

# Bush: Former Colleagues See a Man of Reflexive Loyalty to Party and Boss

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## WASHINGTON

Richard Nixon was basking in the full flush of his landslide re-election victory when he turned his thoughts toward refashioning the government.

"Boys run for office to be somebody. Men run for office to do something," Nixon told a small group of aides meeting with him at Camp David on Nov. 14, 1972. Notes by one of the aides, convicted Watergate conspirator John Ehrlichman, quote Nixon as adding, "Therefore, eliminate the politicians, except Bush. He'd do anything for the cause."

Years later, Bush, having risen through a series of mainly appointive posts to the rank of vice president, would defend his refusal as a presidential candidate to reveal confidential details of his relationship with President Reagan by saying, "In my family, loyalty is not considered a character defect."

Loyalty, as manifested by dedication to a cause, represents a central commitment of Bush's political career that helps explain why senior political figures such as Nixon felt comfortable in promoting Bush to posts that provided him with an impressive depth of government experience and credibility as a presidential candidate.

The same quality, however, may also shed light on why he has had trouble developing a compelling rationale for a Bush presidency.

Mitch Daniels, a former political aide in the Reagan White House, suggested that many voters have an "ill-formed opinion" of Bush which stems from an impression that the vice president suffers from a "lack of strength and purpose."

That problem has been exacerbated by Bush's difficulty in spelling out what Daniels described as "his own priorities and his own plan for the country's future."

Daniels added, "I think he is having little trouble shifting through the gears. It's not mere slavish loyalty to the person who selected him, though. I think it goes much more to his conception of where his duties have lain in that job. I think he believes it was his duty not to talk outside the family."

While Bush's role in the Reagan Administration has been minutely examined by now, his performance in earlier assignments has received less attention — roles that included service as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations from 1971 to 1973, chairman of the Republican National Committee from 1973 to 1974, chief of the U.S. liaison office in the People's Republic of China from 1974 to 1975 and director of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1976.

He has also held elective office as a Texas congressman from 1966 to 1970 and as vice president under Reagan.

Interviews with former associates and a review of the public record from 1971 through 1976 offer a portrait of a public servant who was skilled at adapting both to the expectations of his superiors and to the needs of institutions whose interests he was charged with protecting.

At one point, as RNC chief, Bush was obliged to make a painful choice between competing loyalties. As the Watergate scandal enveloped the Nixon administration beginning in the fall of 1973, Bush moved, reluctantly at first and decisively later on, to protect the GOP by dissociating the RNC from the White House and the constitutional crisis that forced Nixon's resignation on Aug. 9, 1974.

Eddie Mahe, now a Republican political consultant but then Bush's top executive officer at the RNC, recalled that Bush "agonized" over his dilemma, which he ultimately resolved by writing a letter to Nixon, dated Aug. 7, 1974, urging him to surrender the presidency.

"It was just excruciatingly difficult," Mahe said. "Bush saw it as his No. 1 assignment to separate the Republican Party institutionally from Watergate. Without question, that was his most intense commitment. He could not ignore a deep and genuine conviction that a change had to take place, that there was a serious erosion in the body politic, in democracy itself and the government — and that Richard Nixon, for the good of one and all, had to depart."

Initially, at least, Bush appears to have regarded Watergate as a minor issue being exploited by East Coast liberals to embarrass the Nixon Administration.

Ehrlichman's notes, on file at the National Archives in a collection of Nixon presidential materials, indicate that Bush, on the eve of the Senate Ervin Committee's investigation, sought to reassure Nixon about the scope of the affair.

The meeting occurred on March 20, 1973, one day before Nixon's White House counsel, John Dean, dramatically warned his boss of a Watergate coverup conspiracy involving high administration aides that could destroy the Nixon presidency.

Ehrlichman's handwritten record of the session involving himself, Nixon and Bush indicates, however, that Bush described Watergate as an inconsequential

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issue not likely to play a prominent role in the 1974 congressional elections.

"New York and Washington, D.C., ask the questions not Kansas City," Bush appears to have said, according to the notes. "Never get a question on it."

Later in the meeting, Nixon appears to have turned his attention to a strategy that a year later would figure prominently in a vote by the House Judiciary Committee recommending his impeachment. The committee implicated Nixon in an attempt to cover up the Watergate scandal which erupted after burglars were caught attempting to plant eavesdropping devices in the Democratic National Committee headquarters on June 17, 1972.

According to the notes, Nixon pondered whether to encourage aides to "let it all hang out" in testimony to a federal grand jury or to deal with growing demands for explanations of administration involvement in Watergate by issuing a statement over John Dean's name.

The notes suggest that Nixon indicated a preference for the latter option, which Watergate investigators later claimed was conceived as a ploy to withhold evidence.

Ehrlichman's notes of the March 20 meeting offer no sign that Bush urged Nixon to make a full disclosure of the administration's role in Watergate, although later he did so publicly on several occasions. On the other hand, the notes do not indicate that anything was said during the meeting that should have alerted Bush to the existence of a possible White House criminal conspiracy.

