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Just Go Home, Jeb Bush

by Carol Morgan on February 28, 2013

Jeb Bush, former Florida Governor, son of George H.W. Bush, brother of George W. Bush and father of George P. Bush made a visit to Texas this week. He wanted to kill two birds with one stone (I suppose) so he spoke about education reform to Texas lawmakers and opened some political doors, and probably some wallets, for his son at a forum organized by the Texas Business Leadership Council.

George P. Bush is one-half Hispanic and I'm certain the GOP believes he will be their answer to Julian Castro, mayor of San Antonio; a name being tossed around as having a promising future in Washington. The problem is the younger Bush hasn't decided exactly "which" office he'll run for.

It's going to take a lot of convincing since the Texas Bush legacy remains quite negative in the minds of voters and G.P. refers to himself as "a GOP moderate, in the tradition of George W. Bush". That comparison might cost him some votes. Voters also may fail to connect because of his arrest record in Florida for burglary and criminal mischief.

I'm not blaming Jeb Bush for helping his son. Most all parents would move heaven and earth for their children.

What all Texans should resent, however, is the "pep talk" Jeb Bush delivered to the Texas Legislature on Wednesday.

Jeb Bush has no authority to speak to Texas lawmakers, telling them to "Go Big or Go Home". I'm assuming he received an impassioned phone call from Texas Senator Dan Patrick since his "school choice" (Texas-GOP-speak for vouchers) scheme is on life support. It was Senator Patrick's last ditch effort to turn Texas schools over to educational corporateurs.

As Florida's governor from 1999 to 2007, Bush was instrumental in the complete overhaul of Florida's public education. Even though, he's no longer governor, he still influences education in Florida, and not always in a positive way.

Since 1994, Bush's non-profit, Foundation for Florida's Future has amassed a fortune in both money (over \$1 million two years ago) and political power. It has connections to big name Far Right think-tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and the James Madison Institute, and to smaller more obscure ones as well. The board of directors is comprised exclusively of ex-Florida lawmakers and power brokers.

FFFF literally writes and drives ALL educationally related legislation in Florida. In the years since its inception, it has passed merit pay for teachers, mandated online education, established a much tougher grading system for schools and most importantly, the parent trigger measure which allows for-profit schools to have access to district-run schools that are failing because of the new tough grading system. Even worse, the FFFF has taken foundation money to fund certain Far Right Floridian candidates.

They passed another piece of legislation that sounds very, very familiar; one that involves a state tax credit for businesses who donate to a foundation which provides vouchers for lower income students. So it seems that Dan Patrick's idea actually comes from Jeb Bush. As a matter of fact, most of the changes that TEA's Michael Williams wishes to make, originated in Florida. Texas, with all its rugged individualism, fashions its educational policies from another state.

Unfortunately, Florida's charter schools didn't do so well. Read this report on the latest audit of Florida's charter schools in 2012: <http://www.truthabouteducation.org/fl-charter-school-audit.html> Florida was censured by the DOE for ineffective oversight of grant applications, for unsatisfactory management of charters that needed improvement and for failure to close low-performing charter schools. In other words, Florida opened a lot of charter schools and didn't manage them very effectively.

There have been other criticisms as well. Much of Florida's educational overhaul did mainly one thing: Benefit its corporate donors like Pearson Inc (the testing company which has a stronghold on the Texas educational budget courtesy of George W. Bush during his tenure as Texas governor, via his friend, Sandy Kress, former Pearson owner), K-12 Inc. (a for-profit educational corporation that operates online schools in Texas) and McGraw Hill (a textbook company) Bush complained the criticisms came from teachers unions who are "more concerned about their members than the students".

FFFF is supposedly so successful that Jeb Bush is starting a national version: Foundation for Excellence in Education. The egos in the Bush family are huge, aren't they?

The point I'm trying to make is that Jeb Bush holds zero authority to instruct Texas lawmakers how to run education in Texas. First, he's not a Texan and second, Florida's model, upon careful inspection, is not a successful one.

We have enough unethical and unprincipled Texas lawmakers in our own state house.

We don't need another one from out of state.