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Bush: 'DREAM Act kids should have a path to citizenship'

By Ben Kamisar



Getty Images

Jeb Bush responded to hecklers chanting "no hope without our vote" on Monday by reiterating his support for granting a pathway to citizenship for the children of illegal immigrants.

The protest came minutes into the GOP presidential candidate's speech at the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's national convention.

Bush addressed the demonstrators directly, sharing a more moderate piece of his immigration program that has drawn the ire of some conservatives.

"Here's what I believe. I believe we need immigration reform. I've been clear about this. I believe that DREAM Act kids should have a path to citizenship," he said. "I'll continue to be consistently for it irrespective of what the political ramifications of that are."

Once the protests died down, Bush continued with a jab at Donald Trump, the front-runner for the Republican nomination, with whom he's sparred repeatedly over immigration.

"If one of the candidates for president was looking how to make America great again, just hold up high the examples of Hispanic Latina successful businesswomen," he said, echoing Trump's campaign slogan.

"That's what makes America great."

At last week's Republican debate, Trump doubled down on his insistence that immigrants speak English and refused to apologize for tweeting about Bush's Mexican-American wife.

During Monday's speech, Bush needled Trump on both attacks. He noted that his wife is an "American by choice," and compared the passion of an immigrant to that of someone who converted religions.

"Americans by choice area also pretty fierce about this great country," he said.

"And my wife, as an American, just as many people in this room are, the notion that she's not, its laughable, its totally laughable."

Bush pushed back against the characterization that the GOP is against immigration reform, noting that the view is only "out of the mainstream temporarily in my party" and adding that most Republican voters do back it.

Chiding Trump's plan to build a wall across the Southern border, he reiterated his push for a pathway to legal status for all people in America illegally.

"That is the dignified American way, the practical way of solving the problem of 12 million immigrants. If we did that, we could turn immigration into what it's always been: a sustained economic driver for our country," he said.

"All you have to be is up and taking nourishment and you see the value of the immigrant experience in this country, adding a vitality that is different and unique and extraordinary."

The Hispanic Chamber has sought to make inroads with GOP candidates as illegal immigration continues to play a major part in the race. The group's leader sat down with White House hopeful Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) for a question-and-answer session earlier this year and had a private meeting with Trump after his controversial comments on immigration.

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