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IN SEARCH OF GEORGE BUSH

By Randall Rothenberg

A CRACKLING FIRE warmed the White House office of the Vice President this raw winter day, complementing the deep wood tones, the rich Oriental rugs and the family photographs. Sprawled in a chair, George Bush contemplated a question: How would his leadership differ from that of his chief rival for the Republican Presidential nomination, Senator Robert J. Dole of Kansas?

"Can't talk about Bob Dole's leadership," Bush said of the man who humiliated him in the Iowa caucuses and whom, in turn, he defeated in the bitterly attended New Hampshire primary. Then, immediately, Bush caught himself. "I can work well with people," he added. "I can effect change without brutalizing people."

A simple response to a simple question, but telling in what was omitted. After seven years as deputy in the most ideologically charged Administration in this century, and in the midst of the political fight of his life, George Bush's credo remains intact: all politics is personal.

He has strewn handwritten epistles by the thousands along the path of his political career ("George Bush is a fiend for writing personal notes," says a former White House official). On the stump, he seems to delight less in being recognized than in recognizing. "Hey, my main man!" he says to a high school student he greets by name in Ames, Iowa. He spots a fellow back in a crowd in Iowa City. "Hey, how's Shirl? Back in Marshalltown?" After his Iowa drubbing, he attacked New Hampshire not with policies but with *politesse* — offering help to locals whose cars had stalled, shaking hands at factory gates, tossing snowballs with reporters.

But ideas? "I'm not what you call your basic intellectual," said Bush during a break in a campaign whose next test comes two days hence, in the agglomeration of Southern primaries dubbed "Super Tuesday." He grew insistent: "Be what you are in life. Don't try to be everything just because you're running for President."

The statement rings with irony, for if any man in American politics has *been* everything, it is 63-year-old George Herbert Walker Bush. Yet his resumé is the paradox of his public existence.

Throughout his rapid ascension from job to appointive job, Bush has left in his wake respect and deep affection. He is credited with building the Texas Republican Party, keeping the G.O.P together when Watergate ripped its fabric, and restoring morale at a Central Intelligence Agency critically damaged by Congressional investigations.

Yet his political legacy is as ephemeral as the good will is substantial. One former White House aide calls him "the invisible man" — an apt description of him throughout much of his career. Two months of interviews with more than 60 of his colleagues, family members and close observers from across his history leave an impression of George Bush as a man who has willingly sublimated ego and ideology to the values of the institutions he has served, rarely probing, seldom questioning, never reaching.

Eddie Mahe Jr., the political director of the Republican National Committee when Bush was its chairman in the early 1970's, is an admirer of the Vice President's's honesty and tenacity. Nonetheless, Mahe, now a Washington political consultant unaffiliated with any Presidential candidate, says of Bush, "He's not a deep person."

What is more, adds Mahe, "He doesn't have the courage of his convictions."

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"LET ME TELL YOU SOMEthing," George Bush said to a high school student's query not long ago. "The latest thing in politics is to stretch you out on some kind of psychoanalytical couch to figure out what makes you tick."

His own motivations, he continued, were quite basic: "I've always said that I have respect for my Dad because he believed in public service. *I* believe in public service."

Prescott Sheldon Bush, a managing partner at the investment banking firm of Brown Brothers, Harriman, personified noblesse oblige, serving on sundry public boards and committees and later becoming a United States Senator. But he was an imposing man who had little time for his children. "Everyone was afraid of him," recalls his son Jonathan Bush, 56. "He was a man on a mission, and he had mother to raise us."

Dorothy Walker Bush, now 86, bred into her five children rules to buttress the sense of service instilled by their father. During childhood summers at Walker's Point, the family's waterfront retreat in Kennebunkport, Me., and on the lawn of their nine-bedroom Victorian house in Greenwich, Conn., they learned competitiveness — "the zeitgeist of the time," according to her youngest child, William (Bucky) Bush, 49.

Whatever the game, the best at it was her second son, George. Yet "Poppy," as he was called, played ball with such grace that the others couldn't begin to be jealous. "He was too big a hero, too big a star," says Jonathan. "You were just too anxious to get close to him."

For all the competitiveness, Dorothy Bush absolutely forbade bragging. Even the slightest hint of self-aggrandizement, according to Bucky Bush, would be met by her firm statement: "We've heard enough of the 'Great I Am.' "

Dorothy Bush also taught her children loyalty. George Warren, a childhood friend of George Bush's, recalls how as a young adult he rushed to his parents' house in Greenwich the day his father was killed in an accident. When he got there, he found Dorothy waiting on the lawn.

