

>> Peter Robinson: Welcome to Uncommon Knowledge. I'm Peter Robinson talking today with the 43rd Chief Executive of the great state of Florida, Jeb Bush. Governor -- former governor, you stepped down on January what?

>> Jeb Bush: Second.

>> Peter Robinson: January 2nd of this year. In a state in which democrats outnumber republicans, you won election and reelection by comfortable margins. You're reformed education. You cut taxes. You stood up for traditional moral values. And you left office after 8 years with an approval rating of more than 60 percent. How? How did you pull that off?

>> Jeb Bush: Well, first I was blessed to have a great team: actually 4 teams because in 8 years you kind of wear teams out. But I had really talented, very idealistic, quite conservative, very intelligent people that worked hard. So we had a good team. We had a willing legislature, or a compliant legislature depending on the year. And I learned that you say what you're going to do when you run to create a mandate. If you kind of play it cool and don't say what you're going to do, then you never really have a chance to be big and bold.

>> Peter Robinson: Here's the puzzle. Ronald Reagan still puzzles political scientists in the following sense. He got a lot of what he wanted. He remained extremely popular, but all the polls showed that he was more conservative than the country.

>> Jeb Bush: [Laughter]

>> Peter Robinson: You called yourself in an interview I read while you were still in office one of the 3 or 4 most conservative governors in the country. So it seems to me you've got a choice for explaining your record. Either you convinced a not particularly conservative electorate to buy into a conservative agenda or you were such a sweet guy they just didn't mind what you did.

>> Jeb Bush: Well I guess I was relatively sweet: not too sweet. I think people just respected the fact that I had the courage of my convictions. That was important. That I had high voltage energy. Everybody knew - most people knew - unless you were a Bush hater in Florida and you can forget...

>> Peter Robinson: There were some of those. Alright.

>> Jeb Bush: Always. They knew I loved the state: that my heart was in the right place. And most people really aren't that ideological. They're willing to bet on somebody who has thought it through, who's going to stick to their convictions, who's genuinely passionate about his ideas. I love the fact that I was more conservative than the electorate only because it really got the liberal press just -- they just went ballistic. They couldn't understand it and it gave me great joy, but it also gave me -- the fun part of my job was and the joyful part was to actually take the ideas stolen from the Hoover Institution and

all other places, wherever I could get them, and develop strategies around them. And it was just the most fantastic time of my life.

>> Peter Robinson: Speaking of liberals, James Carville. Earlier this month, I'm quoting him, "There's nobody in the current field of presidential candidates who can rally the Republican Party. Former governor Jeb Bush of Florida is the only person in America who can do it." What about it?

>> Jeb Bush: James is probably a very good observer of democratic politics.

>> Peter Robinson: Oh alright, if that's the way you're going to handle the question, what can I do? What it means to be a conservative in 2007? After the Republican Party lost control of both houses of the Congress in 2006, you said the GOP didn't lose quote "Because conservatives were rejected but because we rejected the conservative philosophy," close quote. Explain yourself.

>> Jeb Bush: Well I was really referring to Congress. If you look at the earmarks I think they set the Olympic world record in the number of earmarks and the size of the earmarks. And there was an arrogance about that, that went against everything that conservatives believe. I mean we have all sorts of different blends and brands of conservatism...

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: ...but limited government is really at the core. And if you violate that, I think you violate the trust of people that elect you. And secondly, there was an awful lot of corruption. I mean apart from the arrogance, there was corruption you know consistently. One of Florida's Congressmen Mark Foley violated the public trust and a lot of other people did too. I think people just said "Throw the bums out." I discount -- I mean Iraq was certainly part of this but I think the bigger issue was the democrats were smart to run moderate to conservative candidates...

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: ...against a Congress that was corrupt - fair or unfair, that was the perception - and a Congress that lost their way ideologically.

>> Peter Robinson: Lost their way. So the -- you have to restate and reaffirm the principles after you're in office. Here's what I'm trying to get at something like. John O'Sullivan, Editor of National Review, is famous for saying about institutions such as the Ford Foundation that any institution, and non-profit that is not aggressively and assertively conservative becomes over time liberal.

>> Jeb Bush: Absolutely.

