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in decades who decided to pay attention to the problems that afflict hundreds of millions of Africans.

"And he did this by making sure there was real funding, real programs put in place for these diseases," Mr. Rubin said. "He didn't just talk the talk. He actually put programs in place that were noticed and supported and which saved lives here. And for that, people across Africa are deeply grateful."

Mr. Rubin is no fan of Mr. Bush's decisions in Iraq and the broader Middle East, saying he has "seriously deep disagreements" for those policies.

"We had a policy, a misguided policy of war which was an affront to our place in the world, throughout the Middle East," said Mr. Rubin, who directs Columbia University's access project for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The intensity of his dislike for Mr. Bush's Middle East policies, situated so closely next to his admiration for U.S. aid to Africa, seemed to leave Mr. Rubin at something of a loss.

Continued on page 98

The Washington Times 95

94 The Washington Times

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The legacy of President George W. Bush

By Joseph Curtl
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The defining moment of George W. Bush's presidency occurred Sept. 11, 2001, with the terror attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon just outside Washington and the crashing of a fourth plane in Western Pennsylvania. Three days after the attacks, he stood next to firefighter Bob Beek with atop the still-smoldering rubble of the twin towers and assured the rescue workers: "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon."

GETTY IMAGES

Every presidency is like a 15-round heavyweight boxing match, and every one ends with a split decision. John F. Kennedy took America to Camelot but also to the Bay of Pigs. Lyndon B. Johnson ushered in civil rights but also the Vietnam War. Jimmy Carter excited a weary America after Watergate but ended up mired in malaise. Ronald Reagan broke down the Berlin Wall but traded arms for hostages in Iran. And Bill Clinton delivered a balanced budget but also endured a scandalous impeachment.

So, too, a split decision for President Bush.

He kept Americans safe after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, but he preemptively took America to war in Iraq to rid the threat of weapons of mass destruction — weapons that were never found.

He championed the battle against AIDS in Africa, delivered accountability to America's schools, helped the elderly afford prescription medicine and called for the establishment of a Palestinian state — the first American president to do so.

But he failed in his attempts to overhaul Social Security and the immigration system, oversaw the largest rise in federal

spending since the Great Society, expanded power in the executive branch, increased the use of wiretapping, refused to hold his top advisers culpable for the Abu Ghraib scandal, rejected a climate change pact against world opinion and left the nation mired in an economic swamp that historians say rivals the Great Depression.

Throughout his presidency, Mr. Bush refused to acknowledge a single mistake, once famously telling a reporter in April 2004: "I'm sure something will pop into my head here in the midst of this press conference, with all the pressure of trying to come up with an answer, but it hadn't yet."

His liberal foes have thrived throughout his two terms in office, noting hundreds — thousands — of perceived mistakes, keeping up a relentless drumbeat, often against the man, not the president. His critics lambasted every decision his military advisers and generals made as they conducted two wars. Even when the embattled Mr. Bush succeeded — as with the "surge" of 30,000 troops to Iraq, which stabilized the country — opponents charged that it was too little, too late.

In the end, two images likely will be among the most enduring of his presi-

dency, and though he isn't pictured in one of them, it was that single event that even some of his former top advisers say ended up sinking his presidency.

Being grateful

Americans will forever remember Sept. 13, 2001, when a young president pulling a wizened and weary New York City firefighter onto a pile of rubble that was once the World Trade Center and shouted into a bullhorn: "I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!"

In those first few days after the attacks, Mr. Bush's approval rating soared to 90 percent. Democrats and Republicans were suddenly alike: They were shocked, lost and frightened. They looked to their president for reassurance, and they found it in the steely resolve of a Texas rancher who vowed retribution but also pledged to keep the United States safe from terrorists.

But Americans also will remember the live video feeds from New Orleans in August 2005: Thousands of people, mostly

Continued on page 9
The Washington Times 5