"I hadn't seen her in years, and the two families very seldom saw each other socially," says Warren, now a retired teacher. "And she took it upon herself to come to our house to tell me. It shows tremendous loyalty. And you'll find that quality in George Bush as well."

Loyalty, modesty, competitiveness — the qualities are George Bush's strengths. But they haunt him. Preternaturally disposed to team play at any cost, he is loathe to rise above his surroundings. When he says, as he did in blindly," he doesn't understand the sophisticates' snickers.

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A family friend, Neil Mallon, a man who "could charm the fangs off a snake," according to Bucky Bush, offered George a bottom-of-the-ladder job in Midland, Tex., at Dresser Industries, his large oil company. After two years, Bush joined with a neighbor to create a firm that would purchase royalty rights from small landowners if a driller found oil on the land. Several years later, he formed another company to locate and buy oil-producing properties. His uncle, Herbert Walker, found $800,000 through Eastern investors to help get the firms started.

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When he ran for the Senate in 1964 against the liberal Democratic incumbent, Ralph Yarborough, Bush termed himself a "Goldwater Republican" and opposed both the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and much of the Civil Rights Act. But he still managed to antagonize the right.

"The rumor ran rampant through the Goldwater organization that the Bush people had damaged Goldwater's race because they had been getting voters to the polls who were going to vote for Johnson" but who split their ticket and voted for Bush, recalls Congressman Bill Archer, a nine-term Republican veteran from Houston. True or not, says Archer, "these were the seeds" of the right wing's discontent with Bush.

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But the exhilaration was marred by tragedy. In March 1953, the Bushes' second child, Robin, was diagnosed as having leukemia. After six months of grueling commuting between Texas and New York's Memorial Hospital, George and Barbara Bush saw their 3-year-old daughter die.

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The seeds sprouted after he lost the Senate race. Within a year, his wing of the Republican Party was known as the "Bush Faction" and was considered "an extension of the Eisenhower-Scranton-Rockefeller-Romney wing," according to Archer. When Bush ran for Congress in 1966 in west Houston, he campaigned actively in black neighborhoods, sponsored a black girl's softball team and spoke of the need for "equal opportunity." He won handily, against a law-and-order Democrat widely considered more conservative.

"Young Bush," as he was known, became an immediate presence in Washington, gaining a coveted seat on the House Ways and Means Committee. Back home, he was a power. A 1968 Houston Chronicle editorial maintained that "Bush has become so politically formidable nobody cares to take him on."

Not only was he powerful, he was independent. He voted for an open-housing bill that was vehemently opposed in most of Texas. Political calculation probably entered into the vote; according to an aide to a longtime Texas Congressman, "anybody who was considering a Senate race" in 1970, as Bush was, "would have voted that way, because his eye would have been on the vast south Texas vote," much of it Hispanic.

But it took courage to cast that vote, for in Houston, "it was like the world came unglued," recalls Bill Archer. "I can't think of an issue that's come along since then that's been as explosive emotionally."

A meeting was called at Memorial High School in Houston for constituents to discuss open-housing. Hundreds of people filled the auditorium and the atmosphere was charged. The young Congressman talked about the black Vietnam veteran. "A man should not have a door slammed in his face because he is a Negro or speaks with a Latin American accent," affirmed Bush. He received a standing ovation.

That summer, the night he was nominated for the Presidency, Richard M. Nixon convened a meeting in his hotel room to discuss Vice Presidential possibilities. George Bush's name came up several times. "I've heard nothing but good about George," said Nixon. Nevertheless, he felt Bush was too young for the post.

Bush entered the 1970 Texas Senate race with a strong shot of unseating Ralph Yarborough. But then Lloyd Bentsen, like Bush a businessman and World War II pilot, defeated Yarborough in the Democratic primary. Although he was expected to benefit from defections by liberals, Bush lost. Yet he ended his electoral career with his popularity undiminished.

"He was considered back at the time one of the most charismatic people ever elected to public office in the history of Texas," says Bill Archer. "That charisma, people talked about it over and over again."

WHAT HAPpened? Did Bush change or did our perceptions of leadership change? Probably some of both. He is a child of the war years, when charisma and courtliness coincided. He came of age intellectually when politicians believed in the "end of ideology." How quaint both notions seem, now that personal and ideological passion are measures of political charisma.

