

Friends in high places

A new president and close margins in Congress could give states more flexibility during the next four years.

BY KRISTIN CORMIER ROBINSON

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As President George W. Bush and the 107th Congress begin to make their mark on governing in the United States, states will want to pay close attention to several policy areas. Throughout the presidential campaign and the aftermath of the election, the issues most likely to affect states in 2001 were the promise of increasing flexibility and the need for a new era of bipartisanship. Now that states have ushered many old friends from their capitals to Washington, D.C., they want to see results.

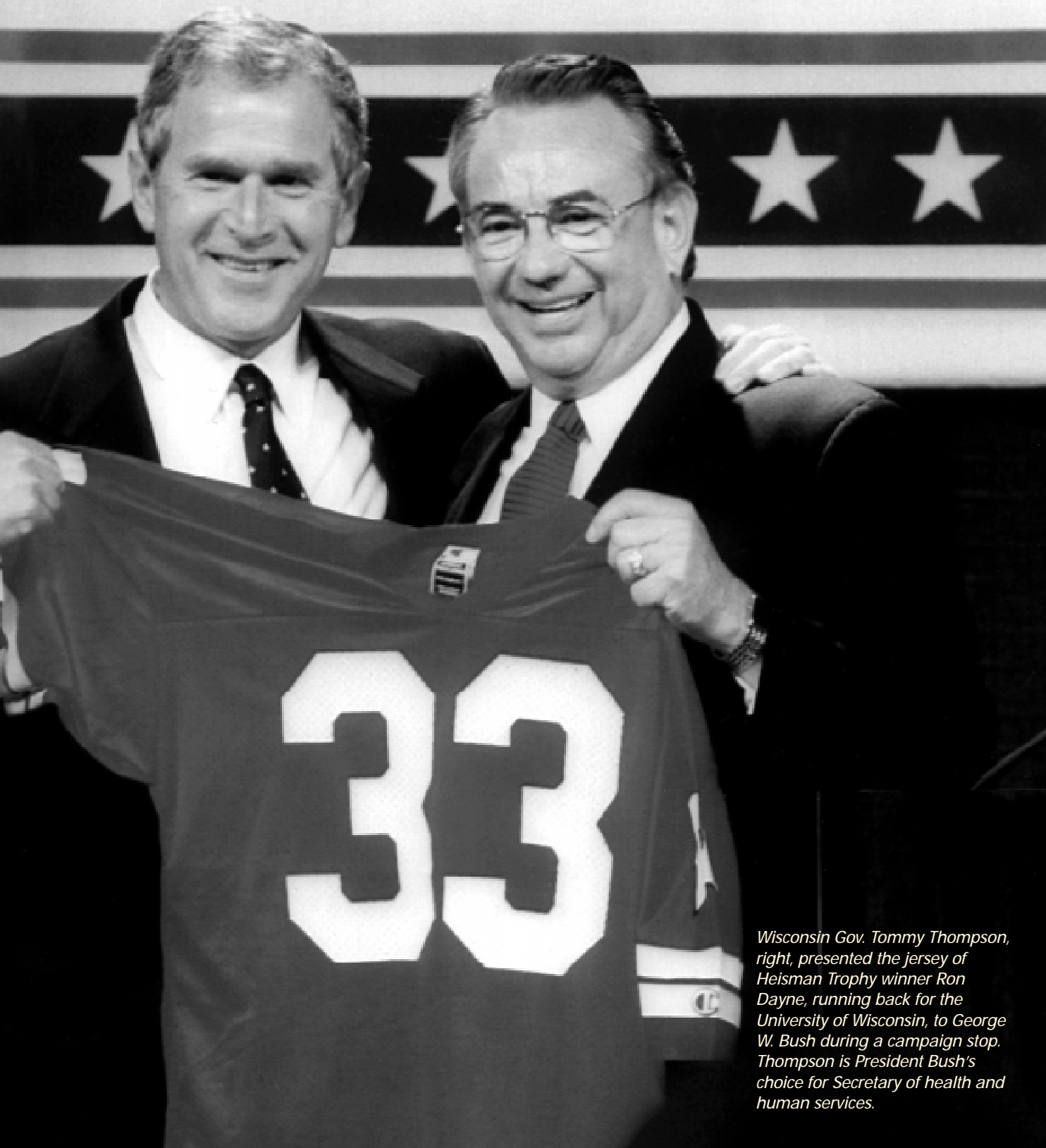
As governor of Texas, Bush used his access to fellow governors to assess the biggest issues facing states and to formulate policy that addresses these issues by supporting increased flexibility for state and local governments. Among the issues Bush campaigned on were education reform, tax cuts and prescription-drug benefits for Medicare. Now it is time for him to work with Congress to make these reforms happen and to address the needs of the states. Other top issues for Bush include a potential economic slowdown and a possible energy crisis.

