

EDITORIAL: What's the problem with Jeb?

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We've always liked Jeb Bush. When he was governor of Florida, the Daily News applauded his tax-cutting initiatives and his efforts to shrink state government. When hurricanes threatened, he stood before TV cameras and was clearly in charge — he understood the science involved and grasped the complexities of the emergency response.

Others liked him, too. Voters liked him enough to make him the first two-term Republican governor in Florida's history. The libertarian Cato Institute rated him the second-best governor in America on fiscal issues.

But the honeymoon with the right didn't last. Now that Mr. Bush has all but announced he's running for president, the tea party is grumbling and the Conservative Action Fund has launched a petition against him. "Together, we can stop a Jeb Bush run," said the fund's leader.

The problem is that Mr. Bush is yesterday's conservative, not today's conservative.

Yesterday's conservatives would promote a pathway to citizenship for immigrants already in the United States illegally. Ronald Reagan did; in 1986 he signed a reform bill granting amnesty to immigrants who had arrived before 1982. Jeb Bush still talks about a path to citizenship, but today's conservatives mostly oppose it. Some talk openly about expelling millions of illegals.

Yesterday's conservatives would be receptive to national education standards. Jeb Bush promoted standardized tests as governor and now supports Common Core national standards. Today's conservatives mostly don't.

There's still time for today's conservatives to warm up to Jeb, which would be a good idea, because he would be a leveling influence in a 21st-century GOP too often dominated by extremist views. The more voters he can impress, the greater the Republican Party's chances of controlling not just Congress but also the White House after 2016.

"Jeb," by the way, is a name stitched together from his initials. He is John Ellis Bush. We expect voters will learn this and all sorts of other things about him during the next 22 months.