



WASHINGTON: The casket of US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia is carried into the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception for his funeral mass yesterday.—AFP

MOURNERS GATHER FOR SCALIA FUNERAL MASS

WASHINGTON: In a hallowed place where popes have prayed and pilgrims have flocked, mourners gathered yesterday at the nation's largest Catholic church to pay their final respects to Justice Antonin Scalia. Scalia's sons and sons-in-law served as pallbearers to carry his flag-draped casket into the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception for a funeral Mass honoring the late jurist who died unexpectedly last weekend.

Dignitaries including Vice President Joe Biden, former Vice President Dick Cheney, members of Congress and all eight sitting justices of the Supreme Court were among those attending. Scalia's casket arrived at the basilica after he lay in repose at the Supreme Court on Friday, where thousands of visitors came to honor one of the country's most influential conservatives. One of Scalia's nine children, the Rev Paul Scalia, was to lead the Mass and deliver the homily.

Several federal judges who are considered possible replacements for Scalia also were at the funeral Mass, including Judges Sri Srinivasan and Patricia Millett and Chief Judge Merrick Garland, all of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. President Barack Obama will not attend, despite criticism from some Republicans. He and first lady Michelle Obama were among the more than 6,000 people who paid tribute to Scalia at the

Supreme Court on Friday. Scalia's flag-draped casket rested on a funeral bier that first held President Abraham Lincoln's casket after his assassination.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest pointed to Biden's personal relationship with Scalia's family and said Obama's decision about the Mass was a "respectful arrangement" that took into account his large security detail. Scalia, 79, died last weekend at a remote Texas ranch after spending nearly three decades on the high court. Burial plans have not been announced.

GOP presidential hopeful Ted Cruz planned to interrupt his campaign ahead of yesterday's South Carolina primary to attend the Mass. The Texas senator has been among those urging the Senate not to consider replacing Scalia until after the November election. Obama has insisted that he will nominate a successor. Scheduled to give opening remarks at the Mass was Washington Archbishop Donald Cardinal Wuerl.

Leonard Leo, executive director of the Federalist Society, a conservative legal group, was to read a passage from the Old Testament, while Justice Clarence Thomas planned to read from the New Testament. Three popes have visited the basilica: Pope John Paul II in 1979, Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 and Pope Francis last year. — AP

BUSH'S TALE OF UNFORCED ERRORS, MISCALCULATIONS

JEB MISJUDGES MOOD OF REPUBLICAN BASE

CHARLESTON, South Carolina: Before Donald Trump's putdowns and the stumbles in presidential debates, and before the profound frustration of voters became so unmistakably apparent, Jeb Bush appeared to be best positioned to win back the White House for Republicans in 2016. He amassed a \$150 million war chest in 2015, surrounded himself with some of the best minds in the party, had a famous last name and attracted the support of the party establishment.

Now with his polling in single digits, strategists say his presidential ambitions may rest in large measure on the outcome of yesterday's South Carolina Republican primary. He needs to do well to show he can perform strongly in the Super Tuesday primaries on March 1, when a collection of mostly southern states will vote. The Bush campaign dismisses what they see as a rush to write him off, saying he plans to go to Nevada for campaigning today and will participate in a debate in Houston on Thursday.

To be sure, Bush has shown signs of momentum in recent weeks, with stronger performances in debates where he struggled earlier in the campaign and a better finish than Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, his fiercest rival for the Republican establishment vote, in the New Hampshire primary. How Bush found his campaign hanging in the balance heading into just the third nominating contest of 2016 is a cautionary tale of political miscalculation and strategic errors, according to interviews with a dozen Republican operatives, many with close ties to the Bush campaign and others who worked for the last two Republican presidential nominees.

From the start, they said, Bush appeared to misjudge the mood of the Republican base. In Dec 2014, for instance, Bush gathered his senior aides and a small group of national political operatives for a meeting in Miami to talk about his coming candidacy. A survey to gauge the national mood of the party was dismissed by Bush and his aides as unnecessary. Such polling, a participant said, would have made clear to Bush the rebellious sentiment of the conservative base of the party. "They missed the boat," the participant said.

The polling may have also helped the campaign spot the threat of Trump, a billionaire and political outsider who tapped into that anti-establishment anger and stormed to the top of the polls. The Bush campaign disputed the charge as inaccurate. "He has shared the frustration of voters from the outset and he has not strayed from that," said spokeswoman Kristy Campbell. "He has presented a hopeful, optimistic message that is based on the belief that he has the leadership skills to get the job done."



GREENVILLE, South Carolina: Republican presidential candidate Jeb Bush addresses the crowd at a campaign rally on Friday.—AFP

'Low Energy'

Viewing Trump as a summer fad who would fade given his outrageous comments, the campaign was slow to respond to the billionaire when he first blasted Bush last August as "low-energy". Bush maintained his above-the-fray strategy and focused on his policy proposals instead of mixing it up with Trump. Trump relentlessly and bluntly attacked Bush in speeches and on Twitter, portraying him as tired, weak and out of touch with the party. Trump has mentioned Bush on Twitter hundreds of times, far more than any other Republican candidate.

"There was a decision made that he was not a serious person and would fade away," said one Republican strategist close to the Bush camp, who asked to remain anonymous. "You don't want to dignify somebody who wasn't a serious candidate. It wasn't just Jeb. Nobody thought he was." When the "low energy" attacks on Bush started to take hold and his poll numbers began dropping, he went out of his way to insist he had plenty of energy to be president, talking of working 16-hour days, putting in feistier appearances on the stump and hitting back at Trump hard.