Bush clearly understands the importance of including state leaders in his cabinet of federal advisors. He has nominated Wisconsin Gov. and former CSG President Tommy Thompson as head of the Department of Health and Human Services, and former New Jer-

sey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman as head of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Bush also has demonstrated his ability to reach out on a bipartisan basis to Democrats by appointing Norman





Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson, right, presented the jersey of Heisman Trophy winner Ron Dayne, running back for the University of Wisconsin, to George W. Bush during a campaign stop. Thompson is President Bush's choice for Secretary of health and human services.

Y. Mineta, commerce secretary in the Clinton administration, to head the Department of Transportation. Interior Secretary-designate Gale A. Norton and Attorney General-designate John Ashcroft also held state offices. And

he has begun working with Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., to build a framework for bipartisanship in the U.S. Congress. Bush and Lieberman compared notes on education policy and looked for ways to draft a bipartisan

bill to reform education nationally. A bill that includes items both men agree on was expected to be introduced in the Senate this winter.

The political landscape has changed on Capitol Hill. The sometimes bitter

State leaders go to Washington

A talent-filled 107th Congress includes many state leaders and friends of The Council of State Governments in its freshman class. The state connection is most visible in the Senate, where newly elected members include former CSG president and former Nebraska Gov. Ben Nelson, former CSG president



Nelson

and former Georgia Gov. Zell Miller, former National Governors' Association chair and former Delaware Gov. Tom Carper, former Florida Insurance Commissioner Bill Nelson, former Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow, former Minnesota Auditor Mark Dayton, and former Virginia Gov. George Allen.



Allen

In the House, 26 of the 41 newly elected members have state-level experience. These include former Arkansas Sen. Mike Ross, former California Rep. Susan Davis, former California Rep. Mike Honda, former California Sen. Adam Schiff, former California Sen. Hilda Solis, former Connecticut Rep. Rob Simmons, former Florida Sen. Ander Crenshaw, former Florida Rep. Adam Putnam, former Idaho Lt. Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter, former Illinois Rep. Timothy Johnson, former Michigan Sen. Mike Rogers, former Minnesota Rep. Betty McCollum, former Missouri Rep. Todd Akin, former Missouri Sen. William Lacy Clay Jr., former Missouri Sen. Sam Graves, former Montana Lt. Gov.

Denny Rehberg, former Ohio Rep. Pat Tiberi, former Pennsylvania Sen. Melissa Hart, former Pennsylvania Rep. Todd Platts, former Rhode Island Secretary of State Jim Langevin, former South Carolina Rep. Henry Brown Jr., former Texas Rep. John Culberson, former Virginia Rep. Eric Cantor, former Virginia Rep. Jo Ann Davis, former Virginia Sen. Edward Schrock, and former West Virginia Rep. Shelley Moore Capito.



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partisanship that prevented many bills from being approved has somewhat subsided, and lawmakers are now looking at how they can work together to get legislation passed and signed into law.

The Senate is evenly split with 50 Republicans and 50 Democrats, making bipartisanship much more important to the 107th Congress than in the past. Although as Senate president, Vice President Dick Cheney can break a tie vote, Republicans do not necessarily hold the balance of power. Sixty votes are required to end a filibuster and to move to consideration of a bill. In addition, Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., and Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., spent several weeks negotiating a power-sharing arrangement for Senate committees. Although

Republicans will head the committees, the two parties will have an equal number of seats and an even share of money. If a committee has a tie vote on bills or nominations, either the majority or minority leader can move them to the floor for a vote; the same is true on subcommittees, where bills and nominations can be moved up to the full committee. Lott called the arrangement a "framework for bipartisanship," while Daschle called it "fair and reasonable."

The House of Representatives is almost as divided, with 221 Republicans, 211 Democrats, two Independents and one vacancy. The chamber also conducted a major reshuffling of leaders for its committees as 13 Republican chairmen were forced to resign their positions because of the six-year term

limits as committee chairmen imposed by their own party in 1994. In an gesture toward bipartisanship, House leaders also said they planned to add one spot each for Republicans and Democrats on major committees, although House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, D-Mo., said he had hoped for more.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., called on lawmakers to put aside partisanship and work with Bush on an agenda that includes cutting taxes, overhauling Social Security and providing prescription-drug benefits under Medicare. The speaker of the House traditionally introduces the first 10 bills in each new Congress to highlight his legislative priorities, and Hastert said he has already reserved the first bill number, H.R. 1, for Bush to use for his education proposal. Among other things, Bush has said he plans to call for sending more federal education money to states and streamlining federal bureaucratic requirements placed on state and local education authorities.

"One of the things I'm going to work with Congress on is to make sure that we have what's called local control of schools, that accountability and authority are aligned at the local level," Bush said. "When we find children simply being shuffled through the school system without regard to whether they can read or write, we've got to hold somebody accountable, and it starts with making sure that accountability is aligned at the local level."

Other issues that were not successful in the 106th Congress may rise again in the 107th, this time with a more bipartisan flavor. These issues include bankruptcy reform, a modified patients' bill of rights, campaign-finance overhaul, domestic preparedness and the Endangered Species Act. The 1996 law that overhauled the federal welfare program and the Clean Air Act also will have to be re-authorized. Finally, in response to the problems of the 2000 presidential election, national legislation to reform the election process may be proposed. ★