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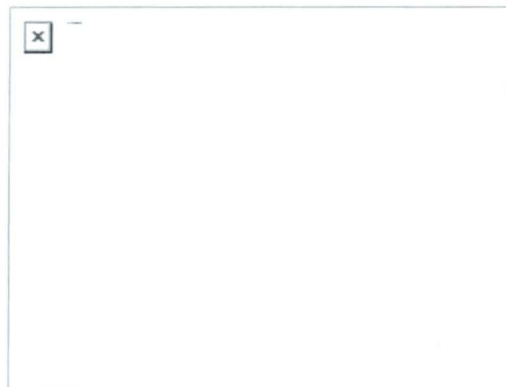


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George W. Bush on next four years



Tom Brokaw's exclusive interview with the president-elect

NBC's Tom Brokaw talks to president-elect George W. Bush about his upcoming inauguration and what he expects to do in office over the next four years.

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NBC News

Jan. 14 — By this time next Sunday, George W. Bush will have spent his first full day as president of the United States. This coming week will be a busy one for the president-elect and his wife, Laura, as they say goodbye to old friends in Texas and prepare for their move to that new address in Washington and then the inauguration as president on Saturday. On this past Sunday, they were both setting aside time at their ranch they enjoy so much reflecting on the past and thinking about the future. They shared their thoughts with NBC News' Tom Brokaw, who sat down with them at the Bush ranch in Crawford, Texas.

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Tom Brokaw
NBC ANCHOR

Tom Brokaw: You know the famous story about Ronald Reagan on the day of his inauguration. Mike Deaver went in to wake him up and said, "Governor, it's time for you to get sworn in as president." And Reagan said from beneath the covers, "Do I have to?" Do you feel that way sometimes?

George W. Bush: No, I want to. I really don't feel that way. I feel like I'm anxious to get up there and get to work. And I'm looking forward to the moment.

But from the moment he takes the oath of office, George W. Bush might have a difficult time proving, as he likes to say, that he's "a uniter, not a divider."

Tom Brokaw: The fact is that you did get fewer popular votes and you had a razor-thin win in the Electoral College. Will that in some fashion cause you to pull back a little bit on the promises you made?

George W. Bush: No, not at all.

Tom Brokaw: One of the things (Bill Clinton) did was

keep an eye on the polls. And your new Defense Secretary, Don Rumsfeld said, "No President can govern without the consent of the people."

George W. Bush: Well, I think — here's the way I view that — I view that I've got some political capital. I earned it during the course of the campaign. It'll be enhanced when I get sworn in and I'm going to spend it.

And I'm going to spend it on a focused agenda. And it'll be an agenda that I firmly believe is the right agenda for the country. And it's not going to be an agenda as to — cobbled together by a bunch of polls and focus

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I think the role of the president is to set a strategic agenda for the country, and to work on it. The role of the president is also to set a tone. And I — this country needs a new tone out of Washington, D.C., and I'm going to give it my all to change the tone in Washington.

The president-elect is making it clear he will follow a conservative agenda. And he's girding for confirmation battles that could be as divisive and partisan as the election itself.

Tom Brokaw: Already people are saying, look, your nomination of John Ashcroft as the attorney general is a divisive gesture within the African-American community. Here's a man who enthusiastically embraced an honorary degree from a university with racist policies, Bob Jones, and a man who said he's got to speak out on behalf of the agenda of Robert E. Lee.

George W. Bush: Yes, well, there are a lot of voices of special interests in Washington that are loud. He's going to be confirmed, in my judgment. And he's going to be a very good attorney general. He has got a record of inclusiveness as an attorney general and as a governor and as a senator in the state of Missouri.

I look forward to people watching his testimony. He is a good man. And he is going to do a very good job as the Attorney General, as the people's lawyer, and as my lawyer, the government's lawyer. And I hope people take a step back and give him a chance. And I think they're going to be pleased with how he performs.

Tom Brokaw: But were you surprised to learn that he said to the Southern Progressive Magazine that he feels that he needs to speak up on behalf of Robert E. Lee because too many people feel that that was a perverted agenda, and it was not?

