

Did Jeb Bush Orchestrate a Pre-emptive 'Strike' Against a 2016 Romney Bid?

Hoping to forestall a repeat presidential bid by 2012 GOP nominee Mitt Romney, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush used a "shock and awe" campaign against the former Massachusetts governor, a new book asserts.

McKay Coppins, a political reporter for BuzzFeed, suggests Romney was ready to make a third bid for the White House when Bush's forces revealed the campaign mechanism they had ready to take him on. Coppins, a former *Newsweek* reporter who covered Romney extensively in 2012, made his assertions in *The Wilderness: Deep Inside the Republican Party's Combative, Contentious, Chaotic Quest to Take Back the White House*, a book released Dec. 1 by Hachette Publishing Group. The *Deseret News*, a Salt Lake City, Utah, daily newspaper, first reported the assertions.

Despite telling key supporters, "I want to be president" in early 2015, Coppins wrote, following "a rattling glimpse at how vicious and driven Jeb could be," Romney dropped out of the race on January 30, according to *Deseret News* political reporter Lisa Riley Roche, who obtained an advance copy of Coppins' book.

The revelations by Coppins are significant, although they are also disputed. Kirk Jowers, a longtime Romney intimate who directs the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah, told the Utah newspaper the assertion that Bush killed Romney's bid "could not be further from the truth."

The *Deseret News* quoted Jowers as saying, "There is, I think, zero truth to the fact that Jeb deterred him by any kind of shock and awe. I don't think Mitt or any of the people on

Mitt's team had any fear of Jeb Bush."

Former Utah Governor Mike Leavitt told the newspaper that Coppins may have been taken in by a self-promoting Bush aide.

"Somebody is kidding themselves about their impact on the world," Leavitt declared. He added that perhaps responsibility for the tale lay with "some campaign operative that was trying to convince Mr. Coppins that he impacted Mitt's decision."

But Coppins is hardly a neophyte when it comes to understanding – and explaining – Romney to readers. Like the 2012 GOP nominee, Coppins is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more popularly known as the Mormon Church. Coppins, who grew up in Massachusetts, where Romney served one term as Governor, is a graduate of Brigham Young University, the LDS Church-owned school in Provo, Utah.

Speaking to BYU's *Daily Universe* newspaper, Coppins recalled his role as the "Mormon Wikipedia" for other 2012 reporters covering Romney and a religion not widely understood in media circles. "In addition to being a political reporter, I knew my role as a Mormon explainer could be valuable to the campaign conversation," Coppins told the newspaper. "I tried my best to merge those two."

And while Romney said in June he was not "second-guessing" his decision not to run in 2016, Coppins asserts he would be able to jump back in if needed. "If, come summer of 2016, his party needed a savior, Mitt Romney would be ready," Coppins wrote.