Behind the scenes, though, donors said they fretted that too much time had gone by before he took the problem seriously. Some confidants of the former Florida governor seethed for weeks at

Trump's taunts and urged the campaign to shift to a more aggressive posture. "They made a horrendous miscalculation in not understanding the intent of the low-energy attack, which was designed to emasculate Bush, to make him look weak," said Steve Schmidt, who was campaign manager to 2008 Republican nominee John McCain. "Defining him as weak denied him the ability to make the argument that by resume, competence and experience he was the most fit to command," said Schmidt.

When Bush launched his campaign in June, he was the clear frontrunner among Republicans, polling at nearly 18 percent in a crowded field. Roughly six weeks later Trump had taken a commanding lead with 26 percent and Bush had dropped to around 12 percent, according to Reuters/Ipsos polling. Today Bush is at 8 percent nationally. Trump stands at 38 percent. But Trump has hardly been Bush's only obstacle.

IRAQ WAR MISSTEPS

Perhaps his biggest misstep was one of his own making, when he spent days trying to explain whether he would have launched the Iraq war begun by his brother, former President George W Bush. Even George W Bush has admitted mistakes were made in the 2003 conflict. But for a week last May, Jeb Bush was flummoxed by the question.—Reuters

US CANDIDATES FACING NEW MORAL QUESTIONS

NEW YORK: When politicians were confronted in recent years about how their policies fit their faith, the issue at hand was usually abortion and the targets were mostly Democrats. Last week, Pope Francis managed to put the Republicans on the defensive by rebuking Donald Trump and doing so over a different issue: immigration. The censure roared through the entire field of GOP presidential candidates, who were all pressed about the morality of their approach to immigrants in the country illegally, during a primary dominated by increasingly tough rhetoric that has emphasized border security.

Analysts say the pope's remarks should serve as a wake-up call for Republicans about how public discussion of religion and policy is broadening under this popular pope who, through his gestures and speeches, has put a greater emphasis on helping the vulnerable than on divisive social issues. "The Democrats aren't off the hook. It's just the Republicans are on it, too, and this might be a new experience for them," said Cathleen Kaveny, a Boston College theologian and author of "Prophecy Without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square."

Francis' comments came hours after he ended a visit to Mexico, where he prayed at the border for people who died trying to reach the US. While speaking to reporters on the papal plane Wednesday, he was asked about Trump's campaign pledge to build a wall along the entire length of the border and expel millions of people in the US illegally. "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not in the Gospel," he said. While Francis said he would "give the benefit of the doubt" because he had not heard Trump's border plans independently, he added, "I say only that this man is not a Christian if he has said things like that."

On Friday, the Rev Federico Lombardi, a Vatican

spokesman, said the pope's remarks were "in no way a personal attack or an indication on how to vote." And during the same news conference, in response to a different question, Francis also made some of his toughest public comments to date against abortion, comparing the procedure to a Mafia hit and repeatedly calling abortion evil. "It is a crime, an absolute evil," Francis said.

Immigrants

But the pope had made clear since his first trip as pontiff outside the Vatican - praying at the Italian island of Lampedusa for migrants who died trying to cross the sea to reach Italy - that generosity toward immigrants was one of his top concerns. "I think we're looking at the impact of the Francis era, where there are different points of contact and different aspects of the Catholic tradition are emphasized," said Matthew Schmalz, a religious studies professor at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts. "Many prominent Catholic intellectuals have been swayed toward the Republicans in the last few decades. This is a jolt."

Francis' immediate predecessors, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, also emphasized care for the poor and immigrants. But they prioritized greater adherence to doctrine, including on abortion, and appointed bishops who would do the same. Recent presidential elections have seen intensifying confrontations between church leaders and candidates. In 2004, Cardinal Raymond Burke, then the St. Louis archbishop, caused an uproar when said he would deny Communion to Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry, a Catholic who supports abortion rights.

Some bishops followed suit by telling Catholic politicians who support abortion rights not to present themselves for the sacrament. In 2007, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a new version of their presidential-year guidance for Catholic voters that highlighted a range of issues, but said opposition to abortion should be Catholics' greatest concern. The bishops re-issued the guide for 2016 with only limited revisions, but several bishops individually have also been highlighting issues such as climate change, immigration and poverty.

Discussion

No one expects the pope's remarks on Trump to persuade voters to change candidates. But he can help shape public discussion of the issues, said Francis Rooney, who was US ambassador to the Vatican under President George W Bush, and now backs former Florida Gov Jeb Bush. "The pope's a soft-power player. His impact around the world comes from moral suasion and influence," Rooney said. "I think the pope has got such a strong moral voice that when he weighs in on immigration, I think it makes more people think about it."

Bush, one of the few GOP candidates proposing a path to legal status for people already in the US illegally, said Thursday he supports "walls and fencing where it's appropriate." He said he seeks guidance from the pope on being Catholic, but not on policy. Marco Rubio, another Catholic candidate for the GOP nomination, said he has "tremendous respect and admiration" for the pope, but he added, "There's no nation on Earth that's more compassionate on immigration than we are." John Carr, who served for more than two decades as the social justice director for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and for years helped write the bishops' election-year guide, said the pope is having some impact on American political life.—AP



CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico: In this Feb 17, 2016 photo, Pope Francis blesses hundreds of people gathered a few yards away on the US side as he stands near the US-Mexico border fence along the Rio Grande.—AP

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