



PRESIDENT BUSH BEGINS SECOND TERM WITH FOCUS ON DOMESTIC POLICY

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In his inaugural address on Thursday, President Bush will outline an ambitious domestic agenda for his second term in office.

President Bush will begin his second term on Thursday facing tough challenges to his domestic and foreign policy agenda with lower approval ratings than the most recent two-term presidents, Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan.

A recent Gallup Poll reported the president's approval rating at 51 percent, down from 86 percent following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

That hasn't stopped thousands of supporters from packing up their cowboy boots and Bush-Cheney pins and heading to cold and snowy Washington, D.C. to join the inaugural festivities. They will be joined in the nation's capital by protesters planning demonstrations.

Domestic policy goals

President Bush's second term promises to be ambitious, as he makes plans to reduce the number of malpractice lawsuits filed against doctors and hospitals, push a proposal for a "guest worker" program that would allow illegal immigrants to work legally in the United States, and overhaul the nation's Social Security system.

The president has said that Social Security reform is his No. 1 priority. He has proposed a retirement plan that would replace the current system of taking money out of workers' paychecks and paying retirees from a government trust fund for one that allows younger workers to open their own private investment accounts.

Critics of the plan say these personal savings accounts are too risky and that ups and downs in the stock market or a job loss could leave individuals without enough money for retirement.

But supporters say it will allow workers to control part of their contributions in a nest egg that they could pass on to their families.

Second term philosophy

The overarching goal of President Bush's Social Security plan and indeed many of his domestic policy proposals for his second term is to promote an "ownership society," one that encourages people to take responsibility for themselves rather than depending on the government.

"I like the idea of encouraging more people to say, I own my own home, I own my own business, I own and manage my health accounts, and now I own a significant part of my retirement account," the president said at a January appearance.

"Promoting ownership in America makes sense to me to make sure people continue to have a vital stake in the future of our country," he said.

But the president's opponents say the "ownership society" principle, a popular philosophy among many conservatives, is just a way to let the rich keep more of their money and brings with it too much risk.

"It's an appealing label," economist Robert Reischauer told The New York Times. "But with ownership comes responsibility and risk, and that's the down side. We buy insurance and collective pension benefits and health care to reduce the risk," he said, referring to Social Security and other government programs.

"The whole process of social insurance is so you won't find yourself in old age without any assets or find yourself poor and sick and without access to health care," he said.

The president's foreign policy agenda

In addition to his domestic priorities, President Bush's foreign policy will likely focus on the spread of democracy, pointing to new elections in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the war against terror.

Iraqi elections are scheduled for Jan. 30 and could either move the country toward a peaceful democratic state or toward a violent civil war.

"Iraq remains the kind of thing that could take over the [president's second] term, if the situation gets a lot worse," University of Wisconsin-Madison political scientist Charles Franklin told the BBC.

The president will also have to decide how to help South Asia recover from the devastating tsunami and help the Israelis and Palestinians end the violence that has claimed thousands of lives.

Inauguration Day

President Bush will outline the goals for his second term as part of his inaugural address on Thursday. The address follows the president taking the oath of office and being sworn in by Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist.

As is inauguration tradition, President Bush will then attend an inaugural luncheon, watch a parade in his honor and cap off the night visiting lavish inaugural balls.

-- Compiled by Kristina Nwazota for NewsHour Extra

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