God and the governor convinced me I was wrong," he says. Bush named him to the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, where he helps broker deals between state agencies, city officials, and local congregations. "I'm there to convince the churches they don't need to be afraid of government, that we need to be back in the game."

Bush's approach is not without its paradoxes: He opposes using taxpayer money to proselytize, yet argues that "transforming hearts" is the key to rebuilding families and communities. But his record on religious charities gives content to the otherwise ambiguous slogan of "compassionate conservatism." "Government can do things," Bush says. "It can rally a military, provide money, write checks. But what we cannot do is change people's hearts." It is impossible, he argues, to usher in "the responsibility era" without the moral and spiritual resources of religious communities. Faith as civic virtue—an impeccably conservative idea.

It's also one that Al Gore can't fully embrace. Liberals are not prepared to take government's limits seriously, and Bush's compassion comes with a moral edge lacking in its liberal counterpart. Nor is Gore likely to back religious groups when disputes arise over hiring policies or government rules against religious expression. Supporting faith-based groups would, after all, force Gore to challenge Clinton-appointed judges and Justice Department officials.

Gore's recent talk of a church-state "partnership" already has liberals fretting about a "theocracy" from the soup kitchens. If public money flows to a program that is "overtly religious," warns Julie Segal of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, "then we're going to sue." What does Gore think of that? He may think he's stolen an issue from George W., but he may find that defending the faithful costs more than he bargained for. **NR**

W. as Campaigner

Tests that Bush has passed.

JOHN J. MILLER

LISTEN to George W. Bush's naysayers, and it sounds like the governor of Texas is a political novice about to run an amateur-hour campaign for president. "Republicans want a winner, but Gov. Bush is totally untested," complains Lamar Alexander. Adds Pat Buchanan: "It's not unusual for hot front-runners to get into trouble, especially for one as untested as Bush." Even Republicans who aren't running against Bush have their doubts. "I have nothing against George Bush," says David Keene of the American Conservative Union, "but he is totally untested nationally."

Keene has a point: Bush has never before faced the national electorate. But the same could be said of most of the other candidates: Gary Bauer and Elizabeth Dole have not previously run for any office at all, and Rep. John Kasich, Sen. John McCain, and Sen. Bob Smith have never faced voters outside their home states. To the extent that Alexander and Buchanan have—they've participated in a few GOP primaries—they're experienced at losing. At best, Alexander, Buchanan, and Steve Forbes have faced a few pop quizzes, with decidedly mixed results. The only Republican in the race who has truly faced a national test is Dan Quayle. But nobody thinks he can win.

What would satisfy Bush's doubters and make them believe he's been "tested"? Do they think he would be a better candidate today if, in addition to his two gubernatorial victories in the country's second most populous state, he had a couple of terms in the Senate under his belt? Or if he had run unsuccessfully in the 1996 primaries? Maybe his detractors think he should lose the nomination next year—so he can be a *really* strong candidate in 2004. And tested!

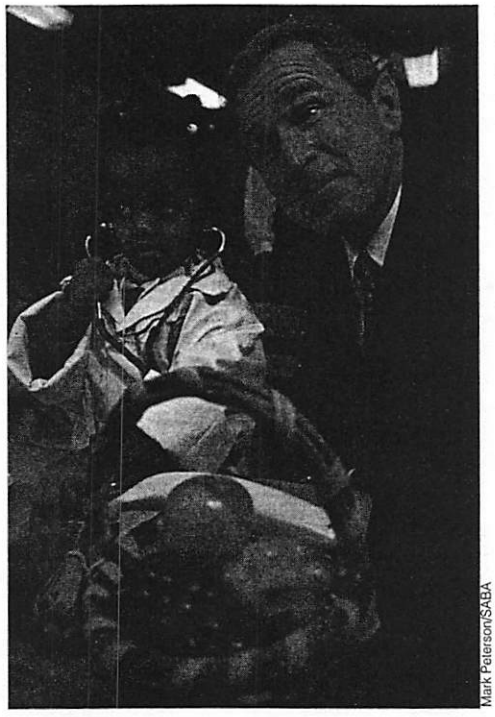
Bush's swing through Iowa and New Hampshire in early June had the trappings of a maiden voyage, but Bush is no rookie. He has plenty of firsthand political experience, from participating in his father's races—starting with an unsuccessful Senate bid in 1970—to his own gubernatorial runs in 1994 and 1998. "He's a natural campaigner," says Kevin Moomaw of the New Mexico GOP, who worked closely with Bush in Texas during the 1988 presidential contest. "We did about 300 events together. He was a very popular surrogate speaker for his father, and he always worked the room like a veteran politician." Bush has learned about the mechanics of campaigning at almost every level and from several vantage points. This experience

not only shows that he's a "tested" candidate, but also suggests patterns that will emerge during his run for the White House.

