Briefing Materials
Karl Zinsmeister
July 25, 2016
Prepared by M. Joel Voss, Research Assistant
March 2011

Presidential Oral History Program

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**Karl Zinsmeister News Timeline**  
*Prepared by M. Joel Voss  
Miller Center, University of Virginia, 05/23/2011*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Zinsmeister graduates from Yale University with a B.A. in cultural history. Prior to graduation, Zinsmeister studies at Trinity College, Dublin. (<a href="http://www.karlzinsmeister.net">http://www.karlzinsmeister.net</a>)</td>
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<td>1982-1986</td>
<td>Zinsmeister serves as a research associate for Ben Wattenberg. (<a href="http://www.karlzinsmeister.net">http://www.karlzinsmeister.net</a>)</td>
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<td>1985-1989</td>
<td>Zinsmeister is as a weekly commentator on Radio America. (<a href="http://www.karlzinsmeister.net">http://www.karlzinsmeister.net</a>)</td>
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<td>1994-2006</td>
<td>Zinsmeister works at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) as the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fellow, J. B. Fuqua Fellow, and editor-in-chief for its monthly magazine. He also serves on the board of directors for the Foundation for Community and Faith-Centered Enterprise. (<a href="http://www.karlzinsmeister.net">http://www.karlzinsmeister.net</a>)</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Zinsmeister is an embedded journalist during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.</td>
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**2006**

*May* On the 24th, George W. Bush appoints Zinsmeister as his new assistant to the president for domestic policy. *(The New York Times, 05/25/2006)*

*July* Bush issues his first veto on a bill that would lift funding restrictions on human embryonic stem cell research. Zinsmeister suggests inviting “snowflake babies” to the White House for the veto speech in the East Room. Snowflake babies are frozen embryos that are implanted in an adoptive mother. *(George Bush, Decision Points, New York: Crown, 2010, p. 123)*
**October**

On the 2nd, Zinsmeister meets with Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales to discuss a proposed conference on violence and safety in public schools. The conference comes after a week that sees three different attacks on schools in America. ([http://chinadaily.com.cn](http://chinadaily.com.cn))

On the 26th, Bush signs the Secure Fences Act.

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**2007**

**January**

On the 3rd, the Forum on Educational Accountability, a coalition of about 100 groups including the National Parent Teacher Association and NAACP, proposes reworking No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Spellings responds that she welcomes proposals to tweak the law, but a rewrite is not necessary. ([The Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/articles/20070104/), 01/04/2007)

On the 8th, Bush, Spellings, and Democratic congressional leaders meet on the fifth anniversary of NCLB to discuss reauthorization of the law, which is up this year. Spellings states that, “NCLB really was a true game-changer. It was really, really historic when we said to ourselves as a country that we were going to educate every child and we were going to give ourselves a deadline of 2014.” ([The White House Bulletin](http://www.whitehouse.gov), 01/08/2007) However, reflecting general Democratic sentiment, Rep. George Miller (D-CA) urges the Bush Administration to support sharp increases for impoverished schools. ([The New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com), 01/09/2007)

On the 9th, The Bush Administration lifts a drilling embargo for Bristol Bay in Alaska. The move comes after reports that OPEC plans to decrease world supplies in an effort to increase crude oil supplies. The Bush Administration also plans on increasing royalty fees for deep water oil and gas drilling. ([The Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com), 01/10/2007)

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**February**


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**April**

On the 30th, The Bush Administration announces a plan to allow oil drilling to occur off the coast of Virginia. Additionally, the proposal includes new measures to allow for drilling in Alaska’s Bristol Bay and in the Gulf of Mexico. ([The Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com), 04/28/2007)

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**May**

On the 17th, the Bush Administration and leaders of both parties in the Senate agree to overhaul the United States’ immigration regulations. The agreement would “grant temporary legal status to virtually all illegal immigrants in the country, while allowing them to apply for residence visas and eventual citizenship.” However, the deal appears to be tentative with Democratic leaders suggesting that they would not pass the legislation if immigrant rights are not
protected. *The Washington Post, 05/18/2007*

**June**

On the 7th, talks over immigration reform collapse and stall in the Senate after both Democrats and Republicans refuse to end the debates and vote. Reportedly, Democrats are concerned with numerous conservative amendments that are recently added to the bill. On the 28th, the bill fails to pass the Senate. *The Washington Post, 06/08/2007, 06/29/2007*

