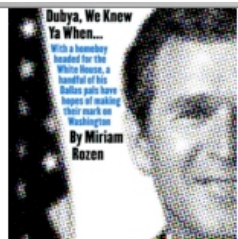


## Dubya, We Knew You When...

With a homeboy headed for the White House, a handful of his Dallas pals have hopes of making their mark on Washington

By Miriam Rozen

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The hotdog looks good, but lose the stiff shirt. Then-Gov. George W. Bush noshes at a Texas Rangers game with current team owner Tom Hicks in 1998.

Mark Graham



Economist John Goodman is a key proponent of a Bush-backed plan to allow taxpayers to invest some of their Social Security contributions.

Peter Calvin



Tony Evans, minister at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, wants to bring God into government--or vice versa. He has found an ally in George W. Bush.

Dallas vitamin entrepreneur Craig Keeland remembers vividly the cocktail party at which he reluctantly passed on a golden opportunity to pitch his products to George W. Bush.

In the early 1990s, Keeland, founder and chairman of the vitamin company Youngevity, became acquainted with Bush when the two men had offices in the same North Dallas building. Bush, then a minority owner and managing partner of the Texas Rangers, subleased space on the ninth floor of an unremarkable office tower one block southeast of the intersection of Loop 12 and the Dallas North Tollway. Keeland was just starting his company, a sort of Mary Kay-like enterprise for health supplements. Keeland's headquarters were on the 11th floor, two elevator stops above Bush's.

"Dallas is just a small town, and he was a really nice guy," says Keeland about the between-floor chats he engaged in with the man soon to be leader of the free world. As Bush moved from the Rangers to the governor's mansion to his quest for the White House, Keeland, a committed Republican, plied his former elevator cohort with campaign contributions.

This past year, Keeland earned the honorific title of "pioneer," the Bush campaign's name for roughly 200 fund-raisers who each directly or indirectly persuaded at least 100 others to contribute a total of \$100,000 or more. Some 28 Dallasites were Bush pioneers, including oilman Ray Hunt, Chili's restaurant's Nancy Brinker, Dallas Olympics promoter Tom Luce, former Dallas Cowboys quarterback turned real estate developer Roger Staubach, former Dallas Housing Authority President Alphonso Jackson, and Texas Rangers owner and financier Tom Hicks.

It was at a party Hicks threw to raise money for then-Lt. Gov. Rick Perry's campaign in 1998 that Keeland believes he could have sold his antioxidants and other dietary supplements to George W. A perennially tanned, extremely fit 46-year-old divorcé, Keeland is not shy about pitching his pills to most people, even reporters.

"I guess you just want to get uglier and older and fatter," Keeland says at the end of a telephone conversation when his suggestion to keep a pack of his supplements as an after-lunch treat is turned down.

At the Hicks fete, however, Keeland was on his way to talk to Bush about his pills but abruptly pulled up short.

"I never approached George W.," he says with some regret still evident in his voice.

Why not?

"I was just about to talk to him, and then I heard Ken Cooper's voice," Keeland recalls. Cooper is the founder of Cooper Aerobics Center and has conducted Bush's physicals. "Cooper has argued first that you don't need antioxidants, and then he has said that brands don't matter. I don't agree, but I didn't want to argue. Why would George W. look at a finance man for advice on vitamins rather than Ken Cooper?"

As his pal ascends to the White House, Keeland can't help but imagine the sales he might have rung up if the president were taking his pills. But Keeland learned early the lesson that other Dallas folk who supported Bush are discovering now: With Bush in Washington, not everyone's dreams of capital glory are going to come true.

Nevertheless, giddiness abounds in Dallas these days about the prospect of a hometown boy in the White House. It seems half of the Park Cities--ZIP codes from which Bush gleaned a disproportionate share of his roughly \$100 million in campaign funds--are waiting impatiently to see if they will be invited to the inauguration. The Presidential Inaugural Committee, whose members include former Texas Republican Party Chairman Fred Meyer and Dallas fund-raiser Jeanne Johnson Phillips, didn't send out invitations to the \$30 million affair until last week, so by the Dallas Observer's deadlines few in Dallas knew whether they were invited to A-list parties. The uncertainty has unnerved the tux-and-limousine crowd. A professional party planner who works with many of Bush's supporters says she heard gripes during the recount about the scheduling problem the Florida mishap had caused for their January social calendars. Dallas Republicans who are close to Bush are getting frequent calls from prospective and fretful invitees. "I tell them I haven't got my invitation yet either," says Jim Oberwetter, an executive with Ray Hunt's oil company who helped raise money for George W. as well as his father years before.

