

By **KEN QUINN**
FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

STRUGGLING through the cold and over snow-covered roads to get to the Register's Democratic candidates debate in Johnston on Jan 4, I thought back to the 1980 Iowa caucuses. On an even more frigid night slightly more than 1,000 caucus-goers set in motion events that continue to have a profound impact on the world in 2004.

The 1980 caucuses had contested races in both parties. On the Democratic side, president Jimmy Carter was challenged by senator Ted Kennedy and California governor Jerry Brown.

On the Republican side, conventional wisdom and polls had former California governor Ronald Reagan seemingly far out in front, but with other prominent party leaders in pursuit.

In this group were senators Bob Dole and Howard Baker; former Texas governor and treasury secretary John Connally; Illinois congressmen Phil Crane and John Anderson and former CIA director and UN ambassador George H.W. Bush.

Endorsements by Iowa political figures were split. As memory serves me, only Congressman Jim Leach was backing Mr Bush Sr, who had not stood out from the pack nor garnered much press attention when he first arrived in Iowa in 1979.

But he was indefatigable — constantly knocking on doors and meeting small

If Iowa voters had stayed at home in 1980...

groups in living rooms all over the state. In our neighbourhood on Des Moines' west side, he was at events on our street on three occasions. One press account said he had shaken more than 10,000 hands in Iowa during the campaign.

This "retail politics" approach gave him a significant lift, especially after Mr Reagan chose not to participate in the Register's Republican candidate forum. That decision caused a precipitous drop in the polls for Mr Reagan and ultimately cost his campaign manager, Mr John Sears, his job.

In the last two weeks before the Jan 21 caucus, Mr Bush's energy and organisation combined to press for a large turnout. In 1976, only about 650 people had participated statewide in the Republican straw poll at the caucuses, according to stories in the Register. Four years later, more than 100,000 turned out to vote their preferences.

On the evening of Jan 21,

he went from one Des Moines caucus to the next asking for support. I recall the great surprise when he ran onto the stage at Merrill Middle School asking residents to support his candidacy.

All this work paid off in a dramatic fashion. In a stunning upset, Mr Bush finished first with 31.5 per cent of the vote, barely edging out Mr Reagan. About 1,400 votes gave Mr Bush his margin of victory.

His "Big Mo" propelled him to being Mr Reagan's chief rival for the nomination. Mr Reagan defeated Mr Bush in the New Hampshire primary and several other races, but offered him the vice-presidential slot to unite the party in the November election.

Just consider the likely implications if those 1,400 Iowa voters had stayed home on caucus night.

If Mr Bush had not finished first here, it's much less likely he would have had the vice-

presidential nomination.

And without eight years as vice-president, it is reasonable to assume that Mr Bush would not have been the Republican candidate for president in 1988 and elected to our highest office for one term.

Without those 12 years when Mr Bush was vice-president and president, it may not be unreasonable to ask whether his son, Mr George W. Bush, would have been positioned well enough to be elected Texas governor.

And with all deference and respect to our current President's very considerable political skills, it might have been much more difficult for the younger Bush to secure the Republican presidential nomination in 2000 if he were not serving as Texas governor.

Whether you are a supporter or a critic of President Bush, the world of 2004 would be quite different if he were not president.

It is intriguing to contemplate the linkage between where America is in the world today and that handful of Iowa voters who bundled up and went out to vote for Mr George H.W. Bush in 1980. While they did not realise it then, that small number of Iowans could and did alter the course of history.

[The writer, a former US ambassador to Cambodia, is executive director of the World Food Prize Foundation, Des Moines.]

Bush's strategy: Confuse the middle and feed the base

By **PAUL KRUGMAN**

ACCORDING to advance reports, United States President George W. Bush will use the upcoming State-of-the-Union Address to portray himself as a visionary leader who stands above the political fray. But that act is losing its effectiveness

even more expensive, new initiatives, like partial Social Security privatisation — which all by itself would require at least US\$1 trillion (S\$1.7 trillion) in extra funds over the next decade. Where is all this money going to come from?

Judging from the latest

continuing to solidify his base.

The most sinister example was the recess appointment of Mr Charles Pickering Sr, with his segregationist past and questionable record on voting rights, to the Federal Appeals Court — the day after Martin Luther King's ac-

Meanwhile, the lying has already begun, with the Republican National Committee's wilful misrepresentation of General Wesley Clark's pre-war statements. (Why are news organisations letting them get away with this?)

The question we should

By **TIM**

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