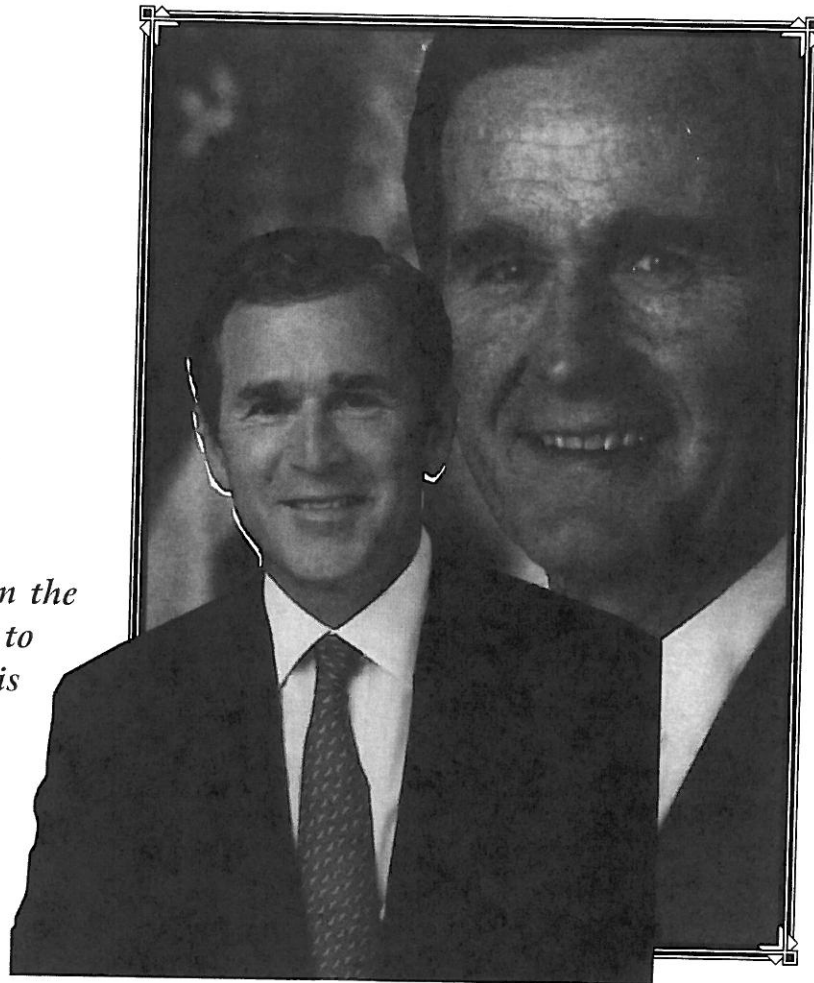


THE SON ALSO RISES

How George W. Bush is emerging from the shadow of his presidential parentage to become a national political figure in his own right.

BY WILLIAM MCKENZIE



Here's the most important thing to know about Texas Governor George W. Bush: The former president's son is no mere political wannabe trying to play his father's game. Since the 49-year-old Bush has been hailed around Texas as a shrewd politician, a person who's willing to reach into unpredictable corners to achieve his goals. His style has made him popular and successful.

Bipartisan Ranger

Much of the GOP leader's progress can be attributed to his ability to attract both Democrats and Republicans to his aim of making Texas "a beacon state." His leadership style also reflects a newer managerial streak at work in Texas politics, mirroring the transition in Texas' economy from farms and oil to computers and services. And he has been noticeably low-key, letting others share his spotlight.

Even Democratic Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock—whose knowledge of Texas

government spans four decades—gushes about the governor. Speaking to Dallas business leaders, Bullock said "I like that boy." The feeling must be mutual. In an unprecedented move, Bush dropped by Bullock's Austin fundraiser last October.

State Rep. Paul Sadler (D-Henderson) also speaks highly, almost glowingly, of the governor. Sadler worked so well with Bush on redefining the Texas education code that the Governor went to Sadler's district to sign the new code into law. Reports Sadler, chairman of the House Education Committee: "He would talk philosophy with me, asking me if we were on the same page. He would let me know which way he wanted to head. But he also would ask me how we can come together."

Some Republicans feared Bush might build Sadler into a prominent statewide figure. But the governor didn't care. Along with Sen. Bill Ratliff (R-Mount Pleasant) Bush and Sadler fashioned the new education code. Its

emphasis on freeing campuses to make decisions and holding them accountable for results reflects the recommendations of such organizations as the Brookings Institute.

Zealous Zelig

One Austin lobbyist describes Bush another way: The governor "takes his personality and blends it to the need." He does that, the lobbyist says, "for the sake of getting the job done." Indeed, the governor said last April that "reaching out helps defuse the environment." Karl Rove, the governor's political strategist, says Bush's practicality should not be misinterpreted as a lack of beliefs. "He just doesn't want to make the train run on time, he also knows where he wants the train to go," Rove observes.

Bush is committed to his core philosophy of less government and more personal responsibility. And he is a Republican almost down to his bones. But like his father before him, as

well as pragmatic Texans such as Lloyd Bentsen, James Baker and Robert Strauss, Mr. Bush's managerialism reflects a greater interest in sensible results from government, not a narrow partisanship or zealous hatred of government. "Government if necessary, but not necessarily government," the new governor declared.

Texans evidently like the get-it-done style. The most recent polls indicate an overwhelming majority of Texans think Bush is either doing a "good" or "excellent" job. Austin political consultant Bill Miller summarized the results this way: "Bush is like good whiskey—he seems to be getting better with time."

Bush has said he will not campaign against any Democrat in the Legislature with whom he has closely worked.

Legislative Results

Of course, non-Texans have had no reason to watch the Texas Legislature work under Bush's leadership. They may assume he is just a dilettante. Before his election in November 1994, Bush's political experience involved being the son of the former president and the grandson of a senator. He worked in his father's presidential campaigns but had held no office. What did this guy know? Ann Richards and Democratic Party higher-ups hammered that point home during the campaign, often referring to him as "Shrub."

Bush knew a lot more than they assumed. His work in the 1995

legislature, and the unconventional way in which he achieved his goals over the last year, indicate political astuteness. GOP candidates should take notes as they begin the 1996 campaign. For starters, the Republican Governor has already convinced the Democrat-controlled Legislature to turn his four 1994 campaign goals into public policy. Ralph Wayne of the Texas Civil Justice League said during the legislative session that Bush "made the Legislature his turf and it shows."

As he wished, Texas legislators gave local public school campuses more authority; implemented new liability laws; toughened the juvenile justice system; and created new welfare rules, such as requiring welfare recipients to immunize their kids.

The bipartisan work toward Bush's goals was striking, especially in contrast to Washington, where partisans play a nasty game of one-upmanship. Some Democratic legislators openly said that they had had more policy conversations with Bush than with Richards. *Texas Monthly's* Paul Burka elaborated on this point on Dallas radio station KERA, saying "George W. Bush's best friend in the Texas House was a Democratic trial lawyer." That trial lawyer was none other than Sadler, the House Education Committee chairman.

Outside the Box

Bush also has thought "outside the box" on several national issues. He has drawn notice for opposing a Texas version of California's Proposition 187, which denies public services to undocumented immigrants. In August—as most GOP presidential candidates were talking tough about illegal immigration before United We Stand's Dallas convention—Bush said he would work to see "that there is no immigrant-bashing" during the 1996 presidential primaries.

While the governor favors many new measures to control illegal immigration, he does not want to curtail education and health care benefits for undocumented aliens. ("I believe it's good public policy," the governor told the Associated Press in explaining

his support for benefits.)

Likewise, Bush has taken a different posture from fellow Republican Gov. Pete Wilson of California on affirmative action. Bush was noticeable absent last year when David Sibley—an ally and Republican state senator—proposed to end Texas' affirmative action policies. Although he has never come out swinging for affirmative action like Massachusetts Gov. Bill Weld (R), Bush has opposed removing such policies at Texas universities.

Ross Perot voters in search of less national partisanship especially should like this fact: Bush has said he will not campaign against any Democrat in the Legislature with whom he has closely worked. The governor even wrote *The Dallas Morning News* last summer complaining that it had given him too much credit for the Legislature's successes.

