

● Progressivism Under Taft

MAIN IDEA Taft's ambivalent approach to progressive reform led to a split in the Republican Party and the loss of the presidency to the Democrats

William Howard Taft became president in 1909. He pursued many Progressive policies but more cautiously—and with less publicity—than Roosevelt. And he divided his own party.

One issue was the tariff. Taft wished to lower the tariffs. When conservatives in the Senate passed a weakened version of the measure, Taft signed it anyway and Progressives complained. He also angered conservationists by appointing officials who favored development of wild lands rather than preservation of them.

With the Republican Party split between reformers and conservatives, Democrats won control of the House for the first time in almost two decades. In 1912, Roosevelt tried to regain the

Republican nomination for president. Failing that, Roosevelt formed a third party—the Bull Moose party—and ran on a platform of reform.

The Democrats nominated reformer Woodrow Wilson, the governor of New Jersey. As Taft and Roosevelt bitterly denounced each other, Wilson won the election—and a Democratic majority in Congress. About three-quarters of the vote went to candidates in favor of economic reform.