>> Peter Robinson: And that's the -- there's something like that about the pressures of government: particularly in Congress.

>> Jeb Bush: And in government -- in state government.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: The demands on government are never ceasing. They never go away and so actually one of the strategies that conservatives have to realize is part of our -- it has to be part of our agenda is that we have to restore self government or over -- you know, the dike breaks. And so Congress I think you know you throw a couple of teaspoons of corruption and a tablespoon of arrogance, and we got what we had.

>> Peter Robinson: Domestic conservative agenda. Let me try something out on you. President George W. Bush campaigned on a platform of compassionate conservatism. There are various -- it's also called strong government conservatism. That's what David Brooks likes to call it: big government conservatism. Signature piece of legislation: 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. Increases federal funding of public schools by many billions. Asserts federal control over public education which was originally almost entirely -- or very mainly -- very chiefly the responsibility of the states. And now that the No Child Left Behind Act is up for reauthorization, the evidence that it has actually improved test scores, in dispute at best. Is big government conservatism, conservatism?

>> Jeb Bush: Well as it relates to education reform it needs to be the highest national priority because our economic prosperity depends on it. I never felt, in fact I can not give you one instance where the federal government intervened in the affairs of education policy in the state. Now we actually implemented a version of No Child Left Behind prior to No Child Left Behind. So you know, it may be a unique situation but we had rigorous accountability. We had grading of schools.

>> Peter Robinson: That doesn't bother you as a violation of federalism then: No Child Left Behind?

>> Jeb Bush: Well it didn't in our case because we already...

>> Peter Robinson: You already met those standards and then some.

>> Jeb Bush: Yeah, so if you were a state that wanted to gain the system and you didn't want testing and you didn't want accountability, I think that that would have been an infringement. But, in a world where knowledge - the acquisition of knowledge - is really the key determining factor of whether you're going to be able to be successful in the pursuit of dreams, what do we do? Do we sit back and say "Okay you know, everybody thinks their child's school is good, but the system stinks." The fact is whether they're good or bad they've got to get a lot better. We're going to get our clock cleaned by places far off from here but not that far in this new world that we live in. So I think you need to

temper this idea of federalism with a reality that this should be a national -- the highest priority in my opinion more than anything else.

>> Peter Robinson: Foreign policy: some conservatives -- again the question here is about conservatism. Some conservatives - Norman Podhoretz for example - argues that the United States should prosecute the war in Iraq vigorously, unapologetically. You've got other conservatives - William F. Buckley Jr. - who says the war in Iraq was the product of a terrible mistake and of naive idealism. How should conservatives think about the war in Iraq or the war on terror? What's the way of addressing that problem by means of conservative principles?

Jeb Bush: You know, I think here's where conservatism is kind of vectored off and I feel sometimes that I'm -- I can't answer that question because I don't know you know traditional conservatives don't want to project American force around the world. But we're at war and it's a new kind of war again - similar to education policy - what do we do? Do we sit back and wait until we're attacked again before we respond again? I think that's talking about naive idealism. That's just naive. And so I think most people - and frankly this is not so ideological - I think most Americans recognize that we're safer today than we were on September 11th, 2001. And it is appropriate to do what we're doing in Iraq. What they want is results and interestingly those results are starting to bear fruit now. The new strategy which changed a failed strategy...

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: ...is working.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: So I think foreign policy works a lot better when it works well. It's not so much an ideological thing. I think people want it to work well and it's working well now.

>> Peter Robinson: So Jeb Bush Conservatism is a very practical conservatism?

>> Jeb Bush: I think we are naive to think that we're not interdependent and interconnected with the rest of the world. We need to use American power, the traditional American power, military power and we need soft power. We need every means by which we can use our influence and use our might to be able to project American values to the rest of the world. It's for our own safety. It's also for our own prosperity.

>> Peter Robinson: Okay, conservatism at the national level. Now let's talk about a couple of issues that you cared about most as governor: education and immigration. Education: simple question here. Milton Friedman advocated universal vouchers in education.

>> Jeb Bush: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: Parents of every student gets vouchers to send their kids to any school they want to: public, private, religious, secular. You're A Plus Education Reform included a limited voucher program for children in failing schools.

>> Jeb Bush: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: By the way, as I understand it as of this date more than 20 thousand kids have received vouchers under that program. Is that correct?

>> Jeb Bush: No, interestingly we have 3 voucher programs. That one's the smallest. It was ruled unconstitutional.

>> Peter Robinson: I see.

>> Jeb Bush: So 900 students took advantage of that. And they also had public choice options. And then we have 2 other programs that total now about 35 thousand.

>> Peter Robinson: I see.

>> Jeb Bush: We have more kids...

>> Peter Robinson: So it's a large number.

>> Jeb Bush: It is and it's more universal but it's still - God bless Milton Friedman - but sometimes when you steal ideas and you've tried to implement them in the realm of politics, you can't achieve everything you want. But we've achieved more in Florida in terms of school choice than any state by far.

>> Peter Robinson: And so here's the questions: the underlying principle there. Would universal -- the politics of the situation aside, would you go for some sort of universal voucher...

>> Jeb Bush: Sure.

>> Peter Robinson: ...program if you could? You would?

>> Jeb Bush: Sure.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright.

>> Jeb Bush: And if we -- for the result of free universal public education will get better. I mean I can never envision more than 25 percent of all the kids not going to public schools. The question is the kids who go to private schools, their parents choose, they're going to be more engaged, they're going to benefit and the kids that are in the public

schools will get better as well. The myth that it was the opposite has been shattered in Florida.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: Public schools are a lot better today because more parents have more choices.

>> Peter Robinson: Immigration: Samuel Huntington, Professor of Political Science at Harvard; quote. "Unlike past immigrants, Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political..." You're already shaking your head. Get the reaction shot here.

>> Jeb Bush: The guy needs to get out more.

>> Peter Robinson: [Laughter] Let me finish -- let me do him the justice of finishing the quotation.

>> Jeb Bush: Okay.

>> Peter Robinson: "The persistent in flow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into 2 peoples, 2 cultures and 2 languages." Question: is Florida in any way becoming 2 cultures or 2 peoples?

>> Jeb Bush: No and Professor Huntington who I'm sure is a really smart man, needs to truly get out of the zip code of Cambridge and so does Tom Tancredo and so do the people that use this - not Dr. Huntington - but politicians that use this as a wedge issue. It's a loser. And if you believe in conservative principles and you want conservatives to win to implement those principles, to totally dis [assumed spelling] on a group that is the only group that is growing in our country and is as American in their pursuit of the traditional dreams that people pursue here as any other group. I think we do it at our peril. I mean it's bad -- it's wrong and it's stupid. And the combination of being incorrect and stupid is just very dangerous in politics.

>> Peter Robinson: Let me push you one more time on that one.

>> Jeb Bush: Please.

>> Peter Robinson: You majored in Latin American studies at the University of Texas.

>> Jeb Bush: Yes.

>> Peter Robinson: You're fluent in Spanish. You're married to a Mexican. There's no reason why you would feel walking around a Cuban neighborhood in Miami for example...

>> Jeb Bush: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: ...that you were in any way an outsider. But let's take somebody of our age...

>> Jeb Bush: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: ...who grew up in Florida.

>> Jeb Bush: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: Who was born in Florida in the 50s. And now wanders around portions of his own state and feels as though he is the foreigner.

>> Jeb Bush: Well, here's the answer to that. I'll give you a specific answer: Marco Rubio; 32 year old, 34 year old now, Speaker of the Florida House. He speaks better English than you and I do. He's eloquent. He's downright eloquent. He speaks Spanish fluently. His parents have -- speak halting English. His parents worked hard, 2 jobs, they came with nothing, they worked 2 jobs so their son could go to the University of Florida and then to the University of Florida Law School. They saved their money. They did everything that every immigrant group and people born here what we expect them to do: to provide for their families. And the pride in their son when he assumed this responsibility as the first Cuban-American to be Florida Speaker of the House, was as American as any other parent. And the notion that somehow we now are changing the rules of the game, that immediately when someone arrives in our country they have to automatically speak English and automatically assume that they know everything about American culture when people born in this country don't have very much sense of what our heritage is and what our culture is. I think it is wrong. And so with all do respect to the people that may feel that they're the foreigner in these countries, if they'd look at the next generation that assimilation of cultururation is happening just as it did generations ago.