President Nixon had promised to take care of him if he lost his Senate race, and Bush knew what he wanted. After the election, his friend Potter Stewart called a top White House aide and said, "This may surprise you, but George would like to be more involved in foreign policy. He'd like to be Ambassador to the United Nations."

Bush recognized from the start that the United Nations post was "a ceremonial thing," in the words of a former aide. He assiduously pursued the Administration's official "two-China" policy — admitting mainland China to the world body without jettisoning

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that Henry A. Kissinger, the national security adviser, was already in the process of dismissing Taiwan from Administration thinking.

Considered "loyal," according to a former Nixon aide, Bush was the President's natural choice to replace the irreverant and independent Bob Dole as chairman of the Republican National Committee. But he quickly adapted to the reigning culture of the committee. He considered himself a party man, not a servant of the White House. And when Watergate became a burning issue, about six months into his tenure, Bush made it clear that his loyalty was to the state chairmen. He was a traveling preacher of Republicanism. In his first year as party chairman, he jetted 124,000 miles, gave 118 speeches and conducted 84 press conferences, strenuously attacking any implication that the G.O.P. was connected to Watergate.

But Bush was tormented by the increasingly debilitating situation. According to his brother Prescott, Nixon at one point told him directly, "There's absolutely nothing to these accusations. I'm telling the truth and there's nothing hidden." Bush believed him, and although he privately vented his despair to White House aides, he also displayed what Eddie Mahe, the Republican committee's political director at the time, calls "a toughness that is not generally seen as being part of George Bush."

After Gerald R. Ford succeeded Nixon in the Oval Office, Bush lobbied hard for the Vice Presidency. He was in Maine, at his beloved Walker's Point with Peter Rousel, a longtime aide, when he received the call telling him that President Ford had chosen Nelson A. Rockefeller for the post.

Bush returned stoically to the porch where the two men had been sitting. Shortly thereafter, a television news crew from Portland arrived. "You don't look too broken up about this," the reporter told Bush. "You can't see what's on the inside," he replied.

Demanding an audience, Bush told the President he was quitting the national committee. Ford soon countered with an offer to make Bush the chief of the United States liaison office in Beijing.

In China, Bush courted the image of the regular guy who eschewed diplomatic formalities in order to bicycle everywhere and understand the native ways. A different view of his 16 months in China slipped out shortly after he returned. The historian Barbara Tuchman recalls appearing with him at a forum sponsored by a church in Connecticut. After Bush spoke about his experiences in the Far East, someone asked whether he'd had a chance to meet any of the local people. According to Mrs. Tuchman, Bush replied: "Oh yes. They gave us a boy to play tennis with."

AT THE CENTRAL Intelligence Agency — which Ford offered to him in a 1975 Administration shakeup termed the "Halloween Massacre" — Bush again aggressively sought to portray himself empathically within the agency. Intelligence veterans, already scarred by ongoing Congressional investigations of past agency practices, viewed the appointment of this quintessential political animal with alarm.

But within days, according to several former intelligence officials, Bush had turned sentiment around. He "became one of the boys," in the words of one. He not only mastered superficial symbolism — taking the employees' elevator to his seventh-floor office rather than the director's private elevator — but would also bring one of his subordinates to National Security Council meetings and, after a few words of introduction, turn and say, "I've brought my brains along, let's listen to him."

Yet that same amiability may also have been responsible for the one substantive controversy during his tenure at the C.I.A., the "Team B Affair."

For years, many in the intelligence community had been disturbed by discrepancies between the agency's estimates of Soviet strategic capabilities and what later events proved to be true. Conservatives on the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board wanted to create a group of outside experts — "Team B" — who would review the same information as did the agency's intelligence officers and assemble a competing set of estimates. Bush agreed to the exercise.

But Team B, in the eyes of several intelligence veterans, was packed with conservative ideologues. Ray Cline, a deputy director of the agency before Bush's arrival and a strong Bush supporter, says that its members "were clearly people who had a more alarmist view about Soviet strength than was being expressed in the intelligence community at the time." Agency staffers pleaded in vain with Bush not to allow Team B to be stacked with such conservative figures as Professor Richard Pipes of Harvard.

The study's conclusion — that the Russians were seeking military superiority over the United States, rather than mere parity — lent support to hard-liners who opposed arms control. As Director of Central Intelligence, Bush, ironically, helped to empower conservatives who still consider him weak on defense policy.

But more telling was his allowing the Team B episode in the first place. It was widely viewed, in the words of one intelligence veteran, as "a bad idea that he permitted in the interests of getting along with everybody."

