

Panel predicts challenging road for Bush

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ing a racing chariot. Are these horses so strong that the charioteer will not be able to control them?"

Our former president's popularity could also make Bush's early days difficult. Clinton left office with one of the highest job approval ratings in history: 66 percent, according to a January 16 online Gallup poll.

Plant said Clinton's prolonged farewell likely upstaged Bush's arrival. "This might have been the first ex-president who got in the plane and told the pilot to circle Washington for an hour and re-land."

"Clinton is not going away," Nechemias added. "He is a big fund-raiser for the Democratic Party, and Hillary gives him the perfect excuse to stay in Washington."

The mainstream press has, in recent weeks, called the new president part of a family business or a modern political dynasty. But the younger Bush will have plenty of opportunity to put his own stamp on our political culture. To be most effective, Bresler said "Bush will have to work hard to reach out to core Democrats, feminists and the heads of the labor and civil rights movements. He must also work to find common ground on economic issues like a patient's bill of rights, prescription drugs and the tax cut."

As the only openly pro-Bush panelist, Bresler added that the president must work hard to expand support among certain voting groups, such as African-Americans, by following up on his education reform plans and making sure they work.

Nechemias believes Bush will have to work equally hard if he hopes to gain support among women. "If only men had voted," she said, "Bush would have won Florida 53 percent to 33 percent. Women voted disproportionately for Gore."

She cited Bush's pro-life/abortion stance as one reason women might be less likely to favor him. Now that he is in office, Nechemias thinks Bush will push for legislation that could outlaw many common forms of birth control. Nechemias also thinks the new president will focus less on women's health issues and daycare than Clinton did. She also believes the new administration will not rigorously enforce Title IX legislation, which guarantees gender equality in education.

Bresler agreed that Bush did have to overcome a gender gap, but he pointed out that the statistics used make a difference in its size. He said that married women were almost evenly divided between Bush and

Gore. The largest gap, said Bresler, came between married men and single women. Married men favored Bush by a 20 percent margin; unmarried women supported Gore by 31 percent.

But Nechemias said women are not the only people who should be concerned about Bush's presidency. Environmentalists should be, too. She said the president and his Interior Secretary designate, Gale Norton, support opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling for oil and natural gas. She added they want to do the same thing in the West, using federal lands to develop the mining, logging and oil industries.

Though the next four years might seem especially worrisome for these groups, Peterson raised an important counter argu-

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ment. "Remember that presidents don't control events, agendas and issues," he said. "Bush must reach out to Democrats and Republicans in the House and the Senate and try to develop positive working relationships."

Followers of politics know that the first 100 days of any presidential administration are typically considered a "honeymoon period." During this time, it is crucial for the new leader to make his mark. Bush's ambitious agenda shows that he plans to do just that.

During a recent interview on NBC's Today Show, the president listed his top three priorities for his first months in office. First, he wants to reform education by increasing student testing and offering parents greater school choice. He also wants to cut taxes by \$1.6 trillion, and he wants to boost military morale by paying soldiers more.

"It's time to focus on issues that matter to people," Bush said during the interview. "It's time to focus on policy, not politics. I'm going to do what I said, and I'm not

going to abandon that philosophy."

While optimism and confidence may help him, Nechemias said Bush's Cabinet could work against him. "Clinton's Cabinet looked like the face of America," she said. "Of the big four Cabinet positions, those being Justice, State, Defense and Treasury, this was the first time a woman served in two of the four. Women in Bush's Cabinet are not part of the big four."

Bush did appoint a number of women to his Cabinet, including National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman. But Nechemias said their positions, though important, have little connection to the women's movement or to women's issues. Furthermore, she said that Bush's original choice for Interior Secretary, Linda Chavez, called the glass ceiling "a figment of women's imaginations."

This stands in marked contrast to Clinton's Cabinet. To cite one other example of women playing key policy-making roles, Nechemias chose Donna Shalala, the former head of Health and Human Services. Among other things, Shalala was instrumental in making childhood immunizations universal.

Whatever hurdles Bush might have to clear, Bresler said, "He has this going for him: his opponents treat him as kind of a cartoon character, so he has very low expectations. But I think you all are going to be fooled. I think what George W. and the Republicans are going to try to do is build a coalition that is basically center-right. It could peel off enough Democrats in Congress and in the country that it could build a government majority. It has to do this by showing it can manage the economy well and tackle serious problems that Clinton didn't and could have, such as Social Security, Medicare and campaign finance reform."

Karla West, an American studies major who voted for Gore, said Bush must watch his step and take care not to divide the country, especially on issues related to women and minorities. "He should tread lightly with whatever he does in the first 100 days," she said.

Helen Decker, a communications major who supported the president, said, "Give Bush time. When someone new is presented, we tend to make assumptions about people based on press and media reports. Wait and see."

While the panel is adopting a wait-and-see-attitude themselves, they may hold another discussion later this spring to evaluate Bush's first 100 days in the Oval Office.



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