



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 6, 2014

Will Republican Recycling Bring Back the Bushes?

Whatever else environmentalists might say about Republican policies, there's no denying the Grand Old Party practices recycling. Talk of Jeb Bush for president is back in circulation as the *Wall Street Journal* reported Thursday that the former Florida governor, who is the son of one former president and the brother of another, is sending signals about a potential White House bid in 2016. (The photo shows the three Bushes after the christening of the aircraft carrier *George H.W. Bush* in 2006.)



The news follows a summer of speculation that Jeb wasn't interested, and that another Bush for President campaign was not in the offing. Indeed, the *Wall Street Journal* report spoke of an effort to dispel speculation that he had actually ruled out a 2016 run. The message going out from the "Bush camp" now is not a definitive statement that the latest heir to the Bush dynasty is preparing to take the plunge, but rather that potential backers should keep their powder dry and their wallets uncommitted while the object of their political interest ponders the presidential landscape. To prevent dollars and political brainpower from going elsewhere, the *Journal* said, the message from people close to Bush is, "Before you do anything, let us know."

Jeb Bush, 61, is said to be planning a decision some time after the midterm elections in November. Whether he is really undecided at this point or simply waiting for the right time to make his decision known is not clear. Since leaving the governor's office in 2007, he has been heading a business-consulting firm, serving on corporate boards, and leading a pair of educational think tanks. Despite reports that he was busy raising money for private equity firms while other presidential hopefuls have been visiting early primary states, Bush has also been traveling the country and raising money for his party, especially for U.S. Senate candidates whose victories will help Republicans win control of the upper chamber this fall.

Jeb Bush Jr., one of the former governor's three children and a member of his father's Miami-area consulting firm, told the *Journal* that the matter hasn't come up in family gatherings. But he described the question as "the 800-pound gorilla in the room."

"A lot of people are waiting to see what Dad does," he said. "There's a lot of pressure to run." At the same time, the waiting game has taken some of pressure off potential donors to commit early to a 2016 contender.

"It's frozen the field a bit, in that it's a convenient excuse for finance people to stay neutral and wait to commit," said Republican strategist Dave Carney, who worked in the George W. Bush White House and was an adviser to Texas Governor Rick Perry's 2012 presidential campaign. "It's not like Jeb would walk into the race and clear the field, but his gravitas and fundraising network makes him a first-class competitor," Carney told the *Journal*.

For whatever "gravitas" and undoubted fundraising ability he would bring to the gauntlet of party



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primaries and caucuses, Jeb Bush as a presidential candidate would draw immediate opposition as well as support. His backing of Common Core education standards and liberalization of the nation's immigration laws would make him a sure target for Tea Party activists, and his name and family ties might be a red flag to other Republicans whose memories of the one-term presidency of the first President Bush are uninspiring and who saw the political, military, and economic disasters during the presidency of George W. Bush lead to the capture by Democrats of Congress in 2006 and the White House in 2008.

A Jeb Bush candidacy would likely draw daily flak from right-wing talk show hosts popular with the party's conservative base. Laura Ingraham has ripped Bush for his stand on immigration reform, ridiculing in particular his statement that those who cross the border into the United States illegally do so as an "act of love." She went after House Majority Leader Eric Cantor on the same issue and was ecstatic when the Virginia Republican lost his party's primary this summer to a little known college professor named David Brat.

Rush Limbaugh reacted viscerally to a Bush comment that the Republican Party has too many "reactionaries." "The real reactionaries are the Main Street freakin' Republicans!" he declared, drawing a clear line between moderates among the party's establishment figures and its more conservative grassroots activists. The *Journal* has described Bush as "a top choice of the establishment wing of the Republican Party."

Some political observers believe the same positions that could be stumbling blocks for Bush in Republican primaries could make him a formidable foe for the Democrats should he win the nomination. Washington attorney Lanny Davis, a Democrat who served as special counsel to President Bill Clinton, wrote in June that Bush's passion for both education and immigration reform are "Two Reasons why Democrats Should Fear a Jeb Bush 2016 presidential run."

"In 1998 and 2002, Bush was elected and re-elected as governor of Florida carrying about 60 percent of the Latino vote," Davis wrote, while Mitt Romney in 2012 carried less than one-fourth of that vote nationally. In swing states such as Colorado and New Mexico, Obama's winning 75 percent of Latino voters was critical in bringing those states into the Democratic column.

"Those who care about enacting the conservative agenda know they can't do so without winning the presidency and that won't happen without a more moderate GOP national platform on immigration reform to cut into this Latino vote gap significantly," Davis wrote.

A "more moderate" platform on immigration reform and a presidential candidate promoting it might also result in large numbers of conservative voters staying home on Election Day, rather than voting for a candidate and platform that would reward illegal immigrants with legal status and a possible "path to citizenship." Writing in the *The Atlantic* in May, Peter Beinart suggested Bush's appeal might not extend much beyond the party's top echelon.

"The fact that Republican elites are so excited about a Jeb candidacy suggests that they don't understand how large a shadow George W. Bush still casts over their party," wrote Beinart. "Inside the GOP establishment, the Bushes represent responsible conservatism. But for many other Americans — especially Millennials — they represent economic meltdown and unwinnable war."

The GOP establishment must be in considerable denial if its members consider the staggering deficits of both Bush presidencies and the disastrous military adventures of George W. a record of "responsible conservatism." Beinart has offered the theory that just as Bill Clinton in 1992 managed to convince



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voters he was a different kind of Democrat, Republicans in 2016 will need a candidate who “scrambles Americans’ stereotypes about the GOP by doing things George W. Bush never would. Right now, for all his flaws, Rand Paul is the only contender really trying.”

After two Bush presidencies and the failed 2012 campaign of Mitt Romney, himself the son of a prominent Michigan governor who sought the White House in 1968, GOP primary voters may also be weary of what might be called dynastic Republicanism — especially if the Democrats try to win the White House with another Clinton in 2016.

Bush’s grandfather was Prescott Bush, a U.S. senator from Connecticut. George Herbert Walker Bush was elected to Congress from Texas in 1966 and was the party’s national chairman and director of the CIA before being selected as Ronald Reagan’s running mate and elected vice president in 1980. He was elected president in 1988 in a campaign memorable for the “No new taxes” pledge that Bush broke as president, promoting and signing a record tax hike to deal with rising deficits in the hundreds of billions. He lost to Bill Clinton in 1992. George W. Bush succeeded Clinton and made Dick Cheney, President Ford’s chief of staff and the elder Bush’s defense chief, his vice presidential choice. He also brought back Ford’s defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, to run the Pentagon again.

Only two sons of former presidents, John Quincy Adams and George W. Bush, have won the presidency themselves. One grandson of a president, Benjamin Harrison, served a term of his own in the White House. The Roosevelts, Theodore and Franklin, were cousins. Should Jeb Bush run for and win the presidency, the Bush family will be the first to have three of its members in the office of the nation’s chief executive. Chances are, though, he wouldn’t bring back Cheney or Rumsfeld.

That might be carrying recycling a bit too far.

Photo show then-President George W. Bush (center) with former President George H.W. Bush (left) and then-Florida Gov. Jeb Bush after the christening of the aircraft carrier George H.W.

Bush, Oct. 7, 2006: AP Images.



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