

Jeb Bush: 'If I Were to Run ... I Would Have to Deal With This'

Republican Jeb Bush made clear on Wednesday he realizes his famous last name could be a hindrance in a 2016 presidential campaign, and said he would work hard to connect with people and "do it on my own."

In a speech designed to lay the foundation for a potential White House run, the former Florida governor mixed attacks against President Barack Obama's Middle East policy with promises to run an optimistic campaign based on conservative principles.

But he hewed closely to the mainstream, in a sign that he would try to expand the appeal of the Republican Party in order to make it competitive again in presidential races after losses to Obama in 2008 and 2012.

Bush declared that "parents ought to make sure that their children are vaccinated," separating himself from conservatives in his party in the debate over the reach of government. And he did not shy away from his support for immigration reform, despite conservative criticism that he is too liberal on the issue.

He did, however, avoid antagonizing conservatives by not mentioning his support for Common Core, an education policy they oppose. But he spoke at length on the need for higher education standards.

Bush, who has been out of office since 2007, looked a little rusty on the stump, rapidly reading his prepared remarks to the Detroit Economic Club. But he was more relaxed during the question-and-answer session that followed.

As the brother of former President George W. Bush and son of former President George H.W. Bush, he is facing questions about why a third Bush should live in the White House. It was one of the first questions posed to him at the Detroit event.

"It's an interesting challenge for me," Bush said. "If I were to go beyond the consideration of running, I would have to deal with this, turn this fact into an opportunity to connect on a human level," he said.

He would seek to convince people that "I'm on their side" on the issues they care about, he said, and that while he loves his father and brother, he knows that "I'll have to do it on my own."

His comments suggested he might not rely heavily on the former presidents to help him in a campaign, other than to tap into the vast donor network the Bushes established.

Jeb Bush threaded a fine line over the Middle East. He criticized Obama's handling of the threat posed by Islamic State militants, calling it a result of a U.S. pullback from the region.

But he was careful to say U.S. troops should not be deployed every time there is a global challenge, a position that could be intended to put some space between him and his brother's Iraq war.

"We have to be engaged. And that doesn't necessarily mean boots on the ground in every occurrence," Bush said.

"Ask Israel today if the United States has their back. Ask Eastern European countries, does the United States have your back. There is a growing concern that we've pulled back," he said.

Bush's speech was the first in a series aimed at defining why he is considering a run for the Republican presidential nomination and what policies he would pursue if elected.

The former Florida governor leaped into the debate over how to lift middle-class Americans' income without offering specifics on what he would do. He blamed a "progressive and liberal mindset" in Washington for creating "a spiderweb that traps people in perpetual dependence."

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