The major downside to Bush's leadership is his occasional political nativism, which carries a dangerous edge.

Texas Managerialism

The Yale and Harvard graduate's focus on achieving results—and his willingness to take risks to reach his goals—resemble a shift in Texas itself. University of Texas political scientist Bruce Buchanan says Texans now live "on the cutting edge of international economic issues. Our political style is making the transition, too." Forty years ago, Texas was still a rural, agriculture state. But as its urban centers started burgeoning, Texas' attitudes

began to broaden as well. The state's politics has been racing to keep with the changes.

Oil, agriculture and defense contracts are no longer dominant in the Lone Star State. And neither is the type of politician who has represented those industries: Lyndon Johnson, John Tower, George Mahon and Jim Wright, for example. Entrepreneurs, financiers, international traders, health professionals and high-tech wizards now dominate the landscape. As state Comptroller John Sharp (D) noted in his recent book, *Forces of Change*: "from 1982 to 1992, (Texas) high tech jobs grew by 24.7 percent, while total employment in nonfarm sectors rose by 15.8 percent."

Some of Texas' largest or most prominent employers today are large medical complexes in Dallas and Houston; firms doing business in Europe, Japan and Mexico; companies flying products in and out of Fort Worth's Alliance Airport; high-tech entrepreneurs and biomedical firms around the Austin and San Antonio; the space center near Houston; and communication firms in North Dallas. And Texas politics—with its emerging managerial streak—is starting to reflect the shift.

Rove describes the governor's emphasis on education reform as a product of his understanding that without a solid work force, Texas is in deep trouble. John Connally sounded a similar message three decades ago. Indeed, he and Bush bear several striking similarities.

After World War II, Connally was the state's first forward-looking conservative governor. He knew the state needed to compete in a larger economy, and staked his governorship on building up the base of Texas' flagship universities: the University of Texas and Texas A&M. Connally particularly helped place Texas A&M on a higher plane, urging the Legislature to

invest more money in the once-sleepy ag school. Now, A&M and Texas—with all their resources and branches—allow the state to compete for service industries looking for a home.

But not many Texas governors between Connally and Bush projected such a



modern path. As recently as 1978, Dolph Briscoe was a quiet rancher-governor who would often disappear to his Uvalde home. Republican Gov. Bill Clements was more engaged in the 1980s. But the blunt, feisty Clements did not project the modern style of Connally and Bush. And though Richards also did a masterful job of pitching Texas to industry leaders, Austin insiders almost universally claim she never set a strong legislative agenda, like Connally and Bush.

Wave of the Future

One final thing: Texas managerialism—practiced also by Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros and U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R)—does not receive as much national media attention as the ideological politics Texas Sen. Phil Gramm (R) relishes. Nor is it as colorful as Perot's twangy

populism, or as vituperative as the class warfare good ol' boy Democrats Jim Mattox and Jim Hightower prefer. Nevertheless, managerialism is the "new Texas."

The major downside to Bush's leadership is his occasional political nativism. The oft-repeated Bush mantra is "let Texans manage Texas." That idea is not bad on its face. State capitols, including Austin, are home to much creative thinking these days. But the Bush chant carries a dangerous edge.

Texans used to boast that their oil-based economy was the engine that ran the entire country. But it all came crashing down in the 1980s, forcing Texas to realize that its future was tied to a much larger world.

Likewise, its politics cannot be cut off from the outside. That will be especially true if the delivery of social services like welfare and Medicaid lands on state doorsteps. Does Bush really want to be cast adrift from Washington? Can the state really afford to meet all its social responsibilities on its own? If so, Texans may see their budgets go through the roof. Hunkering down—like an old-fashioned Texas Republic—could hurt the state politically, just as it did economically.

Yet Bush's style of governing is one worth noting, especially by GOP presidential hopefuls. His managerial approach has strengths: define common goals, demand results, share power. Many voters would surely welcome that approach in Washington.

The question is, will any eyes be cast upon Texas?

A former editor of the Ripon Forum (1981-91), William McKenzie is currently a columnist for the Dallas Morning News, in which a previous version of this article appeared.