George W. Bush: Well, I don't think — I don't think he was talking — and I haven't read the article, so it's hard for me to respond to that. I just know that...

Tom Brokaw: That's what he said.

George W. Bush: Well, I know, but he doesn't — if he's — the inference is that somehow he thinks slavery is a — is a noble institution I would — I would strongly reject that assumption — that John Ashcroft is an open-minded, inclusive person.

And I've read all kinds of comments that people are making about him. And he is going to end up being a very good Attorney General. I believe he's going to be



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confirmed.

Tom Brokaw: You know, as well, that those people who believe in choice on abortion are also outspokenly opposed to him.

George W. Bush: But they're outspokenly opposed to me.

Tom Brokaw: But he has said, for example, that he's against abortion in all cases, including rape and incest.

George W. Bush: We disagree.

Tom Brokaw: And some forms of — birth control even. What if he appoints a Solicitor General who will make the case of the government before the U.S. Supreme Court who shares his feelings, would that make you unhappy?

George W. Bush: But you understand who's the president? He understands who — who's going to occupy the chair in the Oval Office. John's a team player when it comes to that.

Secondly, he's going to enforce the laws on the books. That's what you will hear in his testimony. He's going to enforce the law. He will not politicize the Attorney General's Office. Some are trying to politicize it before he even gets sworn in. But, John understands his job is to be an attorney, and not politicize the office. He said that, if I'm not mistaken. I know he said it to me, personally. I think he said it publicly when — when I announced it — the nomination.

Also igniting a firestorm is Interior Secretary-designate Gale Norton. An attorney and corporate lobbyist, she has angered many environmentalists for her stands on issues such as oil drilling in the Arctic wildlife refuge.

George W. Bush: I've already been told by some folks up there that this is a litmus-test issue for them. And you know I read the other day on Miss Norton that somebody said, "Well, you know she can't be confirmed. After all, she believes we ought to be drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic wildlife refuge." And I said: "Why would that disqualify her? After all, that's the position I took."

I will tell you something about her, as well, like I mentioned about John Ashcroft. She, too, had run for statewide office in Colorado. And Colorado's a pretty environmentally sensitive state. And she is a successful statewide political figure. And I think you're going to find a lot of people out there will tell you that she is a

balanced, reasonable, thoughtful woman who's going to do a darn good job.

As president, Mr. Bush says he's going to take a hard look at some of President Clinton's recent executive orders that put nearly 60 million acres of forest lands off limits to development.

George W. Bush: I've been very strong in my opposition with the president on some of the so-called Western land grabs.

Tom Brokaw: Are you going to try to reverse those?

George W. Bush: I'm reviewing every executive order, as well as every regulation. And matter of fact, next week, I'm going to be briefed as to what's doable, what's not doable, what can be delayed, what can't be delayed. I'm going to review all of them.

Tom Brokaw: President Clinton is going out of office with an approval rate of 64 percent, higher than Ronald Reagan or any other outgoing president in modern memory. That says the country likes what he's been doing.

George W. Bush: Well, maybe so, but he's not going to be the president on January 20. I am. And I look forward to the opportunity to serve and — you know the president — the president's an interesting person. I've learned some lessons from him.

And one of them is how to use the bully pulpit to define relations with Congress, for example. He played the end game very well with the members of Congress, and I think it's a good lesson for not only this incoming president, but future presidents as well.

And he's certainly been an active president on the way out of town too. And I can — I can understand that, and appreciate that.

Tom Brokaw: You talk a lot about the energy crisis, but you've talked about it almost exclusively as the need to produce more energy. There's been very little talk about conservation. We have been on a buying and consumption binge in this country.

George W. Bush: Well, I thought — listen, I believe we need to conserve. I mean, I think we need to have incentives to encourage people to insulate their homes better. I think we need to make sure industry does not, you know, is not wasteful, not question about it.

