

# Future of party in doubt when Reagan era ends

**By Paul West**

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NEW ORLEANS — With more than a little trepidation, the Republicans will plunge this week into the post-Reagan era of American politics.

As delegates to the national convention in New Orleans prepare to bid an emotional farewell to the 77-year-old president and anoint George Bush as his successor, the Republican Party is facing an uncertain future.

Less than four years after scoring one of the most lopsided election victories ever, the Republicans are struggling to retain their image as a party on the move.

Increasingly, there are signs that the Republican "revolution" of the past eight years is a spent force and that the Reagan presidency is in danger of being judged a flop, from the standpoint of partisan politics.

A final judgment awaits the re-

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# GOP to open an uncertain convention

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Results of the November election, a vote that in many ways may be even more important than the 1980 and 1984 Reagan landslides.

If the Democrats win this election and have a successful presidency, they can erase everything Reagan did," said David Keene, a Republican political consultant and president of the American Conservative Union. "Reagan will have been a historical anomaly."

But if Mr. Bush can prevail, he added, Republicans could institutionalize the Reagan coalition. In particular, younger voters who became Republicans over the past eight years would be increasingly likely to stay Republican in the years to come.

For the moment, even senior Bush aides concede privately that the Democrats have the upper hand. They say that if the vice president does win the election, it probably will be by a narrow margin and that the potential for an electoral blowout is on the Democratic side.

While the Reagan presidency wrought a dramatic change in public attitudes — Democratic candidates these days are extremely cautious about advocating government spending programs, for instance — that rightward tilt in philosophy has not been matched by a similar shift in party loyalties.

And although the administration has presided over the longest-running economic expansion in peace-

time history and a sharp reduction in superpower tensions, national opinion surveys show a drop since 1984 in the number of voters who identify themselves as Republicans. Mr. Bush, a loyal vice president to Mr. Reagan the past 7½ years, consistently lags in the polls behind the Democratic nominee, Michael S. Dukakis, an unknown figure to most of the voting public until this year.

Mr. Bush's personal qualities — his lack of a forceful image and inability to match Mr. Reagan as a campaign performer — often are cited as factors in his relatively low standing in the polls. But many voters have yet to pay attention to the campaign, and many analysts believe the vice president is in large part a victim of the low esteem in which the Reagan administration and the Republican Party currently are held.

Mr. Reagan "was a success who's been something of a failure," said John Petrocik, a political science professor at the University of California at Los Angeles who also is associated with Market Opinion Research, a Michigan company that polls for the Bush campaign.

Bush campaign officials insist that Mr. Reagan and his record are a plus, on balance, for their candidate. But Lee Atwater, the Bush campaign manager, says "the single biggest problem" the vice president faces is the electorate's desire for a change in parties at the White House after a two-term presidency.

Bush aides and others also argue strongly that the slide in the party's fortunes is only temporary, citing the movement of Southern whites and young people into the GOP's ranks.

But critics, including many in the party, believe the Republicans are in danger of slipping even farther over the next few years. They suggest the decline began before Mr. Reagan's popularity was peaking early in his second term.

Even as the president was winning re-election in 1984, they note, his party was losing seats in the Senate, the only house of Congress it controlled. Two years later, despite Mr. Reagan's personal campaign efforts, Democrats won back the Senate.

One key mistake, many Republicans now say, was the president's decision in 1984 to run a "morning in America" re-election campaign, celebrating the progress of his first term without charting a course for the next four years.

"If there was a mistake that was made, it was that there was not a second-term agenda," said Edward Rollins, the 1984 Reagan campaign manager. He attributed the decision to avoid specific issues to the "exhaustion" of senior White House aides, led by James A. Baker III, the outgoing Treasury secretary who this week will take over as Mr. Bush's campaign chairman.

"What Bush needs to do," Mr. Rollins added, "is lay out a second-term agenda" in his campaign this fall.

The failures of Mr. Reagan's presidency, including the Iran-contra affair, allegations of misdeeds by high

administration officials and revelations about the president's detached management style as revealed by former Chief of Staff Donald T. Regan, also contributed to the party's slide, politicians say.

Those incidents helped undermine the support for the Republican administration from the independent and Democratic voters who backed Mr. Reagan in 1980 out of disgust with the performance of the last Democratic president, Jimmy Carter. National surveys by the Gallup Organization show the percentage of voters who considered themselves Republicans has not recovered from a decline that began in late 1986 after the Iran-contra scandal broke.

