



Jeb Bush's book promotion hits a few snags

By: Chris Moody – March 6, 2013

The rollout for Jeb Bush's new book, which outlines a comprehensive immigration reform plan, could have gone better.

To be fair, it wasn't entirely his fault. As Curly Howard might say, Bush was (partly) a victim of circumstance, which included a mix of poor timing, the unpredictable shifting winds of the Republican Party's views on immigration, and even some nasty weather.

The former Florida governor (not to mention the brother and son of U.S. presidents) re-emerged on the national scene this week with the publication of "Immigration Wars: Forging an American Solution." But Bush seemed to get tripped up when asked if he believed illegal immigrants should be offered "a path to citizenship"—an ambiguous term, to be sure—as part of a reform package.

In June 2012 Bush said explicitly he would support offering a way for illegal immigrants to earn citizenship. But in his new book, Bush argued against it, writing that "those who violated the laws can remain, but cannot obtain the cherished fruits of citizenship." On Tuesday, as part of an interview series to promote the book, Bush explained to MSNBC's "Morning Joe" panel that he wrote the book "last year, not this year." During the same interview, Bush asserted that he would support a "law where you can have a path to citizenship where there isn't an incentive for people to come illegally," but that he wasn't entirely convinced it was possible.

In Bush's case, timing truly does matter. In the period between writing the book and its publication, many Republicans have adopted a fresh outlook on immigration, a shift widely attributed to the drubbing President Barack Obama gave Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney with Latino voters in 2012. It was not long after exit polls showed that more than 70 percent of Latinos supported the president that Republicans renewed calls for immigration reform.

In January, a bipartisan panel of eight senators who had been meeting quietly for months about the issue unveiled a blueprint for a comprehensive bill that would offer illegal immigrants a way to achieve legal status—and eventually an opportunity to become citizens. The effort, which is being spearheaded on the Republican side by Bush's close friend and protégé Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, hinges on a desperately fragile coalition that includes unions, pro-business trade groups, conservative Christians and liberal activists. One major slipup in this long, complicated process could cause any number of key constituencies to back out, taking down the entire effort in the process.

Then, in walks Bush. He publishes a book on immigration that doesn't seem entirely within the guidelines set by the bipartisan panel just as the legislative process begins. Washington gets the jitters.

There are fears from leaders in both parties that outside voices like Bush's could threaten reform efforts on Capitol Hill. On Tuesday, South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham, a member of the bipartisan group responsible for writing the immigration reform blueprint, suggested that the proposals in Bush's book could give cover to Republican lawmakers who remain hesitant about backing a path to citizenship. "It caught me off guard, and it undercuts what we're trying to do," Graham said.

Later that day, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid became visibly angry when a reporter asked him about Bush. "He's frankly made a fool of himself the last 24 hours," the Nevada Democrat said. "Frankly on this issue, I don't think Jeb Bush is a Florida leader. I think Marco Rubio is."

There's another element at play here, one that helps explain why Bush, who last faced election more than a decade ago, matters so much: Bush has made it no secret that he's mulling a run for president in 2016. If he does decide to run, that could put him at odds with Rubio, also a possible contender for the White House. It may be early in the process, but given the involvement of both Rubio and Bush on immigration, presidential politics inevitably lurks around this debate over reform.

While Bush took a beating on Capitol Hill and in the media, he unfortunately didn't have an opportunity to make a trip to Washington, D.C., to defend himself and clear up any lingering confusion. The former governor's scheduled events in the capital, including a policy forum on immigration at the libertarian Cato Institute and a separate meet-and-greet with reporters afterward, were canceled at the last minute due to threats of a snowstorm in the region.

But don't think for a minute that this is the last you'll hear from Bush. This week was merely a minor hiccup; he'll have plenty more opportunities to come.