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# Jeb Bush reaffirms his support for Puerto Rico to become 51st state and says he knows about immigration 'because I married a beautiful girl from Mexico'

- The former Florida governor and 2016 GOP presidential prospect delivered a speech on economic opportunities peppered with Spanish
- Republicans have generally and gingerly endorsed statehood as an option, if Puerto Ricans choose it, but some worry that it could result in more Democrats elected to Congress
- When asked if he was going to run for president, he said 'I'm on the journey of considering that, trying to figure out if I have the support necessary'

By [Jill Reilly For Dailymail.com](#)

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Jeb Bush reaffirmed the idea for Puerto Rico statehood on Tuesday during a visit to Puerto Rico, winning great applause.

The former Florida governor and 2016 GOP presidential prospect delivered a speech on economic opportunities peppered with Spanish.

He's fluent in the language, and often uses it in Florida, but it's rarely heard in Republican presidential campaign politics.



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**Jeb Bush endorsed the idea of Puerto Rico statehood on Tuesday during a visit to Puerto Rico, winning great applause**

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**The former Florida governor and 2016 GOP presidential prospect delivered a speech on economic opportunities peppered with Spanish, and his audience responded with hearty applause**

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'I think statehood is the best path,' he told his audience at the Metropolitan University of Cupey.

'To get the full benefits and responsibilities of citizenship, being a state is the only way to make that happen.'

Republicans have generally and gingerly endorsed making the U.S. territory the 51st state, if Puerto Ricans choose it, but some worry that it could result in more Democrats elected to Congress.

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Puerto Rico has held four non-binding referendums on the issue, with statehood never garnering a clear majority.

He confronted one of the Republican Party's touchiest debates head-on, telling Puerto Ricans that conservatives should be proud that America is 'an immigrant nation' and value the contribution immigrants make to the country.

Immigration is a delicate subject for him in the primacy race, with several potential rivals favoring a harder line on those who come to the U.S. illegally.

But he took it up unapologetically in his remarks.



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**On his Hispanic ties, he said: 'I know about the immigrant experience because I married a beautiful girl from Mexico. My children are bicultural and bilingual.' His wife, Columba, is from Mexico**

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'We're an immigrant nation and we should be proud,' he said, as someone in the audience yelled, 'Yes!'

'We should create an immigration system that drives economic opportunity for all of us,' he added. 'We should move toward protecting the rule of law, protecting our border, making legal immigration easier than illegal immigration for sure, but we also want to look at this as a huge opportunity.'

Said Bush: 'The conservative cause would be better to embrace this rather than push it away.'

Bush was in the territory for a fundraising event and town hall meeting with Republicans.

He is expected to announce his candidacy for the Republican nomination, joining Sens. Marco Rubio of Florida, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Ted Cruz of Texas, as well as many other prospective rivals, in the race.

He wasn't ready to make that announcement Tuesday.

Puerto Rico's Republican Party leader, Carlos Mendez, leaned forward at one point and passed on an index card with the question everyone was wondering: 'Are you going to run for president?'

Bush laughed and said, 'I'm on the journey of considering that, trying to figure out if I have the support necessary to do it. Today's not the day to trigger a campaign but I appreciate the sentiment.'

In large measure, Bush's purpose seemed to be to make a cultural connection on the island where he came to campaign for his father in Puerto Rico's first primary.

'I learned how to organize intensely here,' he said. 'I learned the passion. I learned how to drink a lot of Puerto Rican rum.'

And on his Hispanic ties, he smiled and said: 'I know about the immigrant experience because I married a beautiful girl from Mexico. My children are bicultural and bilingual.'

His wife, Columba, is from Mexico.

His remarks impressed Naomi Rodriguez, a 21-year-old economics and finance major. 'I like the fact that he's bilingual,' she said, as well as his words on statehood. 'When that happens, a lot of things could change and it will likely be beneficial for us,' she said.

Bush also expressed support for giving Puerto Rico the right to file for bankruptcy under Chapter 9.

The island of 3.6 million people has been in a recession for eight years and is struggling with a \$73 billion public debt load, with many U.S. investors concerned that some public agencies including the Electric Energy Authority could soon go bankrupt.

An earlier move to let the island's agencies restructure was struck down by a federal judge.



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