

# 60-Second Presidents



## George W. Bush – Background Essay

George Walker Bush (born 1946) is the son of the 41<sup>st</sup> president, George H.W. Bush. He was born in Connecticut, but at a young age he moved with his family to Texas, where his father was starting a career in the oil industry.

When Bush was a teenager, he returned to New England—first for boarding school, then to attend Yale University. He completed his formal education in the mid-1970s by earning a business degree at Harvard. Bush then returned to Texas and started his own energy company.

After an unsuccessful campaign for the U.S. House in 1978, Bush focused on business. He was part of an investment group that bought the Texas Rangers baseball franchise. But he also stayed involved with politics. In 1994 he defeated a Democratic incumbent to become the governor of Texas. He was re-elected by a huge margin in 1998, and shortly thereafter he organized a presidential campaign for 2000.

Bush battled his way to the Republican nomination, then defeated Democratic Vice President Al Gore in one of the most controversial presidential elections. Bush narrowly lost the popular vote to Gore, and the Electoral College would be decided by disputed results in Florida. The Supreme Court issued a ruling on the standards that could be used in a recount, and Bush ultimately won the state by 537 votes.

Bush started his presidency by focusing on domestic issues. He said he was a “compassionate conservative”—someone who sympathizes with the plight of the poor, but wants strict accountability and standards for the government programs that help them. A few months into his first term, he signed a major tax cut. He also gave his support to an overhaul of federal education law that created new ways to measure the progress of schools receiving federal assistance.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Bush’s presidency suddenly changed. Terrorists attacked New York and Washington, killing thousands of Americans. Bush quickly became an inspirational leader who vowed to fight back. The United States invaded Afghanistan, where many leaders of the al-Qaeda terrorist network were hiding. In 2003, Bush persuaded the nation to go to war with Iraq, to overthrow a dictator who might have dangerous weapons and ties to terrorists.

Bush also oversaw the establishment of a system for the executive branch to deal with terrorism and terrorist suspects.

Bush's actions to fight terrorism are still being debated. The wars with Afghanistan and Iraq turned into long occupations, and both nations have struggled to create stable governments. Critics of the system to fight terrorism argue that it deprives many innocent people of their freedom and privacy. Also, the expenditures for the "war on terrorism" contributed to large increases in government spending and the national debt.

Bush won re-election in 2004, but his second term was marred by two more disasters. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast, and the emergency response of the federal government seemed slow and ineffective. In 2008, the financial system collapsed, wiping out the savings of millions of Americans and forcing many people from their homes. Bush convinced Congress to pass a large "rescue package" for struggling banks, but he left office with one of the lowest presidential approval ratings ever.