In 1988, Bush did more than shake hands and ask people to vote for his dad. He was deeply involved in the race, even moving his family to Washington and setting up an office in the campaign headquarters (where he kept a spittoon behind his desk). One of his chief duties was to keep emerging celebrities like strategist Lee Atwater and media guru Roger Ailes loyal to the Bush family. He also learned a lesson about the politics of personal destruction, playing a key role in quashing gossip about his father. Whispers about an affair started making the rounds in Washington a year before the election, and none of the campaign's hired guns felt comfortable confronting their boss about it. Bush then approached his father privately and popped the question. Nothing to it, the vice president told his son—a conversation Atwater subsequently leaked to the press, silencing the rumor mill.

It was back in 1978 that Bush had gotten his first taste of hardball politics—in west Texas, when he ran for Congress. His Democratic opponent, Kent Hance, successfully portrayed Bush as an elitist carpetbagger with suspicious connections, via his father, to the Trilateral Commission. Bush lost, but managed a respectable 47 percent. (Today Hance is a Republican and Bush supporter.)

It was also in that year that Bush revealed his tendency to wage positive campaigns—something he would go on to do in his statewide races and can be expected to do as he runs for president. Although his associates say Bush approved of Atwater's decision to use negative advertising in the Bush–Dukakis campaign of 1988, it's a strategy the son himself has avoided. He may have even paid a price for this reluctance in that 1978 congressional race.


Mark Peterson/SABA

Then, Hance sent a letter to voters criticizing Bush for an ad in the Texas Tech newspaper promising free beer at a campaign event. The letter, which began "Dear Fellow Christians," said that Bush meant "to persuade young college students to vote for and support him by offering free alcohol." This, it admonished, did not indicate "high character." At the time, Bush knew that Hance had a financial interest in a Lubbock bar frequented by Tech students, but he chose not to expose his opponent as a hypocrite. "In retrospect I probably should have counterattacked," said Bush in 1994.

Bush had another opportunity to return punches in 1994 and, again, refrained. Democratic governor Ann Richards was a popular incumbent, while little about Bush was known except his name. Bush had every incentive to launch attack ads, a standard strategy for someone in his position. Richards herself couldn't resist the low road. She publicly labeled Bush a "jerk" and called Republicans "mongers of hate." Perhaps these were efforts to light Bush's famous temper—something Gore's bombastic rhetoric will aim to do next year—but Bush wouldn't cooperate. Richards had won office in 1990 partly because her opponent had appeared to act in an ungentlemanly way toward a lady. Bush avoided making the race personal and coasted to victory, winning almost every region of the state and cutting deeply into Richards's advantage among women. He topped that performance in his reelection last year, another campaign free of negative ads. Bush captured nearly 70 percent of the popular vote and more than 40 percent support among Hispanics. Between the two races, he raised roughly $30 million and attracted close to 5 million votes.

Still other insights into Bush's presidential run can be gleaned from his earlier races. In 1993, Karl Rove, the governor's top political advisor, penned a strategy memo declaring his intention to screen Bush from the press until he had had time to find his footing as a candidate. In recent months, Bush has been largely unavailable to the national media, refusing to step outside Texas until just the other week and shunning the cable talk shows his rivals can't pass up. In his two runs for governor, he debated his opponent only once. That made sense last year, when he held a huge lead in the polls over challenger Gary Mauro, but not in 1994, when he was himself running against a popular incumbent. "He avoids debates," confirms Tom Pauken, former head of the Texas GOP (and a Bush critic).

Bush is already ignoring a demand by Steve Forbes to engage in a series of monthly debates with the other GOP candidates. This is expected—no candidate in his position wants to diminish his standing by sharing a stage with eight or nine also-rans. Yet the reluctance does highlight the Bush team's preference for managed events. Strict control will be a hallmark of Bush's campaign, and it may even verge on the obsessive. Since last fall, for example, his deputies have snapped up dozens of hostile Internet-domain names, such as "www.bushbites.com," to stymie those who would create satirical webpages.

Bush also will manage his message carefully, focusing on a few carefully chosen issues. It's too soon to say what he will campaign on as 2000 approaches, but his advisors say the short list of topics includes tax reduction, Social Security reform, national defense, and ushering in a new culture of personal responsibility. He is also expected to deliver a major address in Silicon Valley on technology issues before the summer is over.

Of course, front-running candidates usually have a near-death experience—often in New Hampshire—and Bush is probably no exception. He will make mistakes, maybe even big ones. But they won't come from inexperience, no matter what the pundits or Bush's opponents say. They will occur because no candidate is perfect and no campaign is error-free. It may be possible to imagine more "tested" candidates than Bush, such as Ronald Reagan in 1980 or Bush's own father in 1988. Yet it's also possible to imagine less "tested" ones—such as, say, just about every other candidate in the Republican field. **NR**