But I'm realistic. We can't conserve our independence. I mean, you got an energy problem in

California primarily caused by the fact there's no plants, and there's not enough to fuel the plants if there were new plants. We need to explore financial gas. I mean we need to be moving U.S. product. And so I think the two go hand in hand.

I was reading somewhere the other day, where we can get out of this crisis by more wind. Well, you know, that's an interesting thought, except our technology isn't enough to capture enough wind to be able to make sure our economy continues to grow. And so I strongly believe in conservation. I believe we made great progress in conservation. But I know if we don't find more product we're going to have a problem.

Although some of the president-elect's actions in the transition have brought controversy, nothing compares to the very election that brought him to this threshold of power.

Tom Brokaw: The U.S. Civil Rights Commission has said that what happened in Florida was a disaster. After all that the country's been through, do you think that there ought to be major election reforms, not just in Florida, but across the country?

George W. Bush: It depends on what they are. But, yes, listen, I didn't particularly care for a system that went through a couple of recounts, and then they tried to go through a revote. I didn't mind the recounts, which I'd won a couple of times. What I did mind was seeing people on TV kind of trying to figure out, well, I think this person may have wanted to vote for so and so, so we'll give it to me or Al Gore. I don't think it's fair for a human being who is politically elected, a political person, to try to divine the intent of a voter. And so I mean I'd be interested in some reform.

Tom Brokaw: You ran against Washington, in a way. And, yet, we've got Don Rumsfeld going back to be the defense secretary, Dick Cheney your vice president, Colin Powell — a lot of people are pretty familiar who kind of came of age in the beltway.

George W. Bush: Well, they did. And — people ought to be really proud of the — and comforted by the National Security team that I've assembled. I ran against an attitude more than D.C. itself.

Tom Brokaw: Are you going to get together with John McCain and Campaign Finance Reform?

George W. Bush: I think we can, yeah, I do.

Tom Brokaw: He's going to go to the floor and

make the fight, you know.

George W. Bush: Good. I mean I — I believe John and I, we — we agree a lot more than we disagree on Campaign Funding Reform. I strongly believe there needs to be balance in any bill that includes paycheck protection.

On Election Night, as thousands of Bush supporters waited for a victory speech, the Texas governor received two historic phone calls from Vice President Al Gore.

Tom Brokaw: Did you get snippy with Al Gore early in the morning after the election?

George W. Bush: You know, as I told somebody, I wasn't sure what that word means. But I wasn't happy. The man called me on the phone and said he pulled out of the race. And I was preparing a victory statement. I had thousands of people standing in the rain in Austin, Texas. And then about — I just can't remember how much time elapsed, probably an hour later — he calls back and changes his mind. And I reminded him in my state of Texas that's the kind of things that generally, we generally didn't do. But anyway, I was firm. Let me put it to you that way.

Tom Brokaw: Can't blame him in a way, though, given how close it was and how confusing it was? Can you?

George W. Bush: No. I just don't know how many times in the history of the country a concession call was made and then the fellow changed his mind shortly thereafter.

For the first time, the first lady-to-be, Laura Bush, shares her thoughts on the most hotly contested presidential election in modern times.

Tom Brokaw: Was there a time after Election Day and before it was resolved by the Supreme Court when you thought this was all going to slip away?

Laura Bush: Sure. Several times during that time.

Tom Brokaw: Did you confide that to your husband?

Laura Bush: Not really. I mean I think we both were really — it was totally out of our hands, there was nothing we could do. It certainly wasn't the end of the election as we foresaw it, or as anyone foresaw it.

George W. Bush: Laura and I campaigned our hearts out and gave it the best shot we could. And the people went to the polls and we watched them count

those chads.

Laura Bush: Yes.

Tom Brokaw: Do you think if you have Justice Scalia to the White House for a dinner, people will say, "Aha! That's a deal!"

George W. Bush: Oh, I gotcha. I don't know.

Tom Brokaw: You like him?

George W. Bush: I do like him. I, please, I guess we're going to have to scratch him off the invitation list now that you brought it up.

Laura Bush: I mean the president and the first lady host the Supreme Court.

