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Special Event

George W. Bush Resigns as Texas Governor

Aired December 21, 2000 - 11:04 a.m. ET

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DARYN KAGAN, CNN ANCHOR: That is soon to be former Governor of Texas George W. Bush, the president-elect, and his wife Laura. He is there at the ceremony in Austin, Texas to resign his office of governor. And there you see him shaking hands with the man who will be the next governor, Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry.

Let's go ahead and listen to George W. Bush.

PRESIDENT-ELECT GEORGE W. BUSH: Thank you. Thank you all. I appreciate that warm welcome and so does Laura.

Governor, I thank you for your hospitality here. This won't be your home for long. Serving as the governor of the great state of Texas and working with so many fine people has been a higher honor than I could ever imagine. And there's only one thing that would cause me to leave early...

(LAUGHTER)

... and that's to become your president.

(APPLAUSE)

So today I announce my resignation as the 46th governor of Texas, a resignation which will be effective this afternoon.

I'm proud of the good we have done together in Texas, and I'm looking forward to the good we will do together in America.

(APPLAUSE)

These past six years have been a time of steady progress in Texas, and no one person can claim credit. It has been a record of shared success, a true tribute to bipartisan efforts.

When our schools weren't measuring up, we gave them high standards and the resources necessary to meet them. When excessive litigation clogged our courts, we put reason and common sense back into our criminal justice system. When we risked losing another generation to crime and violence, we reformed our juvenile justice laws and worked to provide hope and responsibility to our young. And when Texas workers and entrepreneurs left our state with a surplus, we did the right thing by letting Texans keep more of

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Through it all, I've tried to be a good steward of the office to shape this state for the better.

But the truth of the matter is, I realized how much this state has shaped me. In Texas I have seen how diversity makes us stronger. I have seen how optimism can grow in tough places. I've seen good works of thousands of Texans. And I admire the spirit of independence and enterprise matched with a spirit of compassion and common effort.

I've made friends, both Republicans and Democrats, who I will always remember.

I owe so much to the people of this state. And I hope I've repaid your confidence.

I leave with the confidence in our 47th governor, Rick Perry from Paint Creek, Texas. He's an Air Force veteran, a life-long rancher, and an experienced legislator and executive, a man of Texas roots and Texas values.

I know him well. He'll be a fine governor, carrying on the tradition of bipartisanship, civility and fair dealing.

I don't assume the presidency for 30 days, but I want Rick Perry to have the time needed to prepare to assume the office of governor.

I've cleaned out my office. It's ready for occupancy. Laura and I need a little more time to move out of the mansion.

(LAUGHTER)

We've got a lot of thanks to give and we'll be giving them over the next 30 days. But my wish is, is that the new governor enjoys living in the mansion as much as we did. It won't be our home, but Texas always will be.

(APPLAUSE)

I love you. God bless.

KAGAN: An emotional good-bye speech from former Texas Governor George W. Bush. He is saying good-bye to Texas for now as heads off to Washington to become the 43rd president of the United States.

As of today, George W. Bush resigns and Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry will become the governor of Texas. That is going to happen at a ceremony later this afternoon in Austin, Texas.

We have two people to talk about this today. We have Carl Leubsdorf of "The Dallas Morning News." He is joining us from Washington, D.C., has covered Texas politics for a number of years. And also our White House correspondent Kelly Wallace, who is in Austin, Texas this morning.

Good morning to both of you.

CARL LEUBSDORF, "DALLAS MORNING NEWS": Good morning, Daryn.

KELLY WALLACE, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Good morning, Daryn.

KAGAN: Carl, first to you, as soon as we started to hear George W. Bush started to speak, both Bill and I remarked to each other, wow, that is a much

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more relaxed and comfortable George W. Bush than we saw all these months on the campaign trail. Clearly, he was comfortable in that element and emotional at the end as he said good-bye to the people that he knows and feels comfortable with.

LEUBSDORF: Well, you know, he's really loved being governor of Texas, Daryn, and I think, you know, you could see that today. Of course, his first political office that he won. But he has been there for six years, and he's really mastered that, he feels, and I think in the eyes of other people, so it was a very bittersweet moment for him.

KAGAN: Do you think we will be able to see him take that warmth and that comfort to the national level as he grows into the role of president?