GEORGE BUSH IS A man of rules and institutional values. He operates superbly within established parameters — chairing meetings, carrying diplomatic messages to foreign friends and foes. "He's such a good *listener*," says a top Administration national security official. But when the rules change — when ideologues try to force their agenda or when the Iran-contra affair bypasses established national-security procedures — Bush can be caught off guard.

A turning point of his 1980 Presidential campaign came in Nashua, N.H., at a planned two-man debate between Bush and Ronald Reagan, jointly sponsored by The Nashua Telegraph and by Reagan. Just before the event, Reagan's staff opened the debate to the other contenders.

Bush refused to agree to the open forum. He sat mutely on stage while Reagan and the newspaper's editor argued over the new format. When the editor, Jon Breen, threatened to shut down the sound system, Reagan shouted, "I *paid* for this microphone!" Even though the two-man debate proceeded as planned, Bush's recalcitrance left an indelible impression.

That night, after the debate, as they were returning to his hotel, Reagan said to James H. Lake, one of his campaign aides: "I don't understand it. How would this guy deal with the Russians?" Reagan was not questioning Bush's mettle, according to Lake, but his "wisdom." Bush "failed to understand that in order to win this game he would have been better served by being more flexible," he says.

Bush's apparent lack of an ideological base may account for his remarkable malleability. In 1980, running as a self-described "moderate conservative," he could call Ronald Reagan "as far to the right as you can get." But "the minute they accepted the Vice Presidency, the Bushes forgot about the past and became Reagan people," says Nancy Clark Reynolds, a Washington public affairs executive and a longtime friend of Nancy and Ronald Reagan.

One former Administration official who wants to remain anonymous calls Bush "a neutral political functionary" who would "come to a lot of

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Cabinet Council meetings, listen for a while, raise a few points, and say, 'Why can't we overcome this problem? What's the solution?' He had this sense that there was a disembodied solution out there that involved no political or ideological position." Bush is reminiscent of the small-town civic leader in the late sociologist C. Wright Mills's study of America's ruling classes, "The Power Elite," who said: "We do not engage in loose talk about the 'ideals' of the situation and all that other stuff. We get right down to the problem. . ."

Bush replaces ideology with what might be called a cult of courtesy. Stretched out in Air Force II recently, his gray suit jacket replaced by a blue flight jacket with his name threaded vertically up the zipper, his tie loosened, he bridled at the mention of the name of a prominent liberal activist. It wasn't the man's politics that disturbed the Vice President; it was that he had once disparaged Bush in front of one of Bush's sons.

"Can you imagine that — to a man's *son*!" he said, munching on a beef stick. "Now, what kinda thing is that to say?"

But the graciousness and civility also make Bush a potential captive of what the author Christopher Buckley, a former Bush speechwriter, calls "the gentle man phenomenon: it's good to be liked, better to be loved." Indeed, the drive for accommodation seems to lie behind many of Bush's celebrated gaffes over the years, among them his 1981 toast to Philippine dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos that "we love your adherence to democratic principles"; his 1984 gloat to New Jersey longshoremen that he had to "kick a little ass" in his campaign debate with Geraldine Ferraro, and his enthusiastic comment in Europe last fall that when Russian mechanics "run out of work in the Soviet Union, send them to Detroit, because we could use that kind of ability."

"George Bush wants to see himself as a regular guy," says a former state Republican chairman who was wooed ardently by Bush in preparation for the 1988 election. Bush's brother Prescott agrees: "With the dock workers, he probably felt, 'I'm one of you and I can talk the way you talk.'" He seems to refuse to acknowledge that his upbringing effectively prevents him from identifying fully with many of those whom he would court. "It's when he tries to be Everyman that he sounds false," says Jim Lake, the former Reagan aide.

Bush's desire to appeal to people on their terms, rather than his, often looks like capitulation, and this is the root of his widely discussed "toughness" problem. During the 1988 campaign, he has been obsessed with proving his strength, not only in contrived confrontations with television newscasters, but in interviews, where, without provocation, he will cite his "toughness."

"I avoid sometimes the manifestations of my toughness," he said in one recent conversation. At another point, he added: "I don't have to go out and beat my chest like Tarzan ... and assert toughness by being brutal to people."

But it is not his physical, or even his emotional, toughness that is in question — through World War II and personal tragedies he's exhibited ample quantities of both, and his set-to with Dan Rather and his strident anti-Dole commercials in New Hampshire betokened a willingness to hit hard. The doubts concern his intellectual independence.

