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Jeb Wants a Recession in D.C., Having Forgotten That Real People Live There

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THIS WILL ONLY HURT A LITTLE

Bush is now suggesting he would ‘create a little bit of a recession in Washington, D.C., so that we can have economic prosperity outside of Washington.’ Is he serious?



Photo illustration for *The Daily Beast*

Maybe it’s reverse psychology, or maybe Jeb Bush is trying to reenergize his flagging White House bid by diving cuboidal-head first into absurdity, but the Republican presidential candidate has come out as an advocate for an unlikely cause: recession.

In New Hampshire on Wednesday, speaking to Sean Hannity in front of two plastic pumpkins and a Jeb! 2016 placard, the former Florida governor was asked how he would make the argument to voters that the Democrats’ plans to expand the safety net would bankrupt the country.

“We have the benefit now of all of this philosophy of offering free things to people not working,” Bush said. “I think the better message is, let’s disrupt Washington. Let’s create a little

bit of a recession in Washington, D.C., so that we can have economic prosperity outside of Washington.”

Bush added that as governor, “I got to do that,” and it resulted in the Sunshine State leading the nation in job growth for the majority of his tenure.

Asked if Bush really meant that he would like to create a recession in Washington, D.C., the country’s fourth-largest metropolitan economy, his spokesman, Tim Miller, responded, “We should shrink D.C. so we can grow the economy of the rest of the country.”

But Bush said recession.

Asked “yes or no,” does Bush believe D.C. should be hit with a recession, as the country as a whole continues to recover from the Great Recession, Miller said, “He certainly wants to shrink the size of D.C. as laid out on his plan to reform Washington.”

Shrinking the size of the federal government is a vastly different endeavor than creating a recession in the city in which the federal government is based. Asked if Bush is aware of the definition of a recession, Miller said, “a period of temporary economic decline generally identified by a fall of GDP in two successive quarters.”

Asked why in the hell a candidate for president of the United States would wish such a thing on an American city, Miller didn’t respond—not even to suggest it was a joke.

Michael D. Brown, Washington, D.C.’s “shadow” senator, was not amused, either way.

“I think he’s trying to be clever and say, ‘If we deprive the congressmen and the senators, if we screw things up for them, they’ll pay attention,’” Brown said. **“My first impression is that it’s reflective of the way these people think about our city, that this isn’t a place where Americans live for some reason. Why would you say that about a place where 650,000 taxpayers live—many of whom are veterans?”**

“I just think it’s a preposterous idea,” he said. **“Washington is a major economic hub. We have greater GDP than nine different states. We are an economic engine! It’s ridiculous.”**

Brown continued, **“People don’t think about us here in the District of Columbia like we’re regular citizens. So, beyond the obvious stupidity of the remark, how would that stimulate the economy elsewhere? These people that come and serve in our city don’t depend on our city for income. If that’s his point, you make the congressman poor and then he’ll care, it’s just stupid.”**

The more people see of Bush, it seems, the less they like him.

Although his campaign raised over \$13 million in the third fundraising quarter, the second-highest sum raised by any Republican candidate except for Ben Carson, Bush is still polling at an

average of 7.3 percent. That's behind three people with no governing experience whatsoever—Donald Trump, Carson and Fiorina—and behind Marco Rubio, the senator from Bush's home state who is eating his lunch.

Part of the problem with Bush is that he is bad at expressing himself. For a campaign that began as an attempt not to sacrifice his moderate (compared to the rest of the field) principles in order to appeal to rabid right-wingers, he sure says an awful lot of things that are what you could call, in the words of Mitt Romney, Bush's sandpaper-tongued predecessor, severely conservative.

Speaking recently in South Carolina about tragedy, in the wake of a mass school shooting in Oregon, he said people shouldn't give in to the desire to act after something horrible occurs, because they might actually make things worse in the long run.

"Stuff happens," he said. "There's always a crisis. And the impulse is always to do something, and it's not necessarily the right thing to do."

Nine people had just died.

In his attempts to come off as the "proven conservative leader," Bush sometimes comes off as callous or ignorant or both. And that's when he's not coming off as just plain boring, or "low energy," as his primary tormenter, Trump, likes to say.

Bush's plan to change D.C. has three dry bullet points: Balanced Budget Amendment, which he says he'll implement once in office; Automatic Government, which is how he derides the inefficient method by which "people are hired, promoted, and given pay increases often without regard to performance"; and Setting the Standard, a proposal to threaten to take away pay from federal lawmakers who don't show up or vote when Congress is in session.

Bush calls D.C. "Mount Washington," he explained, because, like "Mount Tallahassee" was during his tenure in Florida, it's a place disconnected from the people and ruled by the establishment. "I was a governor who refused to go along with that establishment," he said. "I wasn't a member of the club, and that made all the difference."

He spat out a series of grievances: "the overspending, the overreaching, the arrogance, and the sheer incompetence in that city." What the country needs, he said, is "a president willing to challenge the whole culture in our nation's capital—and I mean to do it."

Even if it means handicapping one of the United States' biggest economic engines in order to make a point.

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