But another reality has also begun to set in: Only so many Dallasites can go to Washington on a more permanent basis, and you may not be among them. Ask Harriet Miers, the former Dallas Bar Association president who, despite published rumors and her efforts lawyering and fund-raising for Bush, never made any shortlist for attorney general. "If you find someone who professes to know what's going to happen, I'd question their authority," Miers said in an interview a week before John Ashcroft was nominated for attorney general.

For Dallas folk, their hometown affiliation may actually work against them. "Texans are the affluent white males of this scenario. There are too many of them," says Rob Allyn, a political consultant who usually advises Republicans.

"Beyond Don Evans [a close Bush buddy from Midland and the Commerce secretary nominee] people from Texas shouldn't get their hopes up too high," echoes Oberwetter. He advises those with designs on a position with the Bush administration to keep their heads down. "People who talk about what they are going to get are not going to get it."

His advice has not been ignored.

Even celebrities such as football hero Staubach, whose name has surfaced as a candidate for secretary of the Navy (he quarterbacked for the Midshipmen in his college days), plays it cool. Staubach has worked with the Bush family on political matters since 1980, when the president-elect's father was on the ticket as vice president. For the younger Bush's presidential bid, Staubach raised more than \$100,000, traveled to California to appear at rallies, and threw in another \$5,000 of his own to pay for the recount battle. The two men are friends. They played basketball together at the Cooper Aerobics Center gym and served on its board. "He was smart, and he asked good questions," Staubach says of Bush's service at the center.

Despite that history and friendship, Staubach has no intentions of chasing a post in Washington.

"I have been told by good sources that if I want to do that I should be aggressive and get a strategy together. I am not doing any of that," Staubach says. "If they felt I was the one that was good for that job, then I really don't want to say no to someone. But I've been told, 'If you don't pursue it, you are not going to get it.'"

But the Dallas crowd has not vanished altogether from the Bush plan. A lucky few can expect to play a role in Washington. Several already have won their posts. Clay Johnson, a Fort Worth native who roomed with Bush at prep school and Yale University, then served as chief executive for Horchow Catalogs here, is assistant to the president for personnel and deputy chief of staff. Karen Hughes, the ubiquitous spokeswoman during the recount, now named as a Bush senior advisor, got her start as a broadcast journalist at Dallas' KXAS-TV.

The Dallas names might not make it into the huddle in the president's cabinet meetings or into the ambassador's residence in some chic European capital--as political rumormongers say Nancy Brinker, who did not return calls for this story, is hoping. "There will be cat fights about those jobs," one Republican lawyer close to the Bush team in Washington predicts.

Instead, a handful of Dallas residents will take on less glamorous roles, but ones in which they could help the new president forge policies that may significantly alter the way many Americans conduct their lives.

Tony Evans preaches most Sundays at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship Church on Camp Wisdom Road, a mostly African-American congregation that is 5,000 strong and growing. A well-known author in the evangelical world, Evans regularly

speaks nationwide at the rallies of Promise Keepers, a conservative Christian movement for men that has raised the hackles of many women's- and gay-rights activists. At his church, Evans has launched "Project Turnaround," a program that dispatches church volunteers into 22 Dallas Independent School District facilities to offer mentoring programs for troubled youths, unwed mothers, and the children of the jobless and the homeless. The volunteers encourage sexual abstinence and schedule alternative social activities for potential gang members.

Evans is also one of the chosen few from Dallas who have met with Bush since he became president-elect.