BUSH HAD EXplicitly pledged his loyalty to Ronald Reagan when he was offered the Vice Presidency. After the 1980 election, he made that oath the center of his political existence. Not only would he never be seen or heard disagreeing with President Reagan on any matter, but he also would never publicly offer any substantive opinions of his own.

All modern Vice Presidents have been immensely frustrated in their jobs, to be sure. But none felt completely constrained from at least offering opinions within the confines of the White House. Richard Nixon and Nelson Rockefeller both spoke their minds in National Security Council meetings. Walter F. Mondale was President Carter's faithful soldier, but differed with him over MX missile deployment, the Soviet grain embargo and the sale of F-15 fighter-plane equipment to Saudi Arabia, among other matters.

Bush's loyalty to President Reagan may be the strongest asset he carries into the pro-Reagan south on Tuesday. But, because of the way he has exercised his fealty, no one knows for certain how Bush has influenced the President on policy, nor can anyone — including his closest advisers — point definitively to areas where Bush has attempted to make an impact.

Bush, as have other Vice Presidents, chaired several task forces in the White House that he cites often in his campaign speeches. Their success has been mixed. His staff estimates that his Task Force on Regulatory Reform will save the Government $150 billion in regulatory costs during the coming decade. But conservatives in the White House, among others, have criticized it for serving as little more than a "reporting mechanism" on the costs of regulation.

The South Florida Task Force, formed in 1982 to deal with the marked increase in cocaine and marijuana smuggled into the Sunshine State, was successful in uniting several competing Government bureaucracies in the cause of drug interdiction. But during the task force's existence, cocaine imports increased, its price dropped and marijuana smugglers shifted their operations to domestic cultivation. And the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism, whose final report aptly summarized the conventional wisdom on antiterrorism policy, had its key recommendation — "The U.S. Government will make no concessions to terrorists" — violated by the Iranian arms-for-hostages trade.

Beyond the task forces, one can only collect impressions about Bush's White House activities. For example, he supposedly played a role in softening President Reagan's "evil empire" rhetoric about the Soviet Union and in opening a dialogue with Moscow after Korean Air Lines flight 007 was downed by the Russians. And scuttlebutt inside the White House had it that he was responsible for convincing the President to withdraw American troops from Beirut after the 1983 bombing of the marine barracks there.

How fully his whispers in President Reagan's ear contributed to these moves is unknown. "He did not, as other Vice Presidents did, speak up in National Security Council meetings," says a national security aide who has served in several Republican Administrations.

A number of his own aides declare flatly that Bush, in 1985 and 86, interceded with the President to resolve a dispute between Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d and then-Labor Secretary Bill Brock over Meese's desire to eliminate an executive order requiring certain affirmative action standards in Federal hiring.

But another former Administration official familiar with the Meese-Brock contretemps says that Bush's role is "just something I'm not aware of ... [Then chief of staff] Don Regan took the viewpoint that as long as there was disagreement in the Cabinet Council, then it wouldn't go to the President. That was what wore people down."

It is impossible to coax details about these or other incidents from either Bush or his aides. Whatever he and President Reagan speak about in their private, weekly Mexican-food lunches in the Oval Office remains locked in their hearts. The Vice President virtually taunts those who would question his involvement in White House decisions.

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"There are just many examples in my mind that I'm not gonna share with you, where I know I've shaped what happens," Bush said in a White House interview. "You can't point to three things, I take that on the chin, because it's offset by the fact that I know I've been loyal."

More telling, perhaps than Bush's apparently meager involvement in policy formulation is the perception that he actively backed away if the slightest controversy was involved. "There was sort of a fail-safe strategy that he and his people employed," says one former official.

Eventually, many in the Administration simply wrote him off as a player. Although some senior officials would, throughout the two terms, continue to try to use Bush as a conduit to the President, others gave up. Says one national security aide: "It became known that you didn't go to George Bush to get the President to do something."

Even after the re-election landslide in 1984, Bush apparently refused to step into the foreground. In late 1984 and early '85, he rejected David Stockman's pleas for help in convincing the President to cut the deficit. A year later, according to several sources, he spurned repeated appeals from leading Republicans to intervene with the President to dismiss Donald T. Regan as chief of staff.

A year later, Bush was absent from the scene during the battle to confirm Robert H. Bork as an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court. One former aide says that members of Bush's staff said they wanted "to get out front on Bork" but "it never materialized."

