

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 2226
January 16, 2009

President Bush's Farewell Address

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President George W. Bush used his farewell address to reflect on his Administration's record and outline some of the challenges the nation will face in the future. Much of the short speech was devoted to the fight against terrorism, the issue that, after the September 11 terrorist attacks, redefined Bush's presidency. This focus was appropriate because, although Bush came into office promising to be "the education President," he is leaving office as the commander-in-chief of a global war against Islamist terrorism and the leader of a coalition of more than 90 countries fighting this potent ideological threat.

In his speech, Bush noted that one of his Administration's most important achievements was keeping the United States safe from another major terrorist attack over the past seven years: "As the years passed, most Americans were able to return to life much as it had been before 9/11. But I never did." He noted that his Administration had bolstered America's long-term security by creating the Department of Homeland Security, strengthening the armed forces, and reforming intelligence agencies and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The President also warned Americans that "our enemies are patient and determined to strike again." To defeat them, he called for a vigilant engagement in world affairs: "We must continue to engage the world with confidence and clear purpose. In the face of threats from abroad, it can be tempting to seek comfort by turning inward. But we must reject isolationism and its companion, protectionism."

Bush recognized the importance of the ideological war of ideas. He restated his confidence in the transformative power of his freedom agenda, say-

ing: "Security and prosperity at home depend on the expansion of liberty abroad." Victory in this war of ideas requires the United States to remain committed to what he previously called a "generational struggle" against the root causes of Islamist terrorism.

President Bush highlighted his Administration's achievements in liberating Afghanistan and Iraq, two crucial theaters in the global war against terrorism. But to a large degree, his farewell speech struck an optimistic tone, focusing broadly on future hopes rather than on past policies.

The tone of the speech was also unusually reflective and personal. He spoke directly to the American people from his heart, saying: "You may not agree with some tough decisions I have made. But I hope you can agree that I was willing to make the tough decisions." And he also admitted: "There are things I would do differently if given the chance."

In a departure from the traditional presidential speech given from the Oval Office, President Bush spoke in the East Room of the White House, before a small audience that included people whom he had met over the past eight years who demonstrated great courage or compassion. He introduced several who had inspired him and whom he thought should inspire the nation.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm2226.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

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Twenty years ago, President Ronald Reagan invoked images of “the shining city on the hill” in his own farewell address: “We made the city stronger. We made the city freer, and we left her in good hands. All in all, not bad, not bad at all.”

Although President Bush’s speech did not soar to the same rhetorical heights, he can take justifiable pride in expanding freedom to more than 50 million Afghans and Iraqis. While their struggle to safeguard their newfound freedoms will not be easy, President Bush expressed optimism in the ultimate

outcome of their struggle and in the steadfastness of Americans in helping to win that struggle.

“We have faced danger and trial, and there is more ahead,” Bush said. “But with the courage of our people and confidence in our ideals, this great nation will never tire, never falter, and never fail.”

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