In between his congratulatory visits with international leaders and interviews with prospective cabinet members, Bush invited Evans and two dozen other religious leaders to an Austin church for what press releases described as a "faith-based meeting with the president." (Many of them represented African-Americans and Hispanics, a fact not lost on the pundits during the post-Florida talk of a backlash against Bush by minority voters.) By the end of the hour-long private meeting on December 20, Evans says, the president-elect made clear that he intends to quickly launch the Office of Faith-Based Action. Bush would establish the new federal agency explicitly to remove regulations that prohibit religious groups from participating in federal programs and to make it easier for them to get funds and tax breaks from Washington.

"In solving the problems of our day, there is no substitute for Christian love, no substitute," Bush, a born-again Christian, said at a September 1999 Dallas benefit, repeating a theme that he often hit on his way to the White House. During the campaign, Bush kept in touch with Evans and spoke at a fund-raiser at his church. On the stump, the former Texas governor regularly quoted Evans and often cited his Project Turnaround program as an example of the type of faith-based social services he would encourage if he won the White House.

After the Austin gathering, other clergy questioned the role of increased government financing for religious social-service programs, whether that might violate the separation of church and state, and whether minority religions would be left in the cold.

Evans doesn't seem worried.

At the Christmas Eve service in the cavernous sanctuary at the Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, the barrel-chested, gap-toothed preacher, who has a commanding presence despite a slight lisp, had a tough act to follow. Two pint-sized congregants--pre-school-age sisters dressed in matching frocks--offered the 1,000 or so churchgoers their surprisingly articulate (and obviously painstakingly rehearsed) view of the meaning of Christmas.

"Every time you put anger aside, that is Christmas," the older of the two, her hair pulled back in a white bow that matched her lace dress, said with the emphatic sing-songy intonation of a preaching prodigy.

When Evans, who just five years ago finished one expansion of his church and plans to commence another this year, returned to the pulpit, he had a score to settle with the network television show *Politically Incorrect* (on which Bush is regularly flogged). Taking his cue from a bit he had seen questioning the divinity of the baby Jesus in the manger, Evans warned his flock not to downplay the significance of Christ's birth. "That's God in the crib," Evans said. "And you take away that, and all you've got is a few days off of work."

In his 45-minute sermon, punctuated infrequently with "amens" from his middle-class, well-dressed, and relatively staid congregation, Evans dismissed evolution ("If you believe that, then you are a monkey"), reminded his audience that Jews killed Jesus, and reiterated that only believers in Christ are headed for heaven. (Evans says he has spoken in other sermons of the Gentiles who took part in the death of Jesus.)

After the service, Evans talked about the vision that he has--and that Bush has often cited in his speeches--for the delivery of social services through religious organizations. "While there will be separation of church and state, there will less separation of church and state," Evans says.

Asked specifically what he means, Evans says he wants to have his volunteers not to have to worry if they have crosses on a wall, use the Bible for a literacy class, or refer to it in their discussions of moral teachings. Evans says that in his Project Turnaround program, focused on schools in largely African-American and Hispanic-dominated areas in southern Dallas, his volunteers do not feel curbed because the community isn't hung up about the separation of church and state.

The program has more than 35 volunteers mentoring individual children and hundreds of others helping out walk-ins, says Lafayette Holland, an associate pastor who oversees the program. Holland says his volunteers "make sure to abide by [separation of church and state]," but Evans concedes he has some flexibility when it comes to religion in the schools in southern Dallas where most of his volunteers go. "You can get away with that in the black community because religion

is so intertwined with the rest of life,” Evans says. Should he try to expand, Evans knows things could change. “You can’t get away with that in the suburbs.”

Evans first met Bush when the governor and the preacher both visited Greenville in 1996 to console the victims of church burnings in that East Texas town. Bush liked the speech Evans delivered, the preacher recalls, and the Texas governor began quoting the Oak Cliff church leader around the state. Evans says he started talking on the phone with Bush, who often sought spiritual guidance. (Bush spokesman Ray Sullivan says that while the president-elect often mentioned Evans on the campaign trail, he could not confirm any relationship concerning spiritual guidance. In the Park Cities, Bush watchers expect Highland Park United Methodist minister Mark Craig, who oversaw the church Bush attended here, to go to Washington.) Bush did attend conferences Evans arranged with other ministers, including one where he asked for their thoughts and prayers about his presidential bid.