George W. Bush: He's just joshing us.

Laura Bush: I know.

George W. Bush: She's just trying to make sure Anthony gets a good meal — Antonio.

Tom Brokaw: Has he changed since he's been running for president in his personal demeanor?

Laura Bush: I don't think so. Not really. Not that I can tell. He still is not sitting up straight.

Tom Brokaw: Well, one of the things that he has to do as president is be pretty tough on people. When was the last time you heard him chew anybody out?

Laura Bush: Oh, I haven't heard him chew anybody out. He isn't tough on people. I mean, I think people think everyone knows what George thinks. I think he lets people know what he thinks. And that's a really good characteristic. It's very similar to his mother.

Tom Brokaw: But it's well-known that when your father was president, for example, you were the one who had to go to John Sununu and tell him, "It's time to go, John." Are you going to keep that role for yourself as president, or do you think you'll have other people?

George W. Bush: I'm pretty plain-spoken, and when appropriate, I will let people know what I think. If people disappoint me, I will tell them.

The Bushes say a big concern is how their twin 18-year-old daughters, Jenna and Barbara, will deal with the spotlight.

Tom Brokaw: Have you called the girls in for a family conference about how their lives are going to change?

Laura Bush: Not really. You know, we knew all along, talked about that very aspect of how their lives might change during the whole campaign.

Tom Brokaw: But they can't know that until it happens, can they?



Nightly News

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January 15 — Laura Bush talks about how she wants to improve education as the new First Lady.

Laura Bush: No. So I mean, they do know. They were, after all, the grandchildren of a president. And pretty savvy. But what also really helps if the press will afford them the same courtesy they afforded Chelsea Clinton. And that is to give them a private life. Our girls are not public figures. They're the children of a president. They will be the hope that they'll have the opportunity to have privacy. That's what they want, and we want that for them. We were very careful not to use them during our campaign. So that everyone would get the message that they deserve a private life.

Tom Brokaw: Governor, do you say to them, don't spend your college weekends the way I did, because after all, a lot more people are going to be looking in.

George Bush: No. Not really. They'll figure it out. I mean — I want them to learn and I want them to have a great college experience like I did. And part of the experience is to have fun with your friends. And my big regret, if there is any, is that they seem to think that I have affected their life in a negative way. And that made college a miserable time for them because I decided to run for president.

Tom Brokaw: Did they give you some grief about that?

George W. Bush: Yeah, of course. You got daughters, don't you? It's never ending.

Tom Brokaw: Part of the negotiation.

George W. Bush: It is part — exactly right.

Tom Brokaw: Mrs. Bush, have you called your mother-in-law, Barbara, and said, "Look, you've been through this before. Help me out here."

Laura Bush: I have.

Tom Brokaw: What did she say?

Laura Bush: I called her just to ask her the most mundane things about moving there and what I should pay. How she did certain things during their inauguration. What to do with all the family — all the hundreds of family, and I must say they're all George's side of the family who are coming.

George W. Bush: Half of whom I never heard from before.

Laura Bush: And I know she loved every minute she lived there. And I'm sure she would just say, if anything, not to take it for granted — to treasure every moment.

One moment George W. Bush is likely to treasure will occur on Saturday, 12 years to the day after his father took the oath of office on the Capitol steps.

Tom Brokaw: When you're standing on the west side of the Capitol and you have your hand on the Bible, you'll be looking at your mother and father. You can be a pretty emotional guy.

George W. Bush: Yes, I can.

Tom Brokaw: Are you going to be able to get through that?







George W. Bush: I'm going to stay focused. I think I will be able to. You know, I'm worried about Mother and Dad. Not worried about them. They're emotional as well, and I can't imagine what's going to be going through their mind. But I will be focused on the oath, and I'll be focused on my speech. And I'm not going to turn around and spend too much time looking at them because it will be an emotional moment for them and for me. But yes, I can get through it.

Tom Brokaw: I wish you both the very best.

George W. Bush: Thank you.

Laura Bush: Thank you so much.

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