

# Bush says education is path to democracy



AP Photo: First Lady Laura Bush and US President Bush, smile after Bush's address to The White...

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By NEDRA PICKLER, Associated Press Writer

Mon Sep 18, 4:33 PM ET

NEW YORK - [President Bush](#) on Monday linked his push for democratic reform across the world with first lady [Laura Bush](#)'s call for governments to embrace literacy programs to improve lives.

"The simple act of teaching a child to read or an adult to read has the capacity to transform nations and yield the peace we all want," the president said at the White House Conference on Global Literacy being hosted in New York by the first lady. "You can't realize the blessings of liberty if you can't read a ballot."

Bush attended his wife's event, which was being held on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly sessions this week. Later in the day, he had bilateral talks scheduled with several foreign leaders to kick off his attendance at the world body's annual meetings.

Like Mrs. Bush, the president made the case that supporting effective literacy programs is a key to improving the economic prosperity of nations and its people.

"You can't have prosperity unless people can read. It's just as simple as that," Bush said. "To be a productive worker you have to be able to read the manual."

Bush came to the [United Nations](#) with a host of global issues facing his administration.

The president's three-day trip includes bilateral meetings with six foreign leaders, including the presidents of [Iraq](#) and the [Palestinian Authority](#), and a speech to the U.N. General Assembly that will focus on his vision for the Middle East.

The days of diplomacy come as the president prepares for a busy political schedule. Bush, who lately has been trying to turn the election-year debate away from the unpopular war in Iraq and toward a broader war on terrorism, plans to spend much of the next seven weeks campaigning for fellow Republicans.

And he isn't leaving politics behind while he's in New York: Monday night he headlines a fundraiser for the [Republican National Committee](#) at the Manhattan home of billionaire

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At the United Nations, Bush will try to highlight his goal of spreading democracy. To that end, Bush was to spend his first day meeting with leaders of Malaysia, a democracy with a moderate Islamic government; [El Salvador](#) and Honduras, two Central American nations that have moved from military dictatorships to democracies; and the emerging African democracy of Tanzania.

More closely watched will be meetings Tuesday and Wednesday, beginning with French [President Jacques Chirac](#), the only other member of the coalition of nations working with the U.S. to stop [Iran](#)'s nuclear ambitions.

Iran has accelerated its nuclear program and defied U.N. demands, and the U.S. had hoped to have a resolution to apply sanctions on the government by this week's meeting. Administration officials say they don't expect Bush to deliver a breakthrough with other leaders absent, but they say sanctions should come soon.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad also planned to be at the U.N., but last week Bush ruled out any discussions with him until Iran suspends nuclear enrichment. Bush's aides said lower-level officials also will not make any contacts with the Iranians.

On Tuesday afternoon, Bush is scheduled to meet with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to discuss Iraq's progress toward democracy amid continuing violence. Nearly 200 people have been killed in attacks or tortured and dumped in rivers and on Baghdad streets since Wednesday, and politicians are arguing over a proposal to transform Iraq into a federate state.

Bush said last week that he was disappointed the number of U.S. troops in Iraq was climbing rather than falling. He said hopes for troop withdrawals were dashed by the spike in violence in Baghdad.

Polls show the war is unpopular among Americans, and Republicans worry it could cost them votes in November's elections. Bush has been trying to shift the focus to the broader war on terror in recent weeks, introducing legislation that has sparked debate on Capitol Hill about how to treat terrorism suspects.

Before he heads back to Washington on Wednesday, Bush plans to meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who is struggling to get the militant Hamas to soften its anti-[Israel](#) ideology. The U.S. and other nations have halted aid to the Palestinian government until Hamas agrees to renounce violence, recognize Israel and accept past peace agreements. Hamas caved in to pressure last week and announced it would form a coalition government with Abbas' more moderate [Fatah](#) Party.

But coalition talks have stalled over U.S. demands that the unity government recognize Israel. Palestinian officials said Abbas will appeal to Bush to support a coalition that doesn't fully meet international demands for a changed stance on Israel. They said he would warn that failure to work out a unity government could lead to a Palestinian civil war.

Bush aides said he would discuss ways for the global community to help the Palestinians, Iraq and Lebanon.

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