

Bush Steals The Show In White House Return

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's Barack Obama's house now, but his predecessor and political foil, George W. Bush, stole the show at the White House on Thursday with his wisecracks and grin.

"Thank you so much for inviting our rowdy friends to my hanging," the former president said, referring to members of his family and former staff, invited back to the executive mansion for the unveiling of his and Laura Bush's official portraits. "Behave yourselves," he jokingly admonished his crowd.

Bush told the current president he was pleased to know "that when you are wandering these halls as you wrestle with tough decisions, you will now be able to gaze at this portrait and ask, 'What would George do?'"

Free from the stress of the presidency and after three years spent largely out of the spotlight, a relaxed and jovial Bush came back with his father, former President George H.W. Bush, for a rare gathering of three commanders in chief. Former first lady Barbara Bush was there, too, as were George W. and Laura's daughters, Jenna and Barbara.

While Bush, Obama and their wives spoke about the warmth between their families, there was little of that on display between the two presidents. They traded handshakes but no hugs. There was little casual small talk as they entered and exited the East Room or as they stood on stage together.

Presidential Campaign Sees Day Of Stunts

FREMONT, Calif. (AP) — Stunts, stagecraft, scripts — and a touch of the surreal — shaped the presidential campaign Thursday as Mitt Romney and President Barack Obama sought an edge on voters' No. 1 issue, the economy.

On one coast, Romney made a surprise trip to the former California headquarters of solar-panel manufacturer Solyndra to accuse Obama of currying favor with campaign supporters by giving a federal loan to the green energy company that later went bankrupt.

"This half-a-billion-dollar taxpayer investment represents a serious conflict of interest on the part of the president and his team," the Republican presidential candidate said as he stood outside the shuttered company and held it up as Exhibit A of presidential missteps on the economy.

He offered no proof of his claim during a visit that was shrouded in a highly unusual amount of secrecy because, aides said, the campaign feared Obama would interfere with his Republican rival's plans to appear there.

At roughly the same time across the country in Boston, Obama's campaign staged its own event outside Massachusetts' Statehouse to argue that Romney's record as governor from 2003 to 2007 proves he is ill-prepared to manage the nation's economy.

Clinton Outlines U.S. Reluctance About Syria

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — The U.S. is heaping new pressure on Russia to change course and support international action in Syria, warning that intransigence by Moscow may lead to open civil war that could spill across the Middle East with devastating effects.

Speaking on Russia's doorstep in Denmark, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton derided the Russian government for continuing to support Syrian President Bashar Assad, even after last week's massacre of more than 100 people in the town of Houla.

In pointed remarks Thursday, she said Russia's position "is going to help contribute to a civil war" and rejected Russian officials' insistence that their stance actually is helping to ease the crisis.

On the first stop of a European tour, Clinton said Russia and China would have to be on board before the U.S. and other nations might engage in what could become a protracted conflict in support of a disorganized rebel force.

Russia, along with China, has twice vetoed U.N. Security Council sanctions against Syria. Russia is Syria's closest ally other than isolated Iran, and Clinton said that without its support the international community is essentially frozen from taking concrete steps to end the violence.

"The Russians keep telling us they want to do everything they can to avoid a civil war, because they believe that the violence would be catastrophic," Clinton said, noting that they are "vociferous in their claim that they are providing a stabilizing influence."

Race

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"I didn't support this 'Frankenstein' bill. I spoke against it, and I worked against it," Nelson said. "It had all kinds of gyrations and some ugly configurations."

Schoenfish, who ran unsuccessfully as a Democrat for the House in 2010, said he opposes HB 1234 for a number of reasons.

"This contains a one-size-fits-all mentality, which isn't the way to go," he said. "Merit pay hasn't been shown to raise student achievement. We need to bring up the pay for all teachers before we go to merit pay."

Putnam currently represents District 19 in the Senate but is running for the House this time. He noted the number of changes made to HB 1234 throughout the session.

"We had (a large number) of amendments to it, and no one seemed to agree," he said.

Hofer disapproved so much of the legislation — and anticipated its referral to the ballot box — that he came up with a way to spread his message.

"I had bumper stickers made up that read, 'Say No to 1234,'" he said, adding that he supports higher teacher salaries across the board.

The Tyndall forum didn't see the education debate limited to HB 1234.

Schoenfish said he was also concerned about a heavy reliance on test scores in measuring student achievement.

"We have the emphasis on standardized testing, which hampers local control," he said.

Schoenfish said he supports attempts to tie education funding to state revenues. "That's a good idea, and we would still live within our means," he said.

Nelson, Hofer and Putnam all said that schools should reflect the strong values found in the families and communities served by those schools.

The Republican Party needs to stand for parental choice and local control, Nelson said. He added his concern for the future of small schools.

"My kids go to Hanson High School (in Alexandria)," he said. "It's a good wholesome environment that they have grown up in."

On his campaign website, Nelson said he supports better teacher pay.

"While all budget items are tough these days, we MUST find ways to support our public educators and state employees with salaries that will retain South Dakota's most important of resources," he said.

Nelson added that families who home school or send their children to privately-funded

Edwards Acquitted On 1 Charge

Jury Deadlocks On 5 Remaining Counts

BY MICHAEL BIESECKER

Associated Press

GREENSBORO, N.C. — John Edwards' campaign finance fraud case ended in a mistrial Thursday when jurors acquitted him on one charge and deadlocked on the other five, unable to decide whether he used money from two wealthy campaign donors to hide his pregnant mistress while he ran for president and his wife was dying of cancer.

The 6-week-long trial detailed a sordid sex scandal that ended Edwards' political career, but prosecutors couldn't convince jurors the candidate masterminded a \$1 million cