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Analysis

## White House Shifts Into Survival Mode

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By [Dan Balz](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, April 20, 2006; Page A01

In a White House known for both defiance and optimism, yesterday's senior staff changes represent a frank acknowledgment of the trouble in which President Bush now finds himself. They are also a signal of how starkly Bush's second-term ambitions have shifted after a year of persistent problems at home and abroad.

Longtime Bush confidant Karl Rove -- who had hoped to use his position of deputy chief of staff to usher in an expansive conservative agenda -- was relieved of his policy portfolio to concentrate on long-term strategy and planning for a November midterm election that looks increasingly bleak for Republicans.

Rove probably will remain one of the most influential voices in the White House, but his shift in responsibilities suggests that new White House Chief of Staff Joshua B. Bolten intends to operate a different White House than his predecessor, Andrew H. Card Jr., who resigned after more than five years at the helm.

Bolten's White House, say former administration officials and Republican strategists, is likely to have clearer lines of authority and less free-lancing by powerful officials. They also expect Bolten to



## Photos

[White House Spokesman McClellan Resigns](#)

After serving almost three years as White House press secretary, Scott McClellan announced his resignation on April 19, 2006. "I have given it my

play a more active and influential role in shaping domestic policy than did Card.

More significantly, they said, unlike Card, who took as his principal responsibility the management of the president, Bolten probably will operate more in the mold of chiefs of staffs in previous administrations, who saw their role as managing the entire White House and sought to oversee the entire federal government, as well.

Whether the changes will fundamentally alter a troubled administration is another question. One of Bolten's biggest challenges, administration allies say, will be to find ways to open up the Oval Office to new ideas and to the opinions of people who are not longtime Bush confidants.

On that score, many people who know the administration best are privately dubious. Presidents, more than chiefs of staff, determine how White Houses operate, they said, noting that Bush has shown that he prefers a tight circle of advisers and does not welcome the advice of outsiders. As Bush put it on Monday, in asserting that he would not fire Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, "I'm the decider, and I decide what's best."

Rove's return to a role that closely mirrors that which he played in Bush's first term demonstrates how much this White House has now shifted to survival mode -- and how far events have pushed the president from the grand ambitions with which he opened his second term just 15 months ago.

all sir..." McClellan told President Bush during an appearance at the White House.

#### Scott McClellan



**Age:** 38 (B. Feb. 14, 1968)

**Education:** University Texas at Austin

**Career:** Deputy White House Press Secretary; traveling press secretary for Bush-Cheney 2000 campaign; deputy press secretary to then-Gov. George W. Bush.

**Family:** Wife Jill. Mother [Carole Keeton Strayhorn](#) is an independent candidate for Texas governor.

**Post Coverage:**

[Video: Bush and McClellan Announce Resignation](#)

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[Transcript: Bush and McClellan Announce Resignation](#)

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[Analysis: The White House Shake-up: Real Change, or Mostly Spin?](#)

Washington Post Associate Editor Robert G. Kaiser answers questions about recent personnel changes at the White House and whether these moves signify a real shake-up in the administration or merely an outward shift.

#### White House Shake-Up

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**John G. Roberts Jr.**

Then, with Rove as the animating force, the president sought to engineer Republican political dominance by remaking government with such far-reaching initiatives as his plan to remake the Social Security program. Today, Social Security stands as Exhibit A of what went wrong domestically in 2005.

Public disillusionment over Bush's policies in Iraq have left the country in a sour mood and Bush's presidency at low ebb, threatening the entire Bush-Rove project to create a durable Republican majority. While that goal remains central to those closest to Bush, the focus at the White House for the foreseeable future will be trying to revitalize this presidency quickly enough to avoid crippling GOP losses in November that could thrust Bush into instant lame-duck status.

Realigning the White House staff and bringing in new faces appear central to that effort. This week's changes include yesterday's resignation of White House press secretary Scott McClellan and appointment of Joel D. Kaplan as White House deputy chief of staff for policy, as well as Monday's announcement that U.S. trade representative and former House member Rob Portman will succeed Bolten as director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

The domestic policy process has been hampered since Bolten went to OMB, and one Republican strategist close to the White House said the new chief of staff appears bent on trying to prevent Rove and others from interfering in every aspect of the governing process.

Samuel A. Alito Jr.  
John Paul Stevens  
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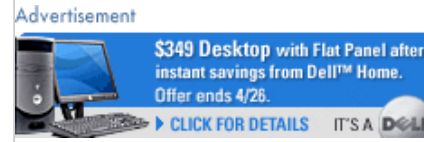
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