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## **PRESIDENTIAL BOOK REVIEWS: THE REPUBLICANS**

(Special for The Anniston Star)

**By Glen Browder**

**There is no excuse, a year before the 2000 elections, for any American citizen to complain about not knowing anything about the politicians who want to be the next President of the United States.**

By my rough count, there are well over a hundred books currently available that have been written by or about the dozen or so announced, hopeful, and rumored presidential candidates (excluding Warren Beatty, Cybill Shepherd, and the rest of the Hollywood crowd that's threatening to run). And new tomes about even more possible chief executives are coming out early next year.

Democratic candidates account for 36 books, Republicans have 29 publications, and there's a slew of third party and independent possibilities in our "White House Wannabe Library", which I define as anything—whether autobiographical or biographical, political or non-political, legitimate or trashy—dealing with the lives of potential Presidents. Democratic Vice-President Al Gore has twenty-something entries in the Wannabe Library; on the Republican side, Texas Governor George W. Bush leads with seven.

My assignment in this review is to comment on the autobiographical or authorized books by the Republican candidates; someone else is handling the Democrats. (For the record: I'm a Democrat; I've served in Washington with several of the candidates of both parties; I have my own preferences. But I have not and am not endorsing anybody.)

Therefore I will focus on Governor Bush, Senator John McCain, publisher Steve Forbes, former Reagan official Gary Bauer, and former U.N. Ambassador Alan Keyes. (I don't believe that Senator Orrin Hatch has written any "How Great I Art" publication thus far in his presidential quest). Obviously, these books have been designed to promote each candidate's national ambitions, but still they tell us something about how Bush et al view themselves or, more accurately, how they want us, the voters, to perceive their visions for the New Millennium.

**Now, here's my assessment of the GOP presidential books in order of current poll standings.**

- **George W. Bush. A Charge To Keep (Morrow, 1999), hardcover, 253 pages, \$23.00.** Governor Bush disclaims intellectual or philosophical pretensions while presenting, in anecdotal fashion, some of the experiences and lessons of life that he

thinks have prepared him to be our national leader. In simple language, he reminisces about his days as presidential kid, college boy, businessman, major league baseball owner, and state governor. Some professional reviewers have disdained the book as “bland”, “platitudes”, and cliches”. In one section for example (p. 236), Bush talks about “compassionate conservatism” and remarks that “I like to joke that a compassionate conservative is a conservative with a smile, not a conservative with a frown”. But I think that this book will serve Bush’s purpose very well. It is, for many people, a friendly introduction to the man they already feel positively toward, a man they have been clamoring to know something about, and a man they expect will be our next President.

- **John McCain. Faith Of My Fathers: A Family Memoir (Random House, 1999), hardcover, 349 pages, \$25.00.** McCain has produced perhaps the most interesting literary product among the presidential books, as reflected in his climb up the bestseller list and complementing his ascendancy in the political polls. It is his life story, and it tells us much about how this exceptionally strong personally got to be so strong—through youthful rebellion against a military heritage and eight years in a North Vietnam prison. He takes great pains to assert his maverick nature while taking some of the edge off his personality (apparently in anticipation of the “temper and temperament” controversy which now helps define, both positively and negatively, his presidential campaign). I found especially interesting a comment in his closing chapter (p. 347) that “I had made more than my share of mistakes in my life. In the years ahead, I would make many more. But I would no longer err out of self-doubt or to alter a fate I felt had been imposed on me.”
- **Steve Forbes. A New Birth of Freedom: Vision for America (Regnery, 1999), hardcover, 204 pages, \$24.95.** Forbes presents a full, coherent, personal statement of his vision for future America (interestingly, unlike Bush and McCain, he lists no “assistant” co-author). Unfortunately for Forbes, he lacks Bush’s political assets and McCain’s “hero” status; and the rich scion of a publishing family somehow doesn’t come across as “just folks”. Forbes seems to be intensely focused, but it’s hard to make the pitch, simply on the merits of his patriotism and philosophy, that he should be President because (p. 179) “the professional politicians in Washington are still mired in old ideas and outdated solutions”.
- **Gary Bauer. Our Hopes, Our Dreams: A Vision For America (Focus on the Family, 1996), paperback, 164 pages, \$7.99.** In this short call for America to restore the family to the centrality of public and private life, Bauer attempts to define himself (p. 2) as “a conservative in political outlook, a Christian by faith—in short, what millions of Americans are.” He relates various policy areas to the family and ends by recommending a compact that “we the people” ought to make with each other. Apparently, an updated “Our Hopes, Our Dreams” is forthcoming early next year to boost Bauer’s struggling campaign.
- **Alan Keyes. Our Character, Our Future: Reclaiming America’s Moral Destiny (Zondervan, 1996), paperback, 135 pages, \$9.99.** Keyes, a former Ambassador (and

interim Alabama A&M President during Guy Hunt's administration), is considered one of the most rhetorically talented and, in all candor, politically limited figures on the GOP circuit. This book is an edited collection of some of his dramatic speeches, ending with the following flourish (p. 135): "We may yet still attain our great destiny—if we lift up our hearts to God, those same angels shall rejoice as they rejoice in finding the lost sheep—when once again, America comes home."

**So, take your pick** from these self-serving literary introductions: a likeable, compassionate guy, a maverick hero, a patriotic publisher, a champion of the family, and a fiery orator. But, before you make up your mind, you might want to take a look around the rest of the "White House Wannabe Library". Look further down the GOP bookshelf for some of the unauthorized profiles of these politicians. You might also want to go on past that partisan partition in the middle of the room and meet the fellow who invented the internet and the ex-NBA star. Or you may even want to run down into the basement and introduce yourself to some of the other candidates "out there"—such as the tough-talking wrestler from Minnesota or some Hollywood celebrities.

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