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### Jeb Bush announces for president: 'I will run with heart; I will run to win' (w/video)



Alex Leary, Times Washington Bureau Chief

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MIAMI — Jeb Bush, the son and brother of former presidents, finally announced his White House bid Monday, emphasizing his record as Florida governor and vowing to run a campaign that faces issues "without flinching, and staying true to what I believe."

"I will run with heart," he said in a speech at Miami Dade College that was notably forceful and polished for someone not known for his oratory. "And I will run to win."

The event was six months after Bush, 62, declared that he was "actively" exploring the idea of running for president and traveled the country for speeches and to raise tens of millions of dollars.

He has struggled at times — bungling a response about the Iraq war, for example — worrying some supporters about his ability to compete in a fast, new era of politics. Days before his event here, he reshuffled his campaign team.

But Bush was flush with confidence Monday before a crowd of 3,000, showing off deep support among elected Florida Republicans — among them, Attorney General Pam Bondi, Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, CFO Jeff Atwater and former Sen. Mel Martinez — and long-established ties to the Hispanic community, employing rhetoric both optimistic and combative.

"As our whole nation has learned since 2008, executive experience is another term for preparation, and there is no substitute for that," Bush said, referring to President Barack Obama, who was a first-term senator when he was elected.

The line conveniently also worked to sow doubts about a crop of younger Republican challengers, including Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, who has emerged as a formidable candidate. Rubio issued a statement Monday calling Bush a friend and welcoming him to the race, but Rubio has engaged in some not-so-subtle messaging about the

need to move beyond "yesterday."

But Bush used his strongest language to attack Democrats and front-runner Hillary Clinton.

"The party now in the White House is planning a no-suspense primary, for a no-change election. To hold onto power. To slog on with the same agenda under another name," he said. "And you and I know that America deserves better. ... The presidency should not be passed on from one liberal to the next."

Bush's campaign logo — Jeb! — was splashed everywhere in the college gym and served as a reminder of his challenge ahead. Outside the college, protesters sat in the muggy heat with signs that read, "No more Clinton-Bush."

Inside, Bush was heckled by young immigration activists and went off script to say, "Just so our friends know, the next president of the United States will pass meaningful immigration reform so that will be solved. Not by executive order."

The crowd, many Hispanics, roared with approval and then began to chant, "USA. USA. USA!"

Bush has a more open position on immigration than other Republicans, damaging his standing among ardent conservatives. He had not planned on discussing the issue, which party leaders are eager to tackle in order to reverse poor performance among the fast-growing Hispanic electorate.

The event was staged to show off his Hispanic ties, featuring singers and signs in Spanish. Bush spoke a little Spanish himself, his Mexican-born wife, Columba, sitting nearby with their three children.

Although his mother, former first lady Barbara Bush attended, his father and brother, presidents 41 and 43, stayed away.

"Jeb's always run his campaign as his own man," said longtime ally Al Cardenas, the former head of the state GOP, playing down reports about Bush's logo. "Even when his dad and brother were very popular in Florida, he ran as Jeb because he wanted to win the governorship on his own merits."

One of Bush's central goals is to sell himself as a proven executive, and he rattled off accomplishments over eight years as Florida governor (1999-2007), from billions in tax cuts to job growth and education reform.

Democrats characterized his record as extreme on social issues and said his tax cutting benefited corporations and the wealthy. A flurry of statements sought to reinforce that he is the brother of George W. Bush, who began the war in Iraq.

Bush did not offer many specific policy plans, but called for less regulation, less spending and a more muscular foreign policy, rapping Obama as weak on Israel and Cuba.

"We need a president willing to challenge and disrupt the whole culture in our nation's capital," he said.

Bush also tried to appeal to middle-class concerns, another problem in past Republican presidential campaigns.

He called for 4 percent annual growth, "and the 19 million new jobs that comes with it," adding: "Economic growth that makes a difference for hard-working men and women — who don't need reminding that the economy is more than the stock market. Growth that lifts up the middle class — all the families who haven't gotten a raise in 15 years."

In addition to immigration and Bush fatigue, the candidate also faces Republican voters who have grown to loathe the Common Core education standards, another topic he mostly avoided Monday.

Hours before the event, dozens of top Bush allies gathered at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, where he maintains an office and frequents the gym, and began making phone calls to donors, beginning a sprint to raise

money directly for the campaign.

Bush has already amassed tens of millions — if not more — for his Right to Rise Super PAC but, as an official candidate, his interaction with the group will be limited.

That activity has drawn considerable scrutiny and allegations he violated campaign finance law by pretending he was not a candidate. Although Bush now cannot coordinate with the Super PAC, it is being run by his close advisers. Bush and his lawyers say they have followed the rules.

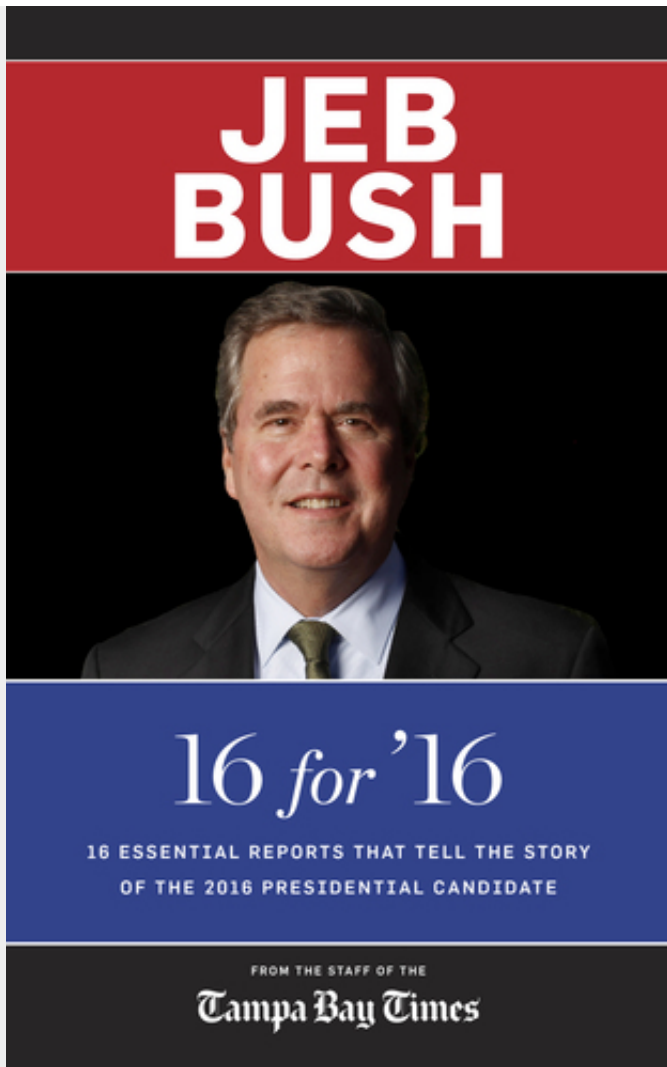
He vowed to hit the campaign trail hard and will be in New Hampshire today, Iowa on Wednesday and South Carolina on Thursday. He will headline a Hillsborough County GOP dinner in Tampa on Friday, a sign of how important Bush views his home state, which holds its primary March 15.

"Campaigns aren't easy, and they're not supposed to be," Bush said, concluding his speech. "And I know that there are good people running for president. Quite a few, in fact.

"And not a one of us deserves the job by right of resume, party, seniority, family, or family narrative. It's nobody's turn. It's everybody's test, and it's wide open — exactly as a contest for president should be."

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