

‘Dead Man’ Walking? Bush Donors Happy Post-Debate

Jeb Bush supporters breathed sighs of relief after the former Florida governor’s performance in Tuesday night’s Milwaukee debate. He didn’t screw up. In fact, many said, he did better than expected.

Sure, it wasn’t the most stellar moment to ever occur on a debate stage. But that wasn’t what Bush’s supporters say they were looking for. They were simply hoping to stave off talks of his imminent demise.

And they were dripped with praise as a result. For the more than half a dozen Bush donors and bundlers interviewed by Reuters after the debate, Bush hit all the right notes.

“I think that Jeb is a league apart, he is the one with the experience,” said Eric Cantor, the former Republican House Majority Leader. “He is the one with the leadership skills and can point to results of actually having done something.”

Cantor praised Bush’s response to a question about the Wall Street regulation Dodd-Frank law.

“I was pleased Jeb responded by focusing on the risks that Dodd Frank was supposed to address and the need for the regulations to make sense and to apply to those financials institutions that actually could affect systemic risk versus community banks that serve as the life blood for the bulk of America and its entrepreneurs,” Cantor said.

Two weeks earlier, the day after the debate brought defections from the Bush camp.

“I feel a lot better now than I was after that last debate,” said Barry Wynn, a Spartanburg, South Carolina-based bundler. “The CNBC debate was probably not good for anybody, but it was worse on Jeb than it was for most. He had prepared for more substance, and he never quite adjusted to it.”

William Scherman, an attorney who has donated \$10,000 to Bush's super PAC Right to Rise, said he was confident Bush proved his "policy acumen."

"I, along with many others, continue to support Jeb and his vision for American," Scherman said. "I trust Right to Rise to do what is necessary to elect Gov. Bush President as that is what is important."

Former Florida U.S. Rep. Tom Feeney, who was Bush's running mate in his unsuccessful 1994 run for governor, said the month-long break in the debate schedule will allow Bush to hit the campaign trail, where he says his strengths lie.

"When he gets in front of people he's genuine," Feeney said. "He's got time for people. He's a good listener. He shows genuine concern for people's individual issues, problems, needs and circumstances in life."

"TV does not play up his natural and overwhelming charm like person-to-person meetings do," Feeney said.

Deborah DeMoss Fonseca, who is fundraising for Bush and a previous senior policy aide for Sen. Marco Rubio's Senate campaign, said Bush thrives better in a setting that is more focused on policy.

"He's not a guy who is going to have a punch line every time it's his turn up to bat," DeMoss Fonseca said. "He's the most vetted and the most tried and true of the candidates in the top tier."

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