



President George W. Bush Oral History Project

BRIEFING MATERIALS

Karl Zinsmeister

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Prepared by M. Joel Voss, Research Assistant
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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

- 1981** Zinsmeister graduates from Yale University with a B.A. in cultural history. Prior to graduation, Zinsmeister studies at Trinity College, Dublin. (<http://www.karlzinsmeister.net>)
- 1981-1982** Zinsmeister is a legislative assistant to Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY). (<http://www.karlzinsmeister.net>)
- 1982-1986** Zinsmeister serves as a research associate for Ben Wattenberg. (<http://www.karlzinsmeister.net>)
- 1985-1989** Zinsmeister is as a weekly commentator on Radio America. (<http://www.karlzinsmeister.net>)
- 1986-1987** Zinsmeister serves as research director at The Working Seminar on Family and American Welfare Policy. (<http://www.karlzinsmeister.net>)
- 1986-1994** While self-employed, Zinsmeister researches and writes “150 articles, book chapters, speeches, and broadcast commentaries, plus a book on the significance of family breakdown.” (<http://www.karlzinsmeister.net>)
- 1994-2006** 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. (<http://www.karlzinsmeister.net>)
- 2003** Zinsmeister is an embedded journalist during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.
- 2005-2006** Zinsmeister produces *Warriors*, a film about soldiers in Iraq. The film is commissioned the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and airs in 2007. (*The New York Times*, 04/01/2007; <http://www.karlzinsmeister.net>)
- 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>)

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

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*, 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*, 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*, 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*, 01/10/2007)

February *The Washington Post* reports that Walter Reed Army Medical Center is in dire straits. According to the report, buildings at the hospital and a makeshift secondary hospital are unhygienic and overcrowded. (*The Washington Post*, 02/18/2007; *The New York Times*, 02/24/2007)

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*, 04/28/2007)

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)

On the 19th, Bush signs the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (EISA).

2008

January On the 2nd, Secretary of Treasury Henry Paulson meets with Bush about a plan for the weakened economy. Chief of Staff Josh Bolten and Paulson support the White House's efforts for an economic stimulus. Bush announces the proposal on the 18th and signs the \$145 billion measure into law the next month. (Henry M. Paulson, Jr., *On the Brink*, New York: Business Plus, 2010, pp. 84-85; *The New York Times*, 01/17/2008)

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, “[it 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 as 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.

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- Karl Zinsmeister, “A Society without Dictators,” *Engage: A Journal for Law and Public Policy*, 8 (2): 19-23.
- Karl Zinsmeister and Edward Lezear, “Lead Weight or Gold Mine: What Are the True Costs of Immigration?” *Realclearpolitics.com*, 06/25/2007.
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- Karl Zinsmeister, “Progress in Education: How the White House Sees it,” *The New York Times*, 10/24/2008.

DOMESTIC POLICY ADVISOR

- Bradley H. Patterson, “Policymaking at the White House: Domestic and Economic Affairs” in *To Serve the President: Continuity and Innovation in the White House Staff* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008) pp. 108-119.
- Josh Gerstein, “Bush Names Critic to a Key Post,” *The New York Sun*, 05/25/2006.
- Josh O’Brien, “How Cazenovia Man Wrote His Way into the White House, *The Post-Standard*, 06/11/2006.

KEY ISSUES AND EVENTS

Domestic Policy

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No Child Left Behind

- Diana Jean Schemo, “Democrats Push for Changes to No Child Left Behind Law,” *The New York Times*, 01/07/2007.
- Maria Glod, “As Congress Tarries, Administration Proposes Changes to 'No Child' Law,” *The Washington Post*, 04/23/2008.

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- Steven Mufson and David A. Fahrenthold, “U.S. Proposal Would Allow Oil Drilling Off Virginia; Five-Year Plan Would Also Open Alaskan, Gulf Waters,” *The Washington Post*, 04/28/2007.
- Office of the Press Secretary, “Fact Sheet: Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007,” 12/19/2007, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/12/20071219-1.html>>, (06/25/2013).

Student Loans

- Amit R. Paley, “Lenders Misusing Student Database; Improper Searches Raise Privacy Fears,” *The Washington Post*, 04/15/2007.
- “U.S. House Clears College Cost Reduction Act for President,” *States News Service*, 09/07/2007.
- Stacy Teicher Khadaroo, “Student-Loan Legislation Moves Forward,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 05/02/2008.

Immigration Reform

- Jonathan Weisman, “Deal on Immigration Reached; Bush Supports Senate's Bipartisan Compromise, but Hurdles Remain,” *The Washington Post*, 05/18/2007.
- Jonathan Weisman, “Immigration Overhaul Bill Stalls in Senate; Bipartisan Compromise Collapses; Reid Says Measure May Return,” *The Washington Post*, 06/08/2007.

Stem Cell Research

- George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010) pp. 122-125

- Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Bush will Pair Veto with New Cell Initiative,” *The New York Times*, 06/20/2007.
- Michael Abramowitz and Rick Weiss, “A Scientific Advance, a Political Question Mark,” *The Washington Post*, 11/21/2007.

Race and Family

- Michael A. Fletcher, “White House Aide Channels a Democrat on Fixing Nation's Social Ills,” *The Washington Post*, 10/01/2007.

Veteran Disability

- Ginger Thompson, “Bush Calls for Simplifying Military Disability System,” *The New York Times*, 10/17/2007.
- Patrick Yoest, “2007 Legislative Summary: Veteran’s Affairs: Veteran’s Aid Expansion,” *CQ Weekly*, 01/07/2008.

The Mortgage Crisis

- Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Administration Pushes Mortgage Help Expansion while Democrats Seek a Broader Housing Rescue,” *The Associated Press*, 04/09/2008.
- Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, “Vital Part of Housing Bill Is Brainchild of Banks; Mortgage Aid Under 'Credit Suisse Plan' Would Benefit Lenders,” *The Washington Post*, 06/28/2008.

KARL ZINSMEISTER SUGGESTED TOPICS

Prepared by M. Joel Voss

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 05/23/2011

Early Relationship with Bush

- How did you come to meet George W. Bush? What were your 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?