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Inaugural Observations–The Day Before

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Thursday, January 20, 2005

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In 1933, the nation amended the Constitution in order to move Inauguration Day from March 4 to January 20. Back in 1789, it took weeks for the newly elected George Washington to prepare to take office. A March inauguration made sense when transportation and communication technologies were rather primitive. Yet, by the time Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected in 1932, there was no need for such a long "lame duck" period, and the deteriorating relationship between the defeated President Herbert Hoover and President-Elect Roosevelt convinced the nation to make the change. Evidently, no one thought to ask the weatherman.

Four years ago, the first inauguration of President George W. Bush took place under grey skies that seemed determined to rain, sleet, and snow on the new president's parade. This time, the snow arrived early and the cold came with it. Nevertheless, the weather won't keep a crowd estimated to reach 500,000 persons from attending the swearing-in ceremony on the Capitol's west front. It's not about the weather. A blizzard wouldn't keep these folks from the ceremony.

The night before the inauguration is about parties—lots of them. It seems that every major group holds an inaugural event—especially those who supported the winning candidate in the election. No one is dancing all night at the Democratic National Committee's headquarters, where the staff must be preparing for the likely arrival of 'Hurricane Howard' [Dean] as their new boss.

The Texas "Black Tie and Boots Ball" was the hot society ticket in town, and the Texans drew a big crowd of Bush supporters and happy Republicans. Another big event was a gathering of conservative Christian leaders determined to keep crucial moral issues on the agenda. Attorney General John Ashcroft—retiring from office as soon as his successor is confirmed by the Senate—delivered an address that mixed powerful sentiment with deep Christian conviction. Attorney Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice [ACLJ] declared Ashcroft "the most important attorney general in the nation's history" in introductory remarks.

Other parties were just about partying, and Washington is a city that is all too lubricated with lobbyists, special interest groups, embassies, and corporate councils. The lights are likely to burn long into the morning at some of these events.

The big change here is security. Anti-aircraft missile emplacements line the Potomac on the approach to Reagan National airport. Security blockades have already closed several streets and many entrances. A veritable army of security personnel is evident throughout the city, and "observers with tactical ability" [snipers with high-powered rifles] will stand on rooftops around the parade route and the Capitol. And that's just a hint of what can be seen. Homeland Security

Secretary Tom Ridge warned would-be terrorists that far more is yet unseen, in terms of security provisions and assets. Government sources have described the event as the greatest security challenge in the nation's history.

Thursday begins with a series of prayer services around the city—and for good reason. The nation should pray—not only that the inaugural ceremony will be free from danger—but that God would bless and guide President George W. Bush and the nation as together we face the challenges that lie ahead.

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