

# Bush's passions laid foundations

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President George Bush has passions. You never saw it in his speeches. But I did, up close. And out of those passions — the ones I saw as majority leader working with him — will come his greatest legacy.

First is education. I helped run the platform committee for the Republican convention in 2000. The soon to be Republican nominee asked me to make K-12 education the No. 1 priority of the Republican Party. Impossible, I told him. Republicans had wanted to eliminate the Department of Education; there's no way they will make it a federal priority. "Do it," he said; we did. And as president he opened our country's eyes to the moral and economic imperative that the greatness of America cannot be maintained when we educate our children more poorly than 20 other nations. He delivered a program that focused the country on raising expectations for our children and narrowing the achievement gap by transparency and accountability.

## **Drug plan has worked**

Second is slowing the growth of health-care cost increases and improving access to the most powerful tools of prevention and treatment. The president's prescription drug plan has meant that for the first time ever through Medicare, seniors have affordable access to life-saving drugs. Before Bush, drugs were not a part of Medicare — you were on your own. Today, they are. And the cost? Estimated savings for each of the last two years compared to what was predicted has been 20 to 30 percent! His plan, based on competition and the markets, is driving not just seniors but all people to use lower-cost generic drugs.

Third is revolutionizing foreign aid. Not only did President Bush double total foreign aid worldwide (No president has done that since Harry Truman), but he also created a new mechanism through which aid can flow. The Millennium Challenge Corp. uses 17 results-based criteria that reflect a potential recipient country's commitment to fighting corruption, governing justly, investing in its own people and economic freedom to determine where to invest American taxpayer money. A Tennessean can know that her taxpayer dollars will go only where it can truly lift people out of poverty through sustainable economic development rather than being thrown down a rat hole by some earmarking politician or bureaucrat.

Fourth is reversing the scourge of today's global disease, which has reached biblical proportions. When I came to Vanderbilt as a doctor in 1984, HIV had just been discovered in this country. We watched it kill a million people, then 5, then 10 and then 23 million people.

Our nation talked a good game, but it took George Bush to stand up and boldly commit more resources to fight HIV than had ever been committed by any country in the world against a single disease. And his leadership put it high on the agenda of every nation in the world.

When I would visit world leaders, they knew that HIV better be at the top of their speaking points because it was important to President Bush and the American people. The result: Millions of lives have been saved, tens of millions will receive treatment — all can be traced to President George W. Bush's proclamation on Jan. 29, 2003. That is the greatness of America in action.

So as we bring this chapter to a close and enthusiastically rally around our new president, let's build on the enduring foundations of education, health and life-saving compassion that President George W. Bush has laid.

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