**September**

Miller’s draft proposal for the reauthorization of NCLB is released. He recommends changes in determining school performance by adding other measures besides just math and reading scores, and draws a distinction between schools failing across the board and ones that just have some student groups failing. The proposal would also allow immigrants to take tests in their native language for five years. Spellings responds that the changes, “could be a significant retreat from accountability.” *The New York Times, 09/06/2007, 09/01/2007; The Washington Post, 09/06/2007*

On the 7th, the Senate passes the College Cost Reduction and Access Act. The bill is a bipartisan effort that decreases interest on loans by half while increasing grant assistance. The purpose of the bill is to help prevent families from becoming riddled with debt after sending their children to college. The bill is signed by the president on the 27th. *States News Service, 09/07/2007*

On the 28th, Zinsmeister participates in a Harvard University conference on race and family. According to Zinsmeister, “If a young American was placed behind a curtain, and you were required to guess his or her social status and individual happiness with only one factual datum before you, the single more trenchant indicator you could ask for would be whether that person grew up with both parents in attendance. Unfortunately, about a third of our next generation will substantially grow up without this advantage, and fully half will have at least a brief brush with family separation before they turn 18.” *The Washington Post, 10/01/2007*

**October**

The healthcare industry puts pressure on the White House and Congress to reauthorize the State Children’s Health Insurance Program after Bush’s veto. According to Press Secretary Dana Perino, Bush wants to ensure that children who are not currently covered are assisted first and he is open to a compromise on a $5 billion allocation. *USA Today, 10/04/2007*

Zinsmeister helps Bush formulate a new policy to help disabled veterans after a bipartisan commission finds that the current system is inadequate. The current system is problematic because “both the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs [have] authority over determining the level of benefits and care provided to injured soldiers, often pitting the two bureaucracies against each other and holding up services.” *The New York Times, 10/17/2007*
December
On the 12th, Bush vetoes a children’s health bill for the second time. In her announcement, Perino explains that Congress “failed to send the president legislation that puts children first, and instead they sent for a second time one that would allow adults onto the program, expand to higher incomes, and raise taxes.” *(The New York Times, 12/13/2007)*


2008

January

March
Bush learns about Bear Sterns’ financial problems and its impact on the economy. Bush asks Paulson if there is another company who might be willing to buy Bear Sterns. Paulson works to get JPMorgan to buy Bear Sterns. *(Paulson, pp. 96, 113)*

April
On the 1st, Zinsmeister replies to a letter by Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA) asking that the Administration consider hiring more veterans. Although Zinsmeister points out that the White House “wholeheartedly agrees” with Grassley’s premise, Grassley argues that “[The White House] response lacked much substance and the central request of my letter remains unaddressed.” *(The Washington Post, 04/04/2008)*

As NCLB reauthorization stalls in Congress, the Administration proposes new changes to the program that includes requiring all states to use the same requirements for assessing dropout rates and increase public school oversight. According to at least one advocate of NLCB, “the chances for reauthorization this year are dimming and whoever is elected in November, they’ve got the war, they’ve got the economy, and they’ve got health care. I have a hard time imagining how a No Child Left Behind reauthorization can compete.” *(The Washington Post, 04/23/2008)*

May
The President signs the Ensuring Continued Access to Student Loan Act. The legislation is meant to help students maintain access to loans despite tightening credit around the country. *(The Christian Science Monitor, 05/02/2008)*

June
As the economy deteriorates further, Congress seeks to approve a package of housing legislation, including a refinancing program aimed at preventing foreclosures. Bush threatens to veto the bill, but it receives bipartisan support in an 83-9 Senate vote. *(The Washington Post, 06/25/2008)*
July

On the 11th, Paulson calls Bolten to schedule a meeting with Bush. At lunch with Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Bolten at the White House, Paulson makes the case for going to Congress for expanded authority to deal with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The proposal becomes the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008. For distressed borrowers, the law allows the FHA to insure up to $300 billion of 30-year fixed rate refinance loans up to 90% of appraised value. Zinsmeister reportedly works on this bill and Bush signs it into law at the end of the month. (Paulson, pp. 143-144; The Associated Press Online, 04/10/2008; Reuters, 07/30/2008)

August

Paulson tells Bush and Bolten on the 25th that there is “no good alternative” to placing Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in federal conservatorship. (Paulson, p. 3)

Although Spellings sends a letter to lawmakers regarding her concern about the costs of over 60 new programs, Bush signs the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. It includes new regulations for financial perks and increases financial aid programs. (Chronicle of Higher Education, 08/15/2008; CQ Weekly, 12/08/2008)

