

4 Issues That Could Derail Jeb Bush's 2016 Hopes

By Eric Pianin
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Jeb Bush's father, George H.W. Bush, had a lot of problems locking up the GOP presidential nomination in 1988 until he started eating pork rinds, attending NASCAR events and tailoring his more moderate views to those of rip-roaring Reagan conservatives.

Until now, Jeb Bush, the former two-term governor of Florida, has signaled he wouldn't pander to his party's far right conservatives by abandoning his own views – and let the chips fall where they may.

Judging from the early response of conservatives to Bush's announcement on Tuesday that he would "actively explore" a presidential run, Bush likely will have a hard time selling his positions to rank-and-file voters in the crucial GOP primary and caucus races.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The challenge for Jeb Bush in seeking the Republican presidential nomination is that he'll be dealing with a primary process that in the past has discounted strong moderates or has forced them to abandon their principles or alter their views in a way that make them unelectable in a general election.

In [a new NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll](#), just 31 percent of voters who were surveyed say they could see themselves supporting Bush in 2016, while 57 percent say they couldn't support him. At the same time, 33 percent said they could possibly support Mitt Romney should he decide to seek the nomination for the third time – while 60 percent say they oppose him.

L. Brent Bozell III, chairman of the conservative For America group, told *The Washington Post* yesterday that he and other conservatives groaned at the thought of Bush entering the GOP presidential primary contest. "It's not just the Bush name, it's the Bush agenda," he said. "Those are really going to get the base jumping."

While it's widely known that Jeb Bush is far out of kilter with the Republican base on a series of topics – from education to immigration – it is worth reviewing what his four toughest sells to his party would be, should he decide to formally throw his hat in the ring:

The Common Core.

Bush has long advocated that all 50 states adopt [Common Core national educational standards](#), despite widespread resistance from many state officials and conservative Republicans.

Those standards, which have become fighting words on the right, were created by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, and underwritten by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The conservative Heritage Foundation says the national standards if widely adopted will make school administrations less accountable to families and local communities – and will present a “one-size-fits-all” solution to every school district.

Immigration.

In sharp contrast to many GOP hardliners in Congress, Bush is an advocate of comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform that would provide illegal immigrants with a path to citizenship while steps are taken to improve security along the border.

The former governor, who speaks Spanish and whose wife, Columba, is a Mexican American, has called illegal immigration to this country an “act of love” and that illegal immigrants living in the shadows should be treated with compassion.

In an interview with a [Florida TV station](#) Tuesday, Bush said, “You gotta protect the border, enforce the law, be respectful of the rule of law and at the same time be able to encourage young, aspirational people to come to our country. It’s a win-win.”

Taxes and Spending.

GOP activists still fume about a 2011 statement by Bush during a presidential campaign debate – as [Politico](#) reported today – in which he wouldn’t rule out tax increases in exchange for deeper spending cuts as part of a theoretical budget deal in Washington.

It’s perhaps unfair that a hypothetical discussion would be still held against him three years later, but any talk of raising taxes violates the conservative GOP coda. Moreover, Bush can boast of a solid conservative fiscal record during his eight years as governor. That record includes cutting taxes for businesses and individuals by \$19.3 billion, amassing a \$9 billion state reserve, and cutting government red tape. However, the libertarian [Cato Institute](#) has noted that total government spending rose by 45 percent during Bush’s two terms in office.

Obamacare. Bush refused to align himself with the majority of Republican leaders who have attempted to derail or repeal the Affordable Care Act. He said last year that defunding Obamacare was a flawed strategy. Basically, he argued that it would be better to simply stand back and let the law collapse of its own weight than try to repeal it.

But Bush’s relatively benign stand on Obamacare could be related to some of his business deals that have come under scrutiny. Bush has earned more than \$2 million from his work as a board member with Tenet Health Care, [according to The New York Times](#). That could pose some problems for Bush if he runs for president because Tenet aggressively encouraged Americans to sign up for insurance under the Affordable Care Act.