LEUBSDORF: Sure, I think, you know, a new president, especially one that hasn't become president, there's always a bit of hesitant, a little discomfort. You saw that the other day when he was at the White House, President Clinton seemed very comfortable there, Gov. Bush seemed not as comfortable. It takes a while. It is a big office, it is a big job and, you know, he knows a lot about it, but, as he said the other day, until you actually get there and take the oath, you don't really understand what it is like.

BILL HEMMER, CNN ANCHOR: Let's go down to Kelly Wallace. Kelly, you've been watching this man for many, many months now. We saw emotion in the Texas governor, well now the president-elect's voice there. We have seen emotion in the past, how much did he use that while governed publicly to show how he feels, and indeed, we know that he loves his home state of Texas.

WALLACE: Oh, absolutely. You heard him there saying that he and Laura Bush would be leaving the Governor's Mansion, that Texas would no longer be their home, or the mansion would no longer be their home, but Texas always would. Definitely showing a lot of emotion. It was really the personal qualities of George W. Bush that you heard people comment about all throughout the campaign trail, about the way he could connect with people, certainly a quality that helped him as he was out there over the many, many months on the trail.

He is a man also, and Carl will say this -- I'm sure he knows him much better than I do -- who does show emotion. Just yesterday, in his afternoon event, where he was naming or nominating his lifelong friend Don Evans to be commerce secretary, where he was nominating Mel Martinez to be housing and urban development secretary, he was standing there, talking quietly, his eyes were welling up with tears.

I talked to an aide later and he said he is just filled with emotion about this moment, naming people he cares so much about to these high office posts. So, again, a man who has had a lot of emotion, and that I think has been a quality that has certainly help him connect with people out there throughout the country.

HEMMER: Kelly, stand by there in Austin.

Meanwhile, back to Washington, and Carl. Tell us more about how the strategy developed for George W. Bush to go ahead, even though Republicans were gaining seats throughout the legislature in Texas, how he was able to reach across the aisle and pull Democrats in as he went along the way?

LEUBSDORF: Well, Bill, he started out of course, even before he became governor, developing ties with Bob Bullock, who is the lieutenant governor,

with Pete Laney, the speaker of the statehouse, the two Democrats. He has talked a lot about the relationship with Mr. Bullock, who died a couple of years ago. And it is sort of interesting, in fact, that the new governor, Rick Perry, is trying to follow in his footsteps. He has picked a Democratic legislator, Hispanic, as his secretary of state, the top appointment a new governor makes. And he is also trying to work with the Democrats in the legislature, especially the statehouse, which the Democrats still control.

KAGAN: And Carl, looking back at George W. Bush's six years as governor, looking at his legacy, what would you say was his biggest accomplishment besides the bipartisan effort and what was his biggest defeat in those six years?

LEUBSDORF: Well, his biggest defeat was a tax plan that he proposed in 1997, and which was defeated in part because of opposition from fellow Republicans.

I think his biggest legacy will be that legacy of bipartisanship, he is the first Texas governor to be elected to two four-year terms. Of course, the state didn't have a four-year term until about 20 years ago. Very different from the first Republican governor since reconstruction, Bill Clemens, a very blustery guy, who took on a lot of fights. And so the legacy of bipartisanship is very important, and he has helped solidify the Republican hope on Texas. Every statewide office in the last election went to a Republican.

KAGAN: And Kelly, to you, let's look ahead for what is ahead for Texas. Rick Perry will be sworn in later today, but the lieutenant governor's place has to be -- that office has to be filled -- and that's a very powerful office in Texas.

WALLACE: Absolutely. Some say it is even more powerful than the governor because the lieutenant governor is president of the state Senate. The understanding is, later this afternoon, Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry will be formally sworn in, and President-elect Bush will be there.

And then the state Senate has 30 days to convene a special session and elect a new lieutenant governor. We understand, and Carl can correct me if I'm wrong here, that Republicans, I believe, hold one extra seat in the Senate over Democrats. So it looks like it will be a Republican lieutenant governor getting that seat. But, again, it should happen soon, but it has to have within 30 days, we understand -- Daryn.

KAGAN: Carl, anything to add to that?

LEUBSDORF: Yeah, several Republicans have been sort of jockeying for it, and one of the issues in the election may be whoever gets elected will promise to serve only the two years until the next election because there are other Republicans in statewide office who would like to be elected lieutenant governor in 2002, when Mr. Perry presumably will run for a full term.

KAGAN: A promise to share the power might make the difference. Carl Leubsdorf, in Washington, D.C., Kelly Wallace in Austin, Texas, thank you very much.

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