

The next Bush? George P. ponders political career

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — George P. Bush has something of an advantage he can tap into as he considers a career in politics: He can call two former presidents and a former governor to get advice.

The first advice his father, former Gov. Jeb Bush, gave him was to focus on his career and family first before running out and getting his name on a ballot.

"He always wanted me to earn my own way and earn my own track record. And so I've really taken that to heart. But that's been the advice of my grandmother, my grandfather and my uncle, whom I seek counsel on with respect to a potential public career. In many respects I'm still working on those matters," Bush said as he began a four-day bus tour of Florida to encourage college students to get engaged with the Republican Party.

But many expect him to become the next Bush in politics, and soon. Bush, 36, said his goal is to eventually run for public office and acknowledged he's eyeing a handful of statewide seats that will be opening up in Texas after the fall election. And with his name, his connections and his demeanor, it's believed he can succeed.

"You've got strong name, strong money and he's got a very, very red state in Texas. The Bush name, it's still got magic in Texas," said Bill Miller, a GOP strategist and lobbyist who has worked for and against Gov. Rick Perry and other Republicans statewide. He said he'd be shocked if Bush doesn't announce his candidacy after the fall election. "He's got buzz. He's handled his business without arrogance, he's respectful. He's working it smart, he handles himself well."

Bush was in Florida representing the Maverick PAC he runs. It helps federal candidates and seeks to get young professionals active in the party. And while his father was a popular

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two-term governor who many have speculated will run for the White House, the younger Bush chose to leave Florida to begin his adult life. And at first he didn't give much thought to continuing the family's political legacy, which includes the presidencies of his uncle George W. Bush and grandfather George H.W. Bush.

"I felt that I wanted to go out to Texas and go to school in a completely different state, encounter my own network, encounter my own friends, have my own experiences," Bush said. "But what I've learned over time is that I can't run away from it. I can move abroad, I can move to another country and I'll always be known as 'George Bush, the son of, the nephew of, the grandson of.' So I've learned to embrace it."

Bush and his wife, Amanda, met while attending law school at the University of Texas at Austin. After working as a lawyer, Bush became a partner in a real estate investment firm. He is now starting his second company, St. Augustine Partners, a business consulting firm aimed at small- and medium- market energy industries. Amanda Bush works in a Fort Worth law firm, and the couple is working on having a family.

Beyond his name, Bush can also point to his heritage while engaging Hispanic voters. His mother was born and raised in Mexico, where she was living when she met Jeb Bush. The younger Bush also has Navy service on his resume, including a six-month deployment to Afghanistan, where, for security purposes, he was given a different name. Not even those he was serving alongside knew he was a Bush.

"We came up with ways in which my true identity was not disclosed. That was the only way I was going to be able to do it," said Bush, who said he was given the option to go the Philippines but chose Afghanistan. "It was refreshing just to be a random person, just to be myself."

It's not as if he's avoided politics. Besides his PAC, he's the co-founder of Hispanic Republicans of Texas, a group that seeks to elect Hispanic candidates; the deputy campaign finance director for the Republican Party of Texas; and helping presidential nominee Mitt Romney with Hispanic outreach.

Bush said he speaks regularly to his father, uncle and grandfather about his current activities and his political future. And now that he's put his private life together, his father says he'll help if

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the younger Bush runs for office.

"I give advice when asked. My son doesn't need a lot of advice. He is working hard to help the Republican Party and conservative candidates. If he wants to run for office, I will be his strongest supporter!" Jeb Bush said in an email.

Still, not everyone in Texas is excited about another Bush entering politics.

"Here in Texas, we're still dealing with the after effects of a Bush hangover," said Democratic state Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer, who also chairs the Mexican American Legislative Caucus.

He also questioned whether George P. Bush is a good fit with Texas Republicans, saying the state party has become too extreme for Hispanic voters. The younger Bush, his father and uncle have all advocated for a more reasonable approach to immigration issues than the far-right rhetoric that has become popular within the party.

"The Republican Party has a very difficult time embracing diversity. If George P. is going to run statewide in Texas, either he's going to change or the Republican Party is going to change," said Martinez Fischer. "Hispanics really don't have a home in the Republican Party."