

Bush gives little thought to life after White House

But Secret Service protection for him will be very high

BY KEN HERMAN
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WASHINGTON – In a recent hand-scribbled note, President Bush insisted he is not giving much thought to life after the White House.

"Thanks for 'Second Acts' and your very kind letter," he said in a letter to Mark Updegrove, author of a new book about post-presidential life. "I'm not quite ready to take the stage for the 2nd act. After a two-year sprint, then I'll take the lessons of your book to heart."

Bush may not be thinking about the next act, but planners are planning for it. And they foresee an unprecedented post-presidency, largely because of the war.

The White House sought \$5 million in the 2007 budget to begin hiring and training the Secret Service detail that will protect Bush after he leaves office. The money also will be used to protect 2008 presidential candidates.

Congress bumped the appropriation up to \$16.5 million.

"The increase in the budget is for the most part the result of the post-9/11 threat environment," said Joanna Gonzalez, a spokeswoman for the Department of Homeland Security. "It's expected that the post-presidency protection is going to require significantly more resources."

Gonzalez noted that former Presidents Clinton and Bush have maintained "very active profiles" since leaving office.

"We expect the current president to do the same," she said.

Bush has said little about what he plans to do when he heads back to Texas. He has the ranch in Crawford, and the Bushes also could establish a home elsewhere, perhaps in Dallas, where Southern Methodist University – Laura Bush's alma mater – is a favorite in the contest to house Bush's presidential library.

The White House, as usual, declined to talk about security plans.



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President Bush, shown here surrounded by security personnel during a visit last summer to a Coast Guard station in Miami, will be a high security risk because of the Iraq war even after he leaves office, authorities say.

The Secret Service money came through a committee headed by Rep. Harold Rogers, R-Ky. Planning for unprecedented protection for Bush after he leaves office was a no-brainer, said Rogers spokesman Jim Pettit.

"This is the first president we've had post-9/11," Pettit said. "Given the overall threat environment, there are going to be new concerns."

Former Secret Service agent Chuck Vance, who is a former son-in-law of former President Ford, said Bush's post-presidency will include a variety of challenges.

"One thing is, he is a relatively young man, and young men are more active and always on the road," said Vance, now a security consultant in Virginia. "That takes a lot of manpower and a lot of team effort."

And, Vance noted, Bush will be a target.

"He is the only president that invaded a country without provocation and without it being started by the other side. I think he has gained a lot of enmity. . . . There are a lot of people who resent this president, both externally and internally, some of whom have lost sons and daughters and had people injured in the war in Iraq," he said.

Vance said Secret Service officials make security decisions based on "threat levels."

"I know this president has been getting a lot of threat letters," he added. "There are a lot of people out there who think very strongly about him in one way or another."

Secret Service protection for former presidents began after President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. At that point, it meant protection for former Presidents Hoover, Truman and Eisenhower. Updegrove said Bess Truman didn't want it, seeing it as an unnecessary intrusion. But President Johnson talked her into it.

In 1994, Congress amended the post-presidency protection rules, deciding to offer Secret Service protection for only 10 years after a president leaves office.

Specific threats can spark exceptions to the 10-year rule.

Because the change did not take effect until 1997, the current president is the first one entitled to only 10 years of Secret Service protection for himself and his family.

"It makes absolutely no sense," Updegrove said of the end-of-lifetime protection. "Particularly in a world where al-Qaida is a constant threat. I'm quite certain it was a cost-saving measure."

Richard Nixon, though entitled to lifetime protection, gave it up in 1985. He died in 1994.