

W library in record book

\$500M center would be priciest for a Prez

EXCLUSIVE

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WASHINGTON — He may be a certified lame duck now, but President Bush and his truest believers are about to launch their final campaign — an eye-popping, half-billion-dollar drive for the Bush presidential library.

Eager to begin refurbishing his tattered legacy, the President hopes to raise \$500 million to build his library and a think tank at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Bush lived in Dallas until he was elected governor of Texas in 1995.

Bush sources with direct knowledge of library plans told the Daily News that SMU and Bush fund-raisers hope to get half of the half billion from what they call "megadonations" of \$10 million to \$20 million a pop.

Bush loyalists have already identified wealthy heiresses, Arab nations and captains of industry as potential "mega" donors and are pressing for a formal site announcement — now expected early in the new year.

"You can't ask people in Dallas for \$20 million until they can be sure the library won't be in Waco," one Bush source noted.

The rest of the cash will come from donors willing to pony up \$25,000 to \$5 million.

"It's a stretch," said another source briefed on the plans. "It's so much bigger than anything that's been tried before. But the more you have, the more influence [on history] you can exert."

The half-billion target is double what Bush raised for his 2004 reelection and dwarfs the funding of other presidential libraries. But Bush partisans are determined to have a massive pile of endowment cash to spread the gospel of a presidency that for now gets poor marks from many scholars and a majority of Americans.

The legacy-polishing centerpiece is an institute, which several Bush insiders called the Institute for Democracy. Patterned after Stanford University's Hoover Institution, Bush's institute will hire conservative scholars and "give them money to write papers and books favorable to the President's policies," one Bush insider said.

Presidential libraries are run by the National Archives

and Records Administration, but building costs must come from private donations. Bells and whistles, like an institute or an academic program like Bush's father's public service school at Texas A&M, are also extras.

The News reported in March 2005 that the library will be at SMU, where First Lady Laura Bush is an alumna and sits on the board of trustees. But a formal announcement has been delayed by a legal dispute over some of the land where the library complex will be built.

It remains to be seen whether Bush's low standing in the polls and his rejection by voters in the midterm elec-

tions will make it harder to raise funds. That was true for former President Jimmy Carter, who struggled to fund his library center after being defeated by Ronald Reagan in 1980.

But planners believe hometown and Texas pride will outweigh any drag from Bush's diminished political fortunes. "The money will be there," a senior Bush adviser said. "The President is very popular in Dallas and the library will be great for the city and SMU."

There's another major inducement for potential donors: Their names aren't required to be made public.

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