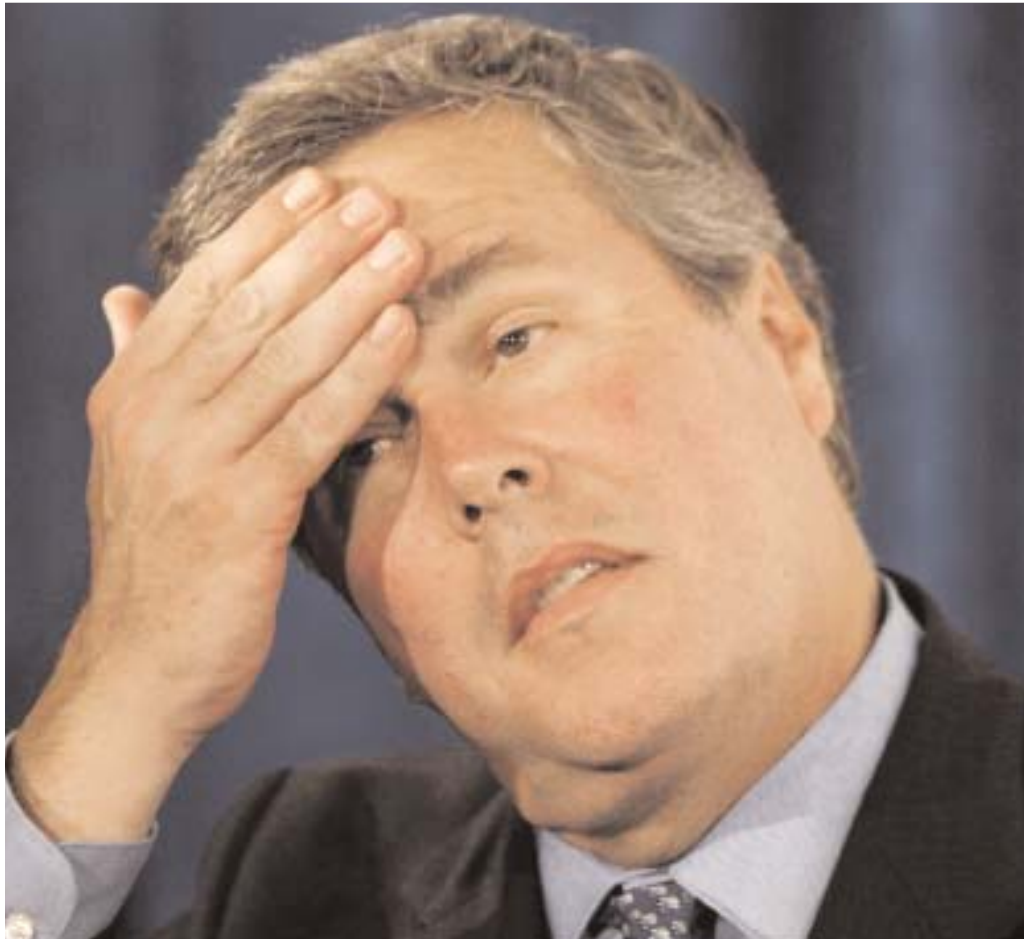


It Isn't Easy Being Jeb Bush

George's brother faces the full burden of Florida again. But what if he really wants W. to lose?



IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT, IF YOU WILL, THE unbearable burden of being Jeb Bush.

With less than two months to go before show-time and the polls still bowel-tighteningly close, the president's smarter and more likable kid brother, once heir to the Kennebunkport kingdom, again finds himself expected to deliver Florida.

Consider the stress: Poor Jebby was leapfrogged by his dyslogistic sibling, and is more or less single-handedly responsible for Chadgate (a difference of 537 votes? *And you call yourself governor?*)—his shoulders must be sorely in need of Shiatsu. If the governor fails to hand his state to the First Partyer turned holy warrior, you can bet someone's going to have a shaky hand spooning cranberry sauce at the next Bush family Thanksgiving. And we're not talking about Noelle.

No wonder Jeb has been working his oranges off in the ambivalent Sunshine State. Other swing states are up for grabs too, but only Florida packs the 27 electoral chits that could put W. on top. "The

unspoken code of Bush loyalty is, you need to deliver for the family," says Peter Schweizer, co-author of *The Bushes: Portrait of a Dynasty*. "There is tremendous emotional pressure."

Even the enemy is impressed by the effort. "Jeb is campaigning all the time," snipes Matt Miller, spokesman for the Kerry campaign in Florida. "It's embarrassing. He shows up to launch the campaign's African-American outreach team." No one knows how often Jeb gets that panicky, late-night call from the Oval Office checking on his progress. But his old man, a doyen of political gamesmanship who drilled a competitive spirit into his boys, is almost certainly keeping tabs.

But is it possible that Jeb is weighed down by more complicated issues than plain old familial pressure? He may have the indomitable angel of loyalty firmly perched on one shoulder, but around 3 A.M., perhaps when he's emptying his bladder, another angel digs into his neck with a smelly red pitchfork and says, "Your big brother?

Fuck 'im! You should be POTUS, pally."

Think about it. If W. loses, there's a huge potential payoff for little Jeb. The governor's term expires in 2006; he claims he'll return to business in Miami. Some have speculated he might instead be eyeing 2008. Some think it would be easier to knock off John Kerry in four years (whose presidency in turn knocks out Hillary) than to persuade America to hire consecutive Bushes. You'd have to be an only child not to recognize the delicious sibling dissonance.

"There was always a rivalry between the two growing up," says Schweizer. "The whole setup is ripe for resentment and envy," adds Michael D. Kahn, a clinical psychologist and co-author of *The Sibling Bond*. "A feeling of having been betrayed by being passed over doesn't wear off."

Give Jebby credit for one thing. If he's up all night psychologically seesawing between brotherly good and evil, he sure isn't showing it. As his closest friends and supporters will tell you, you'll never see a crack in that ideological armor.

The mostly methodical and staid Jeb—who takes after Daddy (unlike George, who is confrontational and caustic like Mommy)—is "tighter than a frog's ass," as one of the governor's house servants told me. Is that a good thing? It depends how impenetrable you like your frogs.

Kevin Gray

Playing President

1964: PETER SELLERS, DR. STRANGELOVE; 1964: HENRY FONDA, FAIL-SAFE; 1964: POLLY BERGEN, KISSES FOR MY PRESIDENT; 1979: JACK WARDEN, BEING THERE; 1987: MEL BROOKS, SPACEBALLS; 1993: KEVIN KLINE, DAVE; 1995: MICHAEL DOUGLAS, THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT; 1996: JACK NICHOLSON, MARS ATTACKS; 1997: HARRISON FORD, AIR FORCE ONE; 2000: JEFF BRIDGES, THE CONTENDER; 2003: BILLY BOB THORNTON, LOVE ACTUALLY (OSCAR: 0).