Nowadays, Evans isn’t counting on any specific role in Washington. “I have a job here,” he says, pointing to the upholstered pews in his sanctuary. But Evans’ secretary has already received a call asking him to speak at an inauguration event. He doesn’t know exactly where. In the Christmas rush, Evans hadn’t bothered to get all the details.

Perhaps more significant is Evans’ expectation that his philosophy and his church’s programs are going to get bigger play in Washington now that George W. is there. He may be partly right, according to Sullivan. “I think that type of faith-based program will have a lot more support,” Sullivan says. “I can’t say exactly what programs will get the support, though.”

Nevertheless, Evans is confident that the president-elect, as well as God, is on his side.

“Government is an agency of God,” he says. “If they tell me that I have to adjust my message, I have a big problem. If they tell me that I cannot force people to believe, then that’s OK. But I do not want to hide what we believe. I think Bush wants to empower us.”

John Goodman, the economist who founded the National Center for Policy Analysis, a conservative Dallas think tank, had the flu last week. Perhaps that explains why, when asked by the Observer about his role in a Bush administration, he offered the same reply he had given a Forbes correspondent a few weeks earlier: “I don’t have the personality.”

Pressed to explain further, the 45-year-old Waco native, who earned his doctoral degree in economics at New York’s Columbia University, added, “I’m an academic. I’m a think person. I like to be more expressive than is possible if you are part of an administration.”

Goodman, who raised about 80 percent of his \$6 million annual budget last year from individuals who are aligned with him ideologically and want to advance his 17-year-old institution’s research, does expect to lose some of his staff to the Bush administration. But he is focusing more intently on what he believes is the very good prospect that the White House might bring one of his dearest policies to life.

Goodman has long championed allowing taxpayers to invest some of their Social Security contribution in the stock market—a concept that seemed, during the Clinton administration, as probable as Hillary baking cookies. Last year Goodman’s NCPA spent more than \$1 million trying to draw Internet traffic to a Web site where visitors could calculate their benefits under various Social Security schemes—and presumably reach the conclusion that his plan was better.

Bush, unlike all the other presidential candidates, promoted Goodman’s concept of reforming the Social Security system. Today, the Social Security taxes taken from your paycheck support current retirees. Goodman wants to create a system where your taxes are saved and invested for your own retirement. On many occasions, the president-elect has said that will be one of his first causes as he enters office.

“On Social Security, we’ve gotten a pretty clear signal,” says Goodman, who served on the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on the Un-insured and also advised Bush during the primaries on health-care issues. “If you just listen, every time the president-elect talks, Social Security is either the third or fourth word out of his mouth. Al Gore really demagogued the issue, but Bush stuck with it.”

Goodman first met Bush nearly a decade ago when he called on Bush, who was then simply a Texas Rangers managing partner, to talk about his Social Security ideas. “He was less interested in it back then,” Goodman recalls.

Even now, Goodman knows the limits of his influence on Bush policy. “There are some ideas that I have pushed less successfully than Social Security,” Goodman says. He has tried through briefings to get the president-elect enthusiastic about a policy of personal portable health insurance, a program where the government would back individual insurance accounts

that employees could carry from job to job. Goodman concedes he has made little progress on that front.

Meanwhile, Goodman has already seen the good coming out of the Bush victory for NCPA. His think-tank has been featured in reports about the new administration on National Public Radio and in *Forbes*, right along with the big guys, the American Enterprise Institute and the Hoover Institute.

With the Inauguration Day festivities, Goodman, whose agency is only half the size of the more formidable conservative Washington-based think tanks, intends to seize the opportunity to remind prospective contributors about his institute. "Our Washington office will have an open house for people who have contributed to us," says Goodman, sounding almost embarrassed. "There were some on my staff who proposed that we be more elaborate." Goodman vetoed the idea.

Dan Branch is a Republican political operative with a résumé as bright as his blue eyes, which match the azure tie he wears to *Salve!* for a lunch interview.