GIVEN THE VICE President's penchant for noninvolvement, we can perhaps see more clearly his role in the Iran-contra affair, an issue that will continue to hound Bush, if not in the rest of the primaries then certainly in a general election campaign. Bush attended at least 30 meetings at which the Iranian arms sale was discussed, beginning in the summer of 1985. Moreover, Bush's staff had information that might have led them to question Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North's relationship with the contras: the Vice President's national security adviser, Donald P. Gregg, a former C.I.A. station chief, was told in August 1986 that North was involved in Central America with associates of the renegade C.I.A. agent Edwin Wilson.

Yet Bush has consistently maintained that he was "out of the loop" on the arms sale, that he was "deliberately excluded" from key meetings on the subject, and that he was completely unaware of the diversion of funds to the contras.

In a White House interview, Bush grew testy when the subject was pursued: "I've said all I really want to say on this subject . . . To rehash all this and then, frankly, play into the hands of political opponents is not in my interest."

But the question remains: How could he *not* have known?

The most frequent response from those who have worked with him is that the Vice President was ill-served by his and the White House staff. "Somebody screwed him," says Adm. Daniel J. Murphy, Bush's former chief of staff. "I'm sure it was the N.S.C. staff." While Murphy singles out North and the former national security adviser, Rear Adm. John Poindexter, others point to Don Gregg, who declined to transmit to Bush the news about North's involvement with intelligence agency apostates. Gregg told Congressional investigators that he did not consider the information "Vice Presidential." (Bush said recently that "ex post facto, maybe" he should have been told about North's escapade.)

Criticisms of Bush's staff occur with startling frequency. "There's a feeling he deserves to be better served," says a senior Administration foreign policy official. "He has a weak national security staff," echoes another official. "They don't have an impact on policy, and they don't have a grasp of the issues involved."

There are indications that Bush purposely chose a lackluster Vice Presidential staff in order to fit in to the Reagan White House. According to one former campaign adviser, Bush said that he felt a high-powered staff could create contention rather than harmony with the President's staff.

The Vice President grew angry in a recent interview when told of criticisms of his staff. "I just deny that. I don't agree with that. I think it's *wrong*," he said. He maintains his own code of loyalty and forgiveness. "I'll be damned if I'm gonna let the pressure in the newspapers compel me to fire Don Gregg," he said heatedly. "That's not fair and that's not right and I'm not gonna do that!"

Still, his professed lack of knowledge about the Iran-contra affair indicates an unwillingness or inability to draw on all available resources for intelligence and enlightenment.

In his classic 1960 study on leadership, "Presidential Power," the Harvard political scientist Richard E. Neustadt noted that a successful executive must actively seek information.

"It is not information of a general sort that helps a President see personal stakes," wrote Neustadt. "It is the odds and ends of tangible detail that, pieced together in his mind, illuminate the underside of issues put before him. To help himself he must reach out as widely as he can for every scrap of fact, opinion, gossip, bearing on his own interests and relationships as President."

In the Iran-contra matter, this Bush did not do.

CAN ONE PREDICT, from his handling of the Iran-contra matter — or, indeed, from his handling of the Vice Presidency — how George Bush would lead as President of the United States? Difficult to say. His innate moderation shines through in the few specific proposals he has made on the Presidential campaign trail.

He wants a line-item veto to balance the budget and a cut in capital-gains taxes — eminently conservative ideas, yet far from right-wing. But he opposes the concept of an across-the-board freeze on Government spending, because he wants to be able to spend money on AIDS research, drug interdiction and tax-free savings accounts for college education. He has said time and again that he wants to be known as "the education President," employing "the bully pulpit, using the Presidency, to promote the kind of excellence we want."

Beyond these proposals, he adds little to the debate over post-Reagan politics. In the twilight months of the Reagan Presidency, this man who has blended in so well is still leery to call too much attention to himself and his thoughts.

Yet there is a calm that pervades him. Sitting in his White House office recently, George Bush pondered whether life would have been different had he "stopped to smell the roses."

"I sometimes think about that now," he said. "But how many people that pause to find themselves, wondering who they were, uncertain of themselves, have the blessings that I have that come from strength of family?"

He admitted that he would love to spend more time reading, or fishing at Walker's Point, especially when he thinks how "adversarial and denigrating" politics has become. "But do I have a certain self-assurance that I'm on the right track and that I'm lifted up by friends and family?" he asked. "Yeah."

"You see, I know who I am," he said. "I know *exactly* where I want to go. How to take this country there."

And if he didn't make it? "I'd be a good grandfather," answered the Vice President of the United States. ■

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