Bush had been summoned to take the party position from the United Nations, where he was sent following an unsuccessful race in 1970 for a Texas Senate seat.

Bush replaced a veteran and colorless diplomat, Charles Yost, who was a holdover from the Lyndon Johnson Administration and highly regarded by other professional diplomats.

"It wasn't a particularly popular appointment in the beginning because a lot of old U.N. hands thought we were just getting a politician," recalled W. Tapley Bennett, who served at the time as deputy permanent U.S. representative. "But within a few months he had won those folks over simply by the way he put his shoulder to the wheel."

Bush, due in part perhaps to his congressional experience and patrician background as a Yale graduate and son of a former U.S. senator, appears also to have excelled in the U.N.'s political give-and-take and in the wooing of fellow diplomats at social functions and other occasions involving face-to-face encounters.

But Bush was unable to save the administration from a resounding defeat when the United Nations voted on Oct. 25, 1971, to expel Taiwan and to seat the Beijing government as China's sole legitimate representative. In so doing, the General Assembly rejected a move, quarterbacked by Bush, to seat both Taiwan and Beijing in what was recognized as a political accommodation to the erosion of Washington's long-term insistence that Taiwan's Nationalists, not the mainland communists, were China's true representatives.

While Bennett and others insist that the Nixon Administration was wholeheartedly behind Bush's effort, he was apparently undercut by the fact that Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, was known to be in Beijing at the time of the vote working out the details of Nixon's historic trip to China in February 1972.

"We had a two-headed, two-faced effort under way at the time," declared James Leonard, a disarmament negotiator who served on Bush's team at the United Nations. "It was clear to me in retrospect that Bush was simply manipulated by Kissinger."

"People like myself didn't feel we really knew Bush through and through," said Leonard, a career diplomat and strong admirer of Yost. "I don't think I would ever probably feel... complete confidence that I could predict his actions or the principles that would guide his actions."

Leonard indicated that his feelings about Bush stem from evidence that Bush acquiesced, and perhaps participated, in a post-1972 election purge of U.N. staffers thought to have been disloyal to Nixon.

At a Camp David meeting on Nov. 20 with Nixon and Ehrlichman, Nixon is reflected by Ehrlichman's notes as calling for a "shakeup of (the) U.N. staff" in order to ensure that it would be "our staff from now on." According to the notes, Bush at this point named an individual whom he regarded as insufficiently loyal to the administration.

At that meeting, Bush also evidently lobbied Nixon for an appointment as deputy secretary of state.

"Interested in foreign affairs — love it," Bush said, according to Ehrlichman's notes. "Can tiptoe between (Kissinger) and William Rogers." The reference was to an ongoing power struggle at the time between Kissinger, at the White House, and Rogers, then Nixon's secretary of state.

Bush's second choice of jobs in a second Nixon Administration was to hold the title of undersecretary of the Treasury, a job Bush says in his autobiography that he had been encouraged to seek by George Shultz, then the Treasury secretary.

His last choice would be the RNC post, Bush told Nixon. According to Ehrlichman's record, Bush feared that the job would kill his chances for a comeback in Texas politics.

However, Nixon was insistent on placing Bush at the head of the RNC, saying at one point, "Will you let me decide?" Ehrlichman's jottings reflect that Nixon made the offer more attractive by promising Bush that he would function as the White House's chief political adviser and could virtually count on an official Cabinet portfolio as a reward after the 1974 elections.

By that time, Gerald Ford was president — and Bush was rewarded this time with his first choice among the new assignments that were offered in recognition of his RNC service. According to his autobiography, Bush turned down ambassadorships to Great Britain and France in order to serve as the administration's second liaison representative in Beijing.

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According to China experts, Bush's tenure coincided with an uneventful lull in the Sino-U.S. rapprochement, and the future vice president returned to the United States at Ford's request to assume the leadership of an embattled CIA without leaving much of a mark on the evolving relationship.

However, Bush's political skills proved invaluable at the CIA, which was emerging from a series of tempestuous congressional investigations when he took the agency's helm, according to several retired career CIA officials who served him in high-ranking posts.

That assessment is also shared by William Miller, then the staff director for the newly created Senate Select Committee on Intelligence which was charged with riding herd on the CIA.

"He clearly took over at a very difficult time," said Miller, who served on the committee under a Democratic majority. "His main task was to work out the beginnings of the new relationship of the agency with ... the Congress, and I think he handled it quite well ... It was a very good appointment considering the circumstances."

Moreover, Bush quickly convinced the agency that it could count on his loyalty — that he would safeguard its interests, honor its traditions and avoid demoralizing staff shakeups in order to give plum jobs to political cronies.

E.H. Knoche, a career CIA operative whom Bush named as his deputy director, recalled the day Bush was sworn in at the agency's auditorium by Ford.

"He told us that he wanted to do well — that he knew how important it was," Knoche said. "He said he liked the look of things. We had just gone through nearly two years when everything we had done seemed to be under attack, and then to get that kind of message from our new boss. From that moment until the time he left, the morale couldn't have been higher."

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