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Snow Pick May Signal Less Insular White House

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By [Jim VandeHei](#) and [Michael A. Fletcher](#)
Washington Post Staff Writers
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President Bush's decision to hire conservative commentator Tony Snow as his chief spokesman reflects a consensus among the president and his top advisers that his White House operation has been too insular and needs to be more aggressive in engaging with the news media and other Washington constituencies, according to Bush aides and outside advisers.

Snow, who in his roles as a pundit on Fox News and elsewhere has rapped Bush on several occasions, joined the White House only after extracting a promise that he would become an adviser to the president on day-to-day strategy. If Bush and his team follow through on that commitment, the former columnist will be the first outsider to become part of Bush's revamped inner circle.

"We want fresh thinking, to charge the batteries, and passionate participation," said Dan Bartlett, a top Bush adviser. "There is a lot of value added in Tony coming on board and helping us internally with his own views and ideas. It fits into the mold."

Bush aides said at least one more well-known Republican will join the White House as early as next week as part of a shake-up also aimed at improving the president's lower-than-ever approval ratings and limiting GOP losses in congressional elections this fall.

The emerging team -- which includes Chief of Staff Joshua B. Bolten, budget chief Rob Portman and now Snow -- has the task of salvaging Bush's floundering second-term agenda and repairing relations with Congress, the media and an increasingly skeptical public. But it is unclear whether Bush, who has resisted change and outside advice in the past, will adjust his style and policies enough to satisfy Republicans on Capitol Hill who have said his White House operation needs a major overhaul.

White House aides are hoping Bush will get what they call the "Bolten bounce" in light of recent political progress in Iraq, his new plan to hold down gasoline prices and progress on an overhaul of immigration laws. Even the Snow news, however, served as a metaphor for the long roster of Bush's troubles: A few hours after the president hoped to make a splash by announcing the new hire, sources close to Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove leaked word that Rove would testify again in the CIA leak case.



Photos
[Tony Snow Appointed Press Secretary](#)
On April 26, 2006 President Bush announced that Fox News anchor and radio host Tony Snow would replace Scott McClellan as White House press secretary.

VIDEO | President Bush announces the selection of Tony Snow as his new press secretary.

TRANSCRIPT

[Tony Snow Named White House Press Secretary](#)

Ron Nessen, former White House Press Secretary under President Ford, discusses the announcement that former Fox News commentator Tony Snow will succeed Scott McClellan. Like Snow, Nessen was a journalist before taking the White House post.

TONY SNOW



Age: 50 (B. June 1, 1955)
Education: B.A., philosophy, Davidson

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White House aides said there is now broad agreement that the first-term strategy of largely ignoring the mainstream Washington media was a mistake. At the beginning, the Bush White House pioneered a strategy of circumventing Washington and communicating directly with what it considered more friendly regional and local media outlets and niche publications that served as a pipeline to supporters. The strategy worked well for a long while, but aides said it eventually undercut their credibility with reporters and impeded the administration's ability to receive fair treatment from the media when Bush's popularity began to fade.

Mark McKinnon, a Bush political adviser, predicted that Snow's long experience in Washington would give him more credibility with the White House press corps.

A variety of Bush advisers suggested that the president is not interested in altering his major decisions or philosophy, but that he recognizes he needs to do a better job communicating in Washington and beyond.

"The president's message and vision are firmly in place and are not going to change," McKinnon said. "But it still helps to have a new messenger. It helps to wipe the slate clean."

Snow, 50, worked most recently as a commentator for Fox News and as host of his own radio talk show. He was a director of speechwriting for President George H.W. Bush and has worked as a USA Today columnist, editorial page editor of the Washington Times, deputy editorial page editor of the Detroit News and frequent substitute for radio host Rush Limbaugh.

Snow is an outspoken Republican, but he has not hesitated to pound Bush in writing and on air for his handling of the budget, as well as immigration and other domestic policies. He even poked fun at Bush's speaking style, saying in 2000 that he sometimes sounds like "a soul tortured with Tourette's."

Bush said Snow's selection is proof that he is open to dissenting opinions. "For those of you who have read his columns and listened to his radio show, he sometimes has disagreed with me," Bush said. "I asked him about those comments, and he said, 'You should have heard what I said about the other guy.' " Snow's first assignment will be to improve relations with the media, which have deteriorated over the past five years during disputes over access to Bush and senior officials and the accuracy of information released from the White House. Many reporters viewed outgoing White House press secretary Scott McClellan as out of the loop on many of the big policy and political debates.

"I know there is a perception that we disdain the media as a whole," Bartlett said. "I do not believe that. There have been some issues that strained the relationship,

College; graduate work in philosophy and economics, University of Chicago.

Career: Host, "The Tony Snow Show," Fox News Radio; Anchor, "Weekend Live," Fox News Channel; former anchor, "Fox News Sunday"; syndicated newspaper columnist 1993-2002; speechwriting director and deputy assistant for media affairs for President George H.W. Bush; editorial writing positions at Greensboro Record, Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, Detroit News, Washington Times.

Family: Wife Jill, one son, two daughters.

Post Coverage:

[Video: President Bush and Tony Snow](#) (April 26, 2006)

[Transcript: President Bush Introduces Tony Snow](#)

(April 26, 2006)

[Archives: 'Sunday Shopping With Fox News'](#)

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GRAPHIC

[A Long Media Career](#)

President Bush has chosen radio host and White House speechwriter Tony Snow as his press secretary.

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particularly when it comes at a time of war." He said the Snow pick was part of an effort to "improve our relationship with the press."

Snow will begin working at the White House on Monday and will hold his first on-air news conference by the end of next week or the following Monday. Bush hopes Snow can do for media relations what he anticipates Portman will do for congressional relations. Portman, a former GOP House leader who has close ties to many senior members, will be responsible for not only overseeing the budget but also providing insight into winning over lawmakers and better navigating Congress.

"Tony Snow should provide a smooth presence at the podium," said Martha Joynt Kumar, a Towson University professor who studies presidential communication. "But the problems that presidents have are political problems and policy problems, not press problems. But it is often the press problems that get addressed."

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