

Jeb Bush launches campaign for Republican presidential nomination

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Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush officially launched his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination Monday, bringing the number of announced Republican candidates to 11—a total that ticked up to 12 Wednesday with the entry of billionaire real estate speculator Donald Trump.

At a rally in Miami more than six months after he first indicated his interest in a presidential campaign, Bush delivered a 40-minute speech that consisted largely of right-wing pabulum and invocations of family, country and religion.

Bush pledged to increase the growth rate of the US economy to four percent a year, without any details of how he proposed to do so other than scrapping all regulations on US corporations and banks.

He hailed the privatization of public education through charter schools and backed the right of church-run charities and businesses to impose their religious precepts on their employees.

Bush called for a more aggressive US foreign policy and greatly increased military spending, but he was careful to avoid mentioning Iraq, Afghanistan or any other country bombed, invaded or occupied by his father or his brother during their presidencies.

The address had lines seemingly crafted by speechwriters to make the candidate an object of mockery. Thus, Bush absurdly presented himself as an outsider, declaring, “We don’t need another president who merely holds the top spot among the pampered elites of Washington.”

It would be hard to find anyone who more personifies the “pampered elites” than the son of President George H. W. Bush and brother of President George W. Bush (and grandson of US Senator Prescott Bush of Connecticut). Jeb Bush followed in the family footsteps, going into banking, real estate and

Republican politics.

He was elected governor of Florida in 1998 and pursued ruthless right-wing policies for eight years in office, cutting taxes for corporations and the wealthy, instituting the first school voucher program, and heavily promoting charter schools. He backed the notorious “stand your ground” gun law justifying vigilante action, and curried favor with the religious right by seeking court orders to force-feed Terri Schiavo, a young woman who had been in a persistent vegetative state for a dozen years.

Jeb Bush played a central role in the theft of the 2000 presidential election when his state government first conducted a massive purge of the voter rolls, aimed primarily at African Americans, and then acted to shut down vote-counting in south Florida in order to preserve George W. Bush’s 537-vote lead in the state. These brazenly undemocratic actions set the stage for the Supreme Court’s intervention to install Bush’s brother in the White House.

Since declaring his interest in a presidential race last December, Bush has amassed an enormous war chest and considerable support in the Republican Party establishment. Thanks to his family connections, Bush has access to a vast network of fundraisers. His Super PAC, Right to Rise, is expected to raise more than \$100 million by the end of this month, dwarfing the sums raised by all previous presidential candidates eight months before the first primary contest.

But the candidate has failed to generate much support among party activists, particularly those from the ultra-right Tea Party and Christian fundamentalist groups, and he has been unable to gain an edge in the early polling. He is currently ranked in the top three in national polls of Republican voters, along with Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Florida Senator

Marco Rubio, although none has topped the 15 percent mark.

Remarkably, Bush's main problem in winning over Republican Party activists and office-holders is that despite his record of vicious reaction in Florida, he is now regarded as too moderate. Nearly every one of the 15 or 16 declared or likely Republican presidential hopefuls has criticized Bush from the right, denouncing him as too soft on immigration or education policy.

One little-acknowledged key to the initial struggles of the Bush campaign is that his Mexican wife, Columba, and his personal fluency in Spanish are regarded with suspicion, if not outright hostility, by the nativist and racist elements that make up a sizeable section of the Republican Party base. Anti-immigrant sentiment is one of the major driving forces of the Tea Party groups.

With Hillary Clinton heavily favored to win the Democratic Party nomination, and Jeb Bush among three co-leaders for the Republican Party nomination, a Clinton-Bush contest is a credible scenario for the 2016 election. Such a choice between rival ruling class dynasties would place in even sharper relief the undemocratic character of the corporate-controlled two-party system.

George H. W. Bush was the last American president to be defeated for reelection. George W. Bush was widely despised and hated when he left office. For millions, the Bush name is indelibly connected with mass unemployment, financial crisis, illegal wars, torture, and an aristocratic indifference to the conditions of life facing working people, summed up in the famous photograph of George W. Bush peering down on the drowned city of New Orleans from Air Force One after Hurricane Katrina.

The Republican Party is not unaware of these mass sentiments, but campaign strategists and fundraisers regard Bush's last name as a problem to be overcome rather than a political death sentence. That alone testifies to the enormous distance between the political establishment and the vast majority of the American people.



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