Some Republicans, particularly moderates, contend that the party could have continued to grow if the administration had taken a less conservative approach on issues such as civil rights, the environment and health care.

"Nobody that's black or a woman or a union member is going to go ahead and vote for the Republican position," said Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr., a liberal Republican from Connecticut. "They ignored all that [in 1980 and 1984] and voted for the man."

Recent surveys reinforce the view that Mr. Reagan's policies, which never were as popular as the president has been personally, are a factor in the movement away from the GOP. A CBS/New York Times poll completed earlier this month found that, by an overwhelming 7-to-1 margin, voters believe the Republican Party will do more to help the rich. The Democrats, meanwhile, were seen by a clear majority of voters as the party that would do more to help the middle class.

A new poll of evangelical Christians, a swing-voter bloc that Republicans would like to make a permanent part of their political base, found that a significant proportion now holds negative views of the Republican Party.

White House officials take issue with critics who blame Mr. Reagan for not doing more to prepare his party for the day he no longer would be on the ballot.

But Eddie Mahe Jr., a former staff director of the Republican National Committee and an informal adviser to the Bush campaign, sees a crucial blunder in the thrust the national party took.

By emphasizing raising funds for the Republican National Committee and the GOP House and Senate campaign committees, he said, "We destroyed state and local party structures because we sucked all the money to Washington."

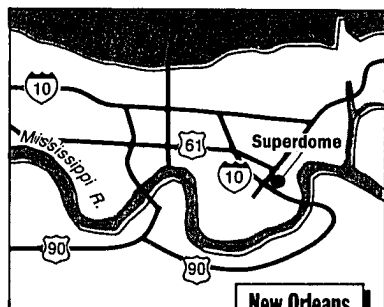
This failure to strengthen the party at the grass-roots level is reflected in statistics from the National Conference of State Legislatures. They show that there are fewer Republican state legislators in office today than when Mr. Reagan took office in 1981.

Hopes for the party's long-term growth now rest mainly with those who reached voting age during the Reagan era.

## Republican convention ballot votes

Alabama	38	Nevada	20
Alaska	19	New Hampshire	23
Arizona	33	New Jersey	64
Arkansas	27	New Mexico	26
California	175	New York	136
Colorado	36	North Carolina	54
Connecticut	35	North Dakota	16
Delaware	17	Ohio	88
D.C.	14	Oklahoma	36
Florida	82	Oregon	32
Georgia	48	Pennsylvania	96
Hawaii	20	Rhode Island	21
Idaho	22	South Carolina	37
Illinois	92	South Dakota	18
Indiana	51	Tennessee	45
Iowa	37	Texas	111
Kansas	34	Utah	26
Kentucky	38	Vermont	17
Louisiana	41	Virginia	50
Maine	22	Washington	41
Maryland	41	West Virginia	28
Mass.	52	Wisconsin	47
Michigan	77	Wyoming	18
Minnesota	31	Guam	4
Mississippi	31	Puerto Rico	14
Missouri	47	Virgin Islands	4
Montana	20	Total	2,277
Nebraska	25	Needed to Nominate	1,139

## 1988 Republican convention



Reagan

### Tentative schedule Monday, August 15

- Morning session begins at 11 a.m.
- Speech by former Gov. Pete DuPont of Delaware.
- Speech by former Secretary of State Alexander Haig Jr.
- Election of temporary chairman of the convention.
- Election of permanent committees.

- Evening session begins at 8 p.m.
- Salute to Sen. Barry Goldwater by Sen. William Armstrong, R-Colo.
- Speech by Representative Jack Kemp, R-N.Y.
- Tribute to first lady Nancy Reagan.
- Acknowledgement by Mrs. Reagan.
- Address by President Reagan.



Kean

### Tuesday, August 16

- Morning session begins at 11 a.m.
- Credentials committee report
- Rules Committee report
- Permanent Organization Committee report
- Resolutions Committee reports
- Evening session begins at 8 p.m.

- Keynote Address by Gov. Thomas H. Kean of New Jersey.
- Speech by Marian G. 'Pat' Robertson of Virginia.
- Speech by former President Gerald R. Ford.



Gramm

### Wednesday, August 17

- Begins at 8 p.m.
- Speech by Sen. Robert Dole of Kansas.
- Nomination of Vice President George Bush by Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas.
- Roll call of the states.



Bush

### Thursday, August 18

- Begins at 8 p.m.
- Tribute to Barbara Bush.
- Acknowledgement by Barbara Bush.
- Nomination of the candidate for the vice presidency.
- Acceptance speech.
- Acceptance speech by Vice President George Bush.