September

Paulson tries to find a buyer for Lehman Brothers. He keeps Bolten and Bush informed, but Lehman Brothers files for bankruptcy after efforts to find a buyer for the firm are unsuccessful. (Paulson, p. 216; Bush, pp. 456-457)

On the 15th, Paulson briefs the president after he learns that Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs are in financial trouble. (Paulson, p. 224)

October

On the 3rd, Bush signs the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act. The bill requires insurance companies to cover mental illnesses and addictions in the same manner that physical ailments would be covered. (http://www.time.com)

After the Connecticut Supreme Court overturns a ban on same-sex marriage, Zinsmeister states that, “[i]t is] unfortunate that activist judges continue to seek to redefine marriage by court order -- without regard for the will of the people.” (The Washington Post, 10/11/2008)

On the 3rd, Bush signs the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) that provides for $700 billion in aid for troubled financial institutions.

On the 10th, Bush signs the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act. The bill includes numerous improvements for, “claims processing, compensation enhancements, employment and education assistance, and housing benefits for veterans.” (Congressional Documents and Publications, 10/10/2008)

December

On the 10th, Senate Republicans block a plan to rescue Chrysler and General Motors. Consequently, on the 19th, Bush uses $17.4 billion in TARP funds to temporarily sustain the auto companies. (The Washington Post, 12/11/2008; The New York Times, 12/20/2008)
2009

January  Zinsmeister leaves the White House. He goes on to serve at vice president of L. & J.G. Stickley, Inc. (http://www.karlzinsmeister.net)
TIMELINES

- Karl Zinsmeister News Timeline, prepared by M. Joel Voss, Miller Center, University of Virginia, 05/23/2011.

- Timeline of the Bush Presidency, prepared by Justin Peck and Bryan Craig, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 04/30/2010.
**SELECTED WRITINGS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY KARL ZINSMEISTER**


DOMESTIC POLICY ADVISOR


KEY ISSUES AND EVENTS

Domestic Policy

No Child Left Behind


Energy


Student Loans


Immigration Reform


Stem Cell Research


**Race and Family**

**Veteran Disability**


**The Mortgage Crisis**

**Early Relationship with Bush**

- How did you come to meet George W. Bush? What were you early impressions of him? Did you know Bush well prior to joining the Bush administration? Were you considered for any appointments at the beginning of the Bush administration?
- Describe your working and personal relationships with Bush. How did your relationship with Bush evolve?

**Domestic Policy Advisor**

- How did you come to serve as a domestic policy advisor for President Bush? Did the president express to you his expectations before taking office? What were your primary responsibilities? With whom did you work most closely with?
- How did your prior work experiences as an author, producer, and editor prepare you for your appointment as domestic policy advisor?
- Describe the policy-making and decision-making process in the administration. How did your role as domestic policy advisor fit into the process and when did President Bush come into that process? Describe your interactions with key administration agencies.
- Tell us what kind of impact did foreign policy (the War on Terror) have on President Bush’s domestic policy agenda during your tenure?
- Discuss your role in helping formulate President Bush’s policies on stem cell research. How active was the president in formulating these policies?
- What was your role in energy policy, specifically about opening up drilling in Alaska and off the Virginia coast? How involved was Vice President Dick Cheney on these issues?
- What was your role in helping formulate President Bush’s policies on the benefits of disabled veterans and the closing of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center?
- Discuss your role in the 2007 immigration debate. Why did you think reform failed to pass?
- How closely did you work with Secretary Margaret Spellings on NCLB and the Higher Education Act reauthorizations, college loan legislation, and the student loan scandal?
- Describe Bush’s efforts to get a more equitable State Children’s Health Insurance Program.
- Tell us about your work on issues of race, affirmative action, and other social issues?
- Describe your role in helping homeowners during the mortgage crisis in early 2008, TARP, and other discussions relating to the 2008 economic crisis.
- Were there any major policies that you wished you could have worked on or that the administration would have passed that did not get through Congress? If so, why did these policies fail to get passed?
- You had extensive background on Iraq as a reporter going into the White House. What role did you play regarding Iraqi policy while in the Bush administration?

**The Bush Presidency in Retrospect**

- What do you consider your most significant accomplishments as a domestic policy advisor?
- What were the most challenging parts of your job? What were the most rewarding?
• What were Bush’s greatest assets as president? Assess his strengths and weaknesses as a communicator, domestic policymaker, a legislative leader, and a leader of public opinion. Which of his attributes served him best in the presidency?
• Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Bush presidency. What features of the Bush presidency were overlooked or misunderstood by the press and public?
• How should the Bush presidency be viewed in history?