

Bush under pressure to deliver

WASHINGTON (AP) — After inflating hopes to extraordinary heights, President Bush now has to deliver.

After all the hype, Bush on Tuesday must produce a credible plan for economic revival and a convincing political manifesto for his sputtering re-election campaign.

It's going to be a tough sell when Bush takes his State of the Union address before recession-weary Americans, many who appear to doubt his leadership.

"The anticipation for this is so high he's got to hit a home run," said former White House political director Ed Rollins. "A triple won't do it."

Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole said, "I think Tuesday night may be the political Super Bowl for President George Bush."

For nearly two months, Bush has teased voters with vague promises, all but declaring that his State of the Union will hold a magic formula for prosperity.

His message to voters in New Hampshire, where the recession has been devastating, was "I care" and "stay tuned."

Political strategists in the White House and on the outside agree that Bush must spell out a clear economic message that reassures anxious Americans about their future.

He has to seize the initiative with a legislative agenda that throws Democrats on the de-

fensive.

And he's got to do it with authority.

It's a daunting assignment for a president who is uncomfortable with prime-time television speeches.

"He's got to give an awfully good speech as a speech ... both in terms of its rhetoric and its delivery or he'll get panned," said Norman Ornstein, a presidential analyst at the American Enterprise Institution. "If this is a typical State of the Union speech with modest proposals, his slide will continue."

Increasingly, polls show that Americans doubt Bush can cure the sick economy or that he has a plan to improve health care.

Bush's policies favor the rich over the middle class, a majority of Americans believe. He spends too much time on foreign policy.

When Bush stands before Tuesday night's joint session of Congress, it will be far different from his last speech on Capitol Hill.

Last March 6, he stood in triumph, a conquering hero as he reported to the nation about the allied victory over Iraq.

His approval ratings in the polls leapt to nearly 90 percent. Congress was intimidated.

A little more than 10 months later, his poll rates have gone into a free fall, dropping to the lowest point of his presidency.

The country is mired in the longest recession since the

Great Depression. Unemployment is rising. Congressional Democrats are emboldened. Saddam Hussein mocks him from Baghdad. And Bush's showcase "jobs, jobs, jobs" trip to Japan is dubbed a disaster.

Tuesday's speech is crucial, perhaps the most important of his presidency. His campaign staff circulated a memo calling it "the defining event of the Bush presidency, and therefore a key to successful re-election efforts."

Says Rollins: "This has to be his campaign theme. It's set up to be a political document. The way it's been staged it's his road map to victory and his road map to a second term."

Democrats are sure to say it doesn't go far enough. Some Republicans already have been saying the same, prodding Bush to provide more incentives for business.

White House aides worry that people are expecting too much.

"He's got a good plan," a senior official said. "That does not mean that simply delivering a speech, somebody snaps his fingers and everything's OK."

But Bush will try to make voters happy.

He's expected to propose a middle-class tax break in the form of an increase in the personal exemption for families, up to \$5,000 as a tax credit for first-time home buyers and a tax credit for lower-income Americans to buy health insurance.

Army officers sentenced in El Salvador massacre

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Two army officers received the maximum sentences of 30 years in prison for the 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter.

The killings were viewed as one of the worst atrocities of El Salvador's 12-year civil war. They drew international outrage and prompted moves in Washington to slash aid to El Salvador.

As a judge passed sentencing on the colonel and lieutenant Friday, a contingent of about 100 U.N. peacekeepers arrived to oversee a cease-fire in the war that is to take effect on Feb. 1.

Gen. Victor Suanzes of Spain, chief of the U.N. force, said he will work with both sides — the government and leftist rebels — to work out disarmament plans.

The peacekeepers and the sentencing came a day after the National Assembly voted to grant amnesty for most politically motivated crimes committed during the civil war.

The amnesty covers most attacks staged by guerrillas and rightist death squads, who together killed tens of thousands of civilians, creating a climate of fear and bitterness that helped prolong the war.

Rebel commander Salvador Sanchez Ceron, one of five senior guerrilla leaders, returned openly to the capital Friday,

apparently for the first time since the war began. The rebels had been waiting for the amnesty to return.

The amnesty specifically exempted those responsible for the Jesuit massacre.

Judge Ricardo Zamora of the 4th Criminal Court also imposed suspended sentences of three years on three other officers, including a lieutenant colonel he found guilty of destroying evidence.

Those sentenced to 30 years were Col. Guillermo Benavides and Lt. Yussly Rene Mendoza.

A jury last September found Benavides guilty of eight counts of murder for ordering the killings of the Jesuits. It was the first time an army officer was convicted of a crime involving the politically motivated abuse of human rights.

The priests and the two women were slain on Nov. 16, 1989, at Central American University, where they lived. The slayings took place on the sixth day of a huge urban offensive by the rebels.

The far-right, including many military officers, had long considered the Jesuits at the university to be subversive ideologues.

The jury found Mendoza guilty of one count of murder — that of 16-year-old Celina Ramos, the daughter of the priests' housekeeper.

It acquitted two other lieutenants and five soldiers of murder charges.

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