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**AN AUDIENCE** at the Marble Collegiate Church listens to President Kennedy's speechwriter Ted Sorensen, below left, and President Reagan's speechwriter Peggy Noonan, below right, in advance of the State of the Union address last night.

# Politically Engaged

## Former presidential speechwriters lead forum

**FLATIRON DISTRICT** Lastnight Peggy Noonan imagined what George Bush would be doing 45 minutes before his State of the Union address.

"The president would have a light dinner," said Noonan, the former presidential speechwriter for Ronald Reagan and the first George Bush. "His wife will be trying to divert him at the table with chit-chat about family. He will have the speech to his right or his left, and he will be nervously referring to it. There will be a speechwriter waiting outside the room — he will have indigestion."

Noonan was speaking ahead of a screening of the annual presidential address, sponsored by Generation Engage, an 18-month-old initiative seeking to spark an interest in politics among young people between the ages of 18 and 29. Metro is the group's media partner. The other speaker was Theodore Sorensen, best known as the presidential speechwriter for John Kennedy.

Sorensen marveled at



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Noonan's ability to draw a scene but doubted that Bush's speech "could possibly be to his right." The Democrat lauded his Republican colleague's way with words before poking fun at some of her "insightful" lines, such as Reagan's warning to the United Nations: "The future is much closer than we realize."

Sorensen lamented the "drift" of the State of the Union speech to a collection of "one-liners" aimed at garnering applause. He hated the advent of "the hero in the balcony," but Noonan thought the nation's ruler should single out average citizens who've acted admirably. She said the pres-

ident needs to "put his intentions in a few lines."

"The State of the Union is, among other things, a piece of rhetoric," she said. "It is a statement about intentions and desires. It is an attempt to persuade. If you weighed it down with too many ideas . . . that ship will start to sink."

Francois Guillaume, a 33-year-old financial analyst, thought Bush's speech went well. "I didn't hear anything unexpected," he said afterward, "but I was satisfied to see he's committed to the war on terrorism. It may infringe on my civil liberties, but it's for a better world."

Columbia University student Jaideep Mulkerji, 26, was excited about seeing Sorensen and Noonan, but he decided to leave before Bush's speech was finished.

"He's already linked the Iraq war to 9/11," he said, standing on Fifth Avenue in front of the Marble Collegiate Church. "We know there was no connection."

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