A partner at the Dallas law firm of Winstead, Sechrest & Minick, Branch is the son of a doctor and graduate of Southern Methodist University Law School. Since graduating, the handsome, thick-browed, square-jawed 42-year-old lawyer has steadfastly worked his way through numerous political appointments, serving as a clerk to the Texas Supreme Court and as a Dallas County Republican finance chairman. Most recently, Branch became chairman of the Texas Public Finance Authority. Appointed in 1999 by Gov. Bush, Branch oversees an agency that acts as a funnel for the issuance of more than \$3 billion in bonds for other state agencies, including the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the Texas Youth Commission, and the Department of Criminal Justice.

For almost a decade, Branch has known George W. Bush. Their relationship has always had a politically convenient cast to it.

Branch first met Bush in 1991 at those same offices on the Tollway and Loop 12. Branch had just launched his ultimately unsuccessful bid for the congressional seat that former Dallas Mayor Steve Bartlett left open when he moved to City Hall. Bush, then managing partner for the Rangers, was not an obvious stop for a Republican congressional aspirant. Other than the unforgettable fact that he was the son of a president, Bush was not technically in the political arena.

"I went to see him because he was the president's son and he was sitting in Dallas," Branch says. "I went for advice and to tell him what I was doing."

When Branch lost the primary, in which 13 contestants were vying for the slot, Bush sent a note that the Dallas lawyer still cherishes. "He told me he understood what it was like to lose a congressional seat," Branch says.

In 1994, Bush was doing the calling. Branch, known in the GOP as a tireless, assiduous fund-raiser, had ties to several Republicans who were considering bids for Ann Richards' gubernatorial seat. Branch has worked closely on political campaigns and statewide education issues with Dallas lawyer Tom Luce, who was among the potential challengers.

Eager to get to Austin without a brawl in his own party, Bush systematically and diplomatically managed to persuade each of his potential opponents in a Republican primary to defer to his bid. Bush, for instance, took Luce to a ballgame and made it clear that he would not be able to raise the kind of money that the Bush name could garner.

When Luce agreed to bow out, Bush lost no time telephoning Branch and asking if he would work for him. "I cannot remember who called first, Bush or Luce, but I remember I learned that Luce had quit and Bush wanted my help on the same day," Branch says.

When the Texas governor launched his presidential bid, Branch knew he would participate. He did not necessarily know what role he would play. "We talked about various positions," Branch says. "It was decided that I would be best as a fund-raiser in Dallas County." Branch served as a co-chair of the Dallas County Republican Party and became one of the pioneers.

At *Salve!*, between bites of a minuscule course of pasta ("It's OK--I like my lunches light," Branch insists when the waiter brings a serving that looks fit for an infant) the Dallas lawyer displays the same kind of deference about his prospects in Washington now. Even though it seemed clear he would love to--and very well might--get one of the 7,000 sub-cabinet-level appointments that the Bush camp still has to make, he makes no predictions.

"I was told everyone would be treated like everyone else, and to send in my résumé," Branch says. "I would say that I don't anticipate a position, but I'd be honored to be considered or asked."

The Bush-Cheney transition office is receiving some 2,000 résumés a day on its official Web site and expects to have received 200,000 by the end of the process, according to news reports. Clay Johnson, will be the bottleneck through which the vast majority of appointments must go. Johnson, as appointments secretary, served the same role for Bush in Austin. Branch knows Johnson and likes him. “He is very thoughtful and orderly,” Branch says, echoing sentiments expressed by other Republicans about Johnson. “He brings a lot of private-sector experience to the job. That experience shall serve him well.”

Perhaps Branch’s experience with Bush will serve him well. Even though he would seem to have earned more points than many others in Dallas--“If he doesn’t get something, then no one will,” says another Republican who worked closely with the Bush inner circle--Branch is not yet packing his bags.

The suitcases may stay in the closet for a few more days. Says Bush spokesman Sullivan about appointments below the cabinet level, “There is no one that could tell you right now who would get what.”

But for a guy like Branch, unlike Craig Keeland, the possibility still exists. “It would be difficult,” he says about a move to Washington, making a reference to his two school-age children and his wife, a Dallas native. “I haven’t thought that through. But if the president asks you to do something, you have to think about it.”

Keeland, meanwhile, has already shifted his focus. New Texas governor Perry, as it happens, uses Youngevity’s supplements. “If you meet him before lunch, he’ll still have a little packet in his breast pocket.”