lessons his tenure provides—especially his involvement with education policy.
Though often disparaged, Bush's efforts to promote and enact education reform demonstrate his strengths as a leader. In general, Bush's involvement in this case serves as a model of how to conduct policymaking in spite of situational changes and various obstacles. Among his greatest strengths, as evidenced by this case, is the deft political skill he possesses. Although he is not the master-negotiator that President Johnson was, Bush has demonstrated keen political instincts as he persuaded prominent Democrats like Congressman George Miller and Senator Edward M. Kennedy to assist with No Child Left Behind. Furthermore, Bush has also displayed an acute sense of self-awareness, deliberately surrounding himself with knowledgeable and experienced staff members and advisers. With regard to his shortcomings, Bush's tendency to be removed from the day-to-day decisions ensured that he had less of a role in shaping the actual substance of the policy. This, however, also allowed him to keep a "big picture" focus throughout the negotiations, rather than getting bogged down in the details. Perhaps Bush's greatest mistake with regard to NCLB was to allow his attention to be overly occupied by his reaction to the September 11 attacks. The resulting drift from domestic to foreign policy in Bush's presidency in some ways closely resembles that of President Johnson. Moreover, like Johnson's ESEA legislation, NCLB has encountered a great number of difficulties in the implementation process. In Bush's defense, the events of September 11 were so powerful, and so demanding, that his shift in focus is not unjustified. But in resigning himself to a more "eventful" style of leadership in the area of education several problems have occurred, and now Bush must struggle to regain support for what was once the defining issue of his presidency.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive review of Bush's leadership as it relates to the passage of NCLB, one can only speculate as to which narrative will prevail for his presidency:
successful domestic policy overseer or struggling war-time commander-in-chief. One of the
greatest tragedies of the Bush presidency, therefore, is that the meteoric rise of America’s first
real education president has seen his fall as a result of the powerful effects of the situation.
Although it is too early to tell how Bush’s presidential administration will be remembered, it is
clear that his remaining time in office will have a considerable effect on the outcome of
everything from Iraq to No Child Left Behind. In reflecting on the passage of NCLB and
thinking forward to its pending reauthorization, it is evident that the principles of political
leadership—especially in relation to the situation—are vitally important to comprehending his
ability to effect change.

In the broadest sense, the story of how NCLB became law contributes to a general
understanding of the relationship between political leadership and the situation. Generally
speaking, the case reveals the tensions between the style of leadership and the makeup of the
situation—and how together, they affect the outcome. Throughout this case study it is evident
that the style of leadership Bush employed profoundly affected the progression and development
of the NCLB legislation. In many ways, the passage of NCLB underscores a central lesson in
leadership and politics; while situations might influence outcomes, they rarely, if ever, create
them. It is the interplay of leaders and followers, and the engagement of political leadership
which manages, augments, succumbs to, or mitigates the effects of the situation. Although all
leaders shape their respective context in some way, the President of the United States has a
special responsibility to inspire change. NCLB’s progression through Congress and its final
shape as a piece of legislation were deeply affected by the actions and non-actions of the leaders
involved.
With NCLB, Bush sought to control the situation through a variety of means, including political entrepreneurship, vision, political framing, and strategic focus. For the most part these strategies allowed him to manage the situation. Even though these strategies are widely used in political leadership, they are in no way exhaustive. Likewise, while these were used with a high level of success in the case of NCLB, they might have been ill-suited in another context. For example, Bush's coalition-building, compromise-based approach to education reform probably would have flopped if applied to his goal of a tax-cut. Yet, despite the fact that different strategies might be required in different contexts, it is clear that some degree of event-making leadership is necessary in order for reforms to occur. Otherwise, the leader's goal, whether in the area of education reform or deficit reduction, will be extremely vulnerable to situational changes.

In recognition of what this case suggests about the relationship between leadership and the situation, it is vital that leaders of all molds—and in all contexts—consciously recognize the importance of managing the situation and endeavor to control the situation rather than let it control them or their goals. Successful leaders make the situation work for them, or at least soften its effects when it works counter to their goals. For Bush and future generations of leaders, these lessons represent a challenge to balance the competing interests, maintain strategic focus, and direct the course of events in a constructive way. To a great extent, the quality of America's representation, the coherence of its public policy, and the welfare of its people hang in the balance.
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