>> Peter Robinson: Last question on immigration. You talked earlier about the need for conservatives and republicans to accept certain political realities. There are certain things that just are and you have to deal with them. Your brother the President had an immigration program that had broadly - very crudely put - 2 aspects: one is greater control of the borders and the other is some form of normalization or legalization for the 12 million or so undocumented immigrants who are already here.

>> Jeb Bush: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: You supported it, so did John McCain, so did Teddy Kennedy and it went down to defeat in the Senate. The question that I have is why did it go down to defeat? Is that -- are you going to write that off the way I think some democrats did as demagoguery or would you say what John McCain is now saying that clearly good people don't trust their government to control the borders. You need to break this

problem in 2 pieces, prove that you can control the borders and then address the second piece. How should the next President address the problem?

>> Jeb Bush: I think that's a fair -- I mean you don't have to wait to control the borders. That's a responsibility of the federal government now.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: There needs to be more money and all that. I think that's a fair assessment, but another reason why it didn't pass was that it didn't get 60 votes. It got 50 votes, in fact it got 58 votes before everybody jumped ship including many of the freshmen democrats that Leader Reed said were to be delivered and they had second thoughts because of this legitimate pushback by a lot of people that are very concerned about the point you make, which is that we haven't been able to control our borders and people don't have confidence in that. I accept that. But at the same time, you know we have these pressing problems: immigration, energy security, social security, the entitlement time bomb, how do we remain competitive in this ever increasingly interdependent world? All of these issues are standing by waiting for some breakthrough ways to you know Nixon-to-China ways if you will to solve problems. And so idealism or political ideology needs to be tempered with a need to get stuff done.

>> Peter Robinson: Got it.

>> Jeb Bush: And we're not doing it right now.

>> Peter Robinson: Faith: Jeb Bush speaking this past summer. I quote you, "I don't think you can separate your personal faith from your public actions and I don't think you need to. Openly expressing your faith is a good thing." And now here's the statement that I want to hear you explain: "Jesus was my best political advisor" close quote.

>> Jeb Bush: I didn't say that.

>> Peter Robinson: You didn't say that?

>> Jeb Bush: No.

>> Peter Robinson: It appeared in quotation marks. Alright, how much of did you say?

>> Jeb Bush: Up to that last part. I said when I made big decisions I prayed, which I do.

>> Peter Robinson: Okay, alright so...

>> Jeb Bush: I'm not sure Jesus was a political advisor.

>> Peter Robinson: We'll drop that. Alright, we'll drop that.

>> Jeb Bush: But that was in the -- you correctly quoted it and I was surprised to see it because I didn't quite say it that way. But the point being that faith -- it's hard to imagine I don't know - I guess people say it and the act on it - but it's hard to imagine "Well my faith says this but my views are different in the political realm." Who are you if you don't act on your faith? And then the good thing about Christian faith is that it's a tolerant faith. It's not a faith that's judgmental. It's a loving faith. It's a faith that accepts other points of view and it's a faith that recognizes that we're all imperfect under God's watchful eye. That's why I love it. And I don't see that as a threat. I think that that's something that is positive. Interestingly the left now, if you see they've adopted -- people are now -- they were fearful of talking about their faith and now I think many people who don't share my ideology are more comfortable about speaking about their faith. I don't have a problem with that at all.

>> Peter Robinson: You were raised Episcopalian. About a dozen years you became a Catholic.

>> Jeb Bush: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: You're fairly devout? You turn up at church most Sundays?

>> Jeb Bush: Fairly. I would say that my priest probably wouldn't be completely happy with my attendance record.

>> Peter Robinson: When you got yourself in a scrape or a dilemma you prayed?

>> Jeb Bush: I pray everyday but yeah.

>> Peter Robinson: So here's the question. How do you reach out then as a Roman Catholic -- by the way, the point of departure for this question is that somehow or other you managed because you were reelected and you had these very high -- we're talking about a successful governorship. How did you as a Roman Catholic reach out to and appeal to the large Jewish population in Dade County, the very heavy Evangelical population up in the panhandle? Was it simply not an issue as a practical matter in day to day politics in Florida?

>> Jeb Bush: It didn't seem that way.

>> Peter Robinson: Really?

>> Jeb Bush: I mean I didn't get a hundred percent of the vote either so it didn't seem that way to me. The language you use if it's a language that's judgmental that says you know "All homosexuals are bad because that's my faith. My faith tells me that." That sends a pretty bad signal out to people.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: I never did that because I don't believe that. And the fact that I was a Catholic, I never felt like it was a -- the only time it came into play was when it got into the political realm. And so I implemented the death penalty which was the law. And I felt like I had a duty to do it. I'll tell you it was the hardest thing I had to do. I didn't get comfortable with it but I reconciled myself to do it. And I did it as honorably as I could and as fairly and equitably as I could. And we changed some laws that as it relates to mental retardation and other things like that.

>> Peter Robinson: Right.

>> Jeb Bush: But then the, you know -- that puts you in a position where your faith is different than what your actions are. And of course the people in the press rightfully brought it up and -- or the bishops would bring it up.

>> Peter Robinson: Your own bishops, right?

>> Jeb Bush: Yeah, they politely scolded their flock occasionally on that.

>> Peter Robinson: The Schiavo case: Schiavo just a quick reminder here. You'll never forget it but let me set up a reminder. Terri Schiavo spent 14 years in a persistent vegetative state. Her husband wanted to remove her feeding tube and starve her to death. Her parents wanted to keep her alive. You intervened on their behalf, one court matter after another. Courts finally ruled in favor of her husband. Her feeding tube was removed and in March 2005 she did indeed die of starvation and dehydration. Regrets about your intervention?

>> Jeb Bush: None at all. First of all, we passed a law that allowed for the intervention. She had 2 cycles through this. She had 1 where the feeding tube was removed. The legislature was in session. We passed a law that gave me the right to intervene. And in the second case after it was ruled unconstitutional, we couldn't. And so I had adhered to the law and I do think that sadly Florida's law is so open ended as it relates to this where estranged husband who was living with a woman and moved on...

>> Peter Robinson: He moved on with his life.

>> Jeb Bush: ...had 2 kids. Had every right to do so. Had won a malpractice suit by the way and promised to care for her for the rest of her life. And had this loving family that wanted to take care of Terri Schiavo. I felt it was appropriate to do whatever we could to change the law to make sure that she had a chance because in my mind she was disabled. In my mind she was disabled. And so back to the question of faith, she's as important under God's eyes as you and I are. And the disabled were very concerned about this case. And they should have been.

>> Peter Robinson: So you can describe your actions and did at the time in terms of human rights? You could justify your intervention in purely secular terms?

>> Jeb Bush: Absolutely. And plus I didn't violate the oath I...

>> Peter Robinson: Everything you did was perfectly legal?

>> Jeb Bush: Yeah, and it broke my heart that I couldn't in the end. She went many more days than what people thought. And the idea that somehow starving to death and being dehydrated is okay, it's painless, is sadly not true.

>> Peter Robinson: Last question about that. There is now I think a consensus in the mainstream media that conservatives over reached in the Schiavo case. That was when they went too far. They got stung. They backed off. We won't see conservatives try that kind of -- in some way or other it was a political failure for you and fellow conservatives. Do you see it that way?

>> Jeb Bush: I think -- you know I was surprised that the federal government intervened. I'm not a lawyer thankfully so I can't tell you what the constitutional case was to speak of. My intervention related to state law, that we crafted in a compromise as best we could to get it through the legislature as fast as we could to -- and then we defended that case in front of the judges. That's more than appropriate. In fact being passive on it I think would have been a miscarriage of justice.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright. Your family. Actually let me start with -- what I want to know is just generally influences: we're talking about you as a conservative. Let's start with aside from your family, what people have been the most influential in your life, in your thinking, in your political outlook?

>> Jeb Bush: Well, I think Ronald Reagan was -- I loved campaigning in 1980 when I first campaigned for my dad and stuck it out in the general election which was a great joy to work for him and my father. I admire both of them so much. That was certainly someone who fits the profile. I really like governors because they have to do things and they don't have to just talk. They can't hide behind the skirt of some collegial body. They've got to be out there. He or she has to do what they say they're going to do and they have to take decisions that aren't always perfect because the context is never perfect. So I've admired a series of governors starting with Tommy Thompson and Engler in the 90s. Those guys were -- they were reformers. And I think for our party to be successful or the conservative movement more importantly be successful, you can't just talk and kind of stiff arm reality and think. You have to act. And the world is in constant flux and so the party that's going to win in the end is the one that's going to reform things that need to be reformed and work on behalf of people. That maybe is even more important, or as important as ideology I think. So governors across the board, I've admired the courageous ones: the ones that have not just focused on popularity.

>> Peter Robinson: Your grandfather: Prescott Bush, represented Connecticut in the Senate from 1952 to 1963. I think it's fair to call him and Eisenhower Republican. What we would now look back on as a moderate.

>> Jeb Bush: Yep.

>> Peter Robinson: Your dad George H.W. Bush leaves Connecticut, goes to war, comes back after the 2nd World War and goes to Texas. Would you describe your dad as a thorough going conservative...

>> Jeb Bush: I would.

>> Peter Robinson: ...by the time he achieved the White House?

>> Jeb Bush: I would. I think he was practical when we needed to be, but yeah of course...

>> Peter Robinson: So you've got an Eisenhower Republican -- he helped define it. Or Reagan-Bush Republican: he was the Bush in the Reagan-Bush.

>> Jeb Bush: Yep.

>> Peter Robinson: We've got you as -- different flavors of Bushes. Is it generational? Is it philosophical? Is part of it that your grandfather was a northeasterner and your dad broke out and moved to the west? What's...

>> Jeb Bush: Yeah...

>> Peter Robinson: That's a big part of it?

>> Jeb Bush: I think so, yeah. Growing up in Texas is a lot different than growing up in Connecticut. And Florida is like Texas in many ways. It's the east coast version of the Wild West.

>> Peter Robinson: Speaking as somebody who -- well I worked for your dad when he was Vice President as I mentioned, but I've always been impressed that within the Bush family you seem to be both intensely competitive - watch some Bushes on the golf course sometime or on the tennis court - but intensely loyal. How do you pull that off as a family?

>> Jeb Bush: It's not an either/or situation isn't it? If there was a hand grenade right here and this was my dad and this was me, I could guarantee you I would beat the Secret Service. That's just the way it is. You know, as it relates to him it's because he's the greatest man alive. He's the greatest man I've ever met. He's the most decent, honorable, courageous, every virtue that you would consider to be a virtue of worth describes my dad. So you know, he's my dad too but he has been an extraordinary father and an extraordinary man. So loyalty comes pretty easy when you have a mom like I do and a dad like I do.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright.

>> Jeb Bush: And my brother, same thing by the way.

>> Peter Robinson: And the sense of competition?

>> Jeb Bush: That's pretty much to it too.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright. You suffered a narrow defeat the first time you ran for governor in 1994.

>> Jeb Bush: Yeah, I did.

>> Peter Robinson: And you said you realized that the people of Florida wanted you to tell them not just where you stood but who you were.

>> Jeb Bush: Right.

>> Peter Robinson: And you added, now I'm quoting you, "That's not easy for a Bush to do."

>> Jeb Bush: [Laughter] Yeah.

>> Peter Robinson: Have politics become too touchy feely for you?

>> Jeb Bush: Well...

>> Peter Robinson: Are baby boomers too self absorbed?

>> Jeb Bush: Yes, that's more like it. I think politics is a mirror image of life. It's a circus mirror, but it's a mirror. I mean it's exaggerated and all that but it's a mirror image of life. And so I think the generation now that's kind of in charge of life around here, is very self absorbed. And it's overdone a bit. So maybe moderating kind of the old way which was to not express any emotion with the new way which is that you know at a drop of a hat you feel everybody's pain and you bite your lips and stuff. I mean there's got to be some middle ground there. And that's what I learned. I mean I learned in '94 that talking about ideas -- I had white papers you know with 30 pages and all sort of nerdy-wonky details, and people were saying "Well that's great but who are you?" And so when I got attacked which I got pretty you know...

>> Peter Robinson: It was a rough one.

>> Jeb Bush: Yeah, I mean '94 standards it was pretty vicious. Now it would be nothing I guess. But the people started to believe it. They didn't shrug their shoulders and say "I know this guy. That's not him." So I learned that you have to let people know who you are as well. It was a great learning experience.

>> Peter Robinson: Last set of questions here. Jeb Bush Jr. - one of your sons - has endorsed Rudy Giuliani.

>> Jeb Bush: [Laughter] I know.

>> Peter Robinson: George P. Bush - your other son - has endorsed Fred Thompson. Are we going to hear who their father's going to back?

>> Jeb Bush: No.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright, let me just give you then...

>> Jeb Bush: I'm going to support the party nominee.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright, let me give you a few names here of candidates. Without committing yourself give me their greatest strength and their worst weakness.

>> Jeb Bush: I'm not going to do the weakness because I saw on someone who did that - Dan Bartlett [assumed spelling] - and it came out pretty bad looking.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright, okay. I'll take what I can get. Just give me the greatest strength. Rudy Giuliani?

>> Jeb Bush: Direct. He sees the world the way it is and he's direct and he communicates well and he's got high energy and tremendous personality. People are drawn towards him.

>> Peter Robinson: Fred Thompson?

>> Jeb Bush: Fred Thompson I think is a committed conservative yet -- by the way, every one of these guys running, they are testing themselves, they're proving themselves along the way. So this is the last debate. I thought it was...

>> Peter Robinson: They were all better than they were a month...

>> Jeb Bush: And they were all -- I felt really proud to be a republican. It was the first time I kind of felt proud in awhile to be honest with you other than seeing the courage of my brother and the determination. They all did well. And they all have attributes that are to be admired. And they're getting -- they get better in this grueling process as you go along. So you know, Senator Thompson is kind of new at the game and 2 months from now he's going to be dramatically different as well.

>> Peter Robinson: John McCain had the line of the evening at the debate. What's his greatest strength?

>> Jeb Bush: His courage. I was in my bed watching this with my wife. I got out of bed and started cheering.

>> Peter Robinson: [Laughter]

>> Jeb Bush: I assume you're talking about the Woodstock thing?

>> Peter Robinson: Yes, that's exactly right.

>> Jeb Bush: You know, I mean he didn't do it in a -- he did it in a humble way. He didn't do it in a way that was grandstanding at all. He -- it was...

>> Peter Robinson: It was about as good as it gets I think.

>> Jeb Bush: It was spectacular.

>> Peter Robinson: Mitt Romney. Greatest strength then?

>> Jeb Bush: Intellectual curiosity which I think the next president of the United States is going to need to have. He's incredibly smart and asks the questions necessary to get -- to find that common ground for the next challenges that we face which you know politics is not really good at right now. It's a lagging -- it's a lagging institution, not a leading institution. And we need politics I think now to be more in the leading side of our life.

>> Peter Robinson: Last name, Mike Huckabee?

>> Jeb Bush: You know I [inaudible] governor.

>> Peter Robinson: You like him, okay.

>> Jeb Bush: I like him.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright.

>> Jeb Bush: And he's a great speaker and he's clear minded about the importance of moral principles which you can't un-tether particularly is you believe in limited government. You have to also advocate self-government. You can't untie the 2. You can't be you libertarian in a libertine world.

>> Peter Robinson: Alright, last question. You're not going to play the game of predicting who will get the nomination but let's just set it up this way. One of these fellows wins the republican nomination.

>> Jeb Bush: I think that's going to be the case.

>> Peter Robinson: Now imagine, imagine that the moment after he walks off the stage after giving his acceptance speech you get to give him 1 or 2 sentences of advice. What would you say?

>> Jeb Bush: Well, I've kind of already done it in you know privately but it's something that I believe in which is be who you are: be genuine. There's a disconnect right now I think that is -- relates to this that people don't believe the candidates to the extent that they need to if we're going to have a leader that leads us into this wacky world we're moving into. So be genuine. Don't worry that if you don't pass some litmus test of some group that's on the sidelines, because frankly they're on the sidelines. You're the one that's leading us. You're in the arena. If you have the courage of your convictions, my experience as Governor of Florida is that people will follow.

>> Peter Robinson: Governor Jeb Bush, thank you very much.

>> Jeb Bush: You bet.

>> Peter Robinson: This is Uncommon Knowledge. I'm Peter Robinson. Thanks for joining us.