

Post Politics

# Jeb Bush to officially launch his presidential campaign

By Ed O'Keefe June 15 at 3:30 AM

MIAMI -- Jeb Bush, a former two-term governor and the son and brother of former presidents, will formally launch his presidential campaign on Monday, seeking to make history as the third member of his family to reach the White House.

The announcement caps six months of aggressive travel and fundraising for Bush, 62, a regimen that suggested a presidential bid was never in doubt. Testing the boundaries of modern campaign finance law and tapping a donor network first cultivated by his extended family more than 30 years ago, Bush has stockpiled tens of millions of dollars for an allied super PAC that will operate independently of his campaign operation and attack his opponents as he seeks to build support in early primary states.

Bush is scheduled to launch a formal campaign Monday afternoon at Miami Dade College, which is located in a Cuban American community and boasts the largest Hispanic student body in the nation. The venue speaks to Bush's desire to aggressively seek the support of Latinos and other communities less prone to vote for Republicans.

Monday night, Bush plans to fly to New Hampshire, where he'll start a whirlwind four-day tour that will also take him to Iowa and South Carolina, and Friday to Washington for his first official campaign fundraiser, before returning to Florida to headline a GOP fundraiser in Tampa.

[\*\[Read more: In drive to be 45th president, Jeb Bush faces legacies of 43rd and 41st\]\*](#)

In his announcement speech, Bush plans to cast himself as an experienced "fix-it" agent who revamped Florida's economy and government over eight years. Recalling his governing experience is designed to contrast him especially with Sens. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Rand Paul (R-Ky.), who are enjoying early support.

As the son of the 41st president, George H.W. Bush, and younger brother of the 43rd, George W. Bush, Jeb Bush has long been considered a contender for the White House. After leaving the governor's office in 2007, he rebuffed repeated overtures from party leaders and the support of his extended family to launch a bid in 2008 or 2012, citing personal reasons.

Serious rumblings of a campaign began last year, as he publicly discussed whether a presidential contender could

campaign “joyfully” in an increasingly toxic political environment. In December, Bush signaled via Facebook that he would “actively explore” a run.



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In early moves aimed at demonstrating his prowess, Bush snatched away a key adviser to 2012 GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney, [released hundreds of thousands of e-mails in a display of transparency](#), adopted a “Paleo” diet that helped him shed more than 30 pounds, and tapped his family's deep-rooted donor network to raise tens of millions of dollars.

The strategy initially worked, as Bush shot to the top of public opinion polls in early states and nationally, though never far above 20 percent support. Romney announced he would not launch a third White House bid and other GOP contenders, including New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, lost the support of well-heeled donors now with Bush.

But in recent weeks, Bush has slid from presumed front-runner to the middle of the Republican pack, surrounded on all sides by questions over his relevance, his ability to withstand the pressure and whether his message is right for the Republican Party at this moment.

He also struggled over several days in May to explain whether he would have authorized the Iraq war – a stumble that shocked supporters who said he should have been prepared to answer questions about a key part of his

brother's presidential legacy.

*[How Jeb Bush's campaign went off course before it even began]*

With polls slipping and supporters growing increasingly nervous, Bush has re-calibrated in recent days by rearranging top staff and demoting that former Romney adviser. Aides also acknowledge that expectations that his super PAC would raise \$100 million in the first half of the year could fall short.

If Bush rebounds in the coming year, wins the Republican nomination and is elected president, he would vault the Bushes above all other American political families. While the Adams and Roosevelt families have produced more than one president – and Democrat Hillary Clinton is seeking to become the second member of her family to win the White House – no family has been able to say it has produced three presidents.

During an April campaign stop in New Hampshire, Bush acknowledged the “oddity” of a potential Bush-Clinton matchup, saying that “I have to prove that I'm not running for president...to try and break the tie between the Adams family and the Bush family.”

He has always acknowledged his unique political lineage when addressing voters.

“I'm my own man,” he has said repeatedly during visits to more than a dozen states, usually adding that “I need to show my own heart” in order to distinguish himself from his family and win the presidency on his own terms.

The list of Bush's top donors and advisers, however, include numerous former officials in the administrations of his father and brother, including several who served as ambassadors for both men. Jeb Bush has so far recruited more than 20 veterans of previous Bush administrations to advise him on foreign affairs.

But his own political team is stacked with people with few ties to either Bush presidency. Instead, he has revived a network of more than 650 people who worked with him as governor or on his campaigns. Top advisers include his former gubernatorial chief of staff, Sally Bradshaw, and GOP campaign guru Mike Murphy, both of whom have worked with him for nearly two decades.

John Ellis Bush – nicknamed by his mother as “Jeb” for his initials – was born in Midland, Texas, in February 1953, the second son and third child to George and Barbara Bush. His older sister, Robin, died of pediatric leukemia at age 3, a few months after he was born.

The family moved to Houston when Bush was 4, and following a trail blazed by his father and brother, he left Texas at age 14 to attend Phillips Andover Academy in Massachusetts. Described as a loner who occasionally smoked marijuana and became captain of the tennis team, Bush told a crowd in New Hampshire in April, “I actually didn't

like my experience at Andover that much.”

But if not for Andover, Bush would have never met his wife.

At age 17, he traveled to Leon, Mexico, to teach English as part of an exchange program. That’s where he met Columba Garnica de Gallo and immediately fell in love with his future wife. They kept in touch while he attended the University of Texas, where he earned a degree in Latin American studies.

*[Columba Bush's painful, unlikely road from Mexico toward the White House]*

After marrying in Texas, the couple lived for two years in Caracas, Venezuela, while Bush worked for a bank founded by Bush family friend and future secretary of state, James A. Baker III.

Bush then relocated his family to Miami, where he launched a successful commercial real estate company and developed deep relationships with South Florida’s Cuban American community.

“I’ve been waiting 30 years for Monday,” said Jorge Arrizurieta, a successful Miami businessman and longtime friend who has known Bush since the 1980s.

Through the years, Bush adopted local causes, especially the concerns of Cuban immigrants. Frequently he would march in the streets, speak at rallies and help lobby the federal government to continue a blockade of the regime of Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

Over time Bush “earned” the support of Miami’s influential Cuban community, said Ninoska Pérez Castellón, a popular Cuban-American radio show host.

“Some people talk about Bush as if he’s another Cuban,” she said. “He was there, always.”

Bush’s first taste of politics came when he used his fluent Spanish skills to help his father win the 1980 Puerto Rico Republican primary. Later, he served as chairman of the Dade County Republican Party and Florida commerce secretary.

His first and only significant political setback came in 1994, when he lost the closest race in history for Florida governor. The loss was especially painful given that his brother overcame bigger odds to win election as Texas governor.

“I put my heart and soul into it,” [he said about the 1994 loss in an interview with The Washington Post](#). “I thought I was going to win, and so did a lot of other people. It was kind of hard because I’m normally pretty good at just

moving on.”

Bush admitted in the interview that the loss strained his marriage and was the catalyst for his conversion to Catholicism. He remained politically active, writing a book about the culture wars of the 1990s and traveling the state to maintain political support.

*[Rather than running from his brother's policies, Jeb Bush embraces them]*

In 1998, he ran again and won. Bush won reelection with more than 50 percent support in 2002.

Over eight years, he implemented an agenda widely praised by Republicans as a conservative model. Bush slashed the state government payroll; cut taxes by roughly \$19 billion; implemented school reforms that became a model for other states; expanded gun rights; earned plaudits for his leadership of state agencies after a 2001 anthrax outbreak and during two active hurricane seasons; and became a vocal proponent of immigration reform.

In a controversial move heralded by social conservatives, he intervened in the case of Terri Schiavo, a state resident diagnosed as in a persistent vegetative state but whose family fought to keep her alive. Federal courts eventually ordered the state to remove feeding tubes, per her husband’s decision.

Since serving as governor, Bush has launched a lucrative business career, including work with his youngest son, Jeb Jr., on investment and real-estate ventures. Until last year he also served as a special adviser to the British bank Barclays. He has traveled overseas 89 times to 29 countries in eight years, according to aides.



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Politically, Bush remained an active proponent of immigration reform and education reform standards commonly known as Common Core. His support for both issues is considered a disqualifying factor by conservatives opposed to overhauling immigration laws or possible federal intervention into local education policy.

Mark Meckler, a founder of tea party-inspired groups, said that Bush will continue facing strong resistance from conservatives due to his stances on education and immigration -- and for his family ties.

"It's odd to have a multi-term governor not defined by his time as governor," Meckler said in an interview.

Bush has been undeterred by recent slips in support and concerns about his viability.

"The challenge I think in America today is that experience is somewhat discounted and giving a mighty fine speech is somewhat elevated," Bush said recently in Michigan. "I think experience matters a lot in a leadership position and the presidency is certainly one of those."

"I know how I can connect with people," he added later, "because I've done it."

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Ed O'Keefe is covering the 2016 presidential campaign, with a focus on Jeb Bush and other Republican candidates. He's covered presidential and congressional politics since 2008. Off the trail, he's covered Capitol Hill, federal agencies and the federal workforce, and spent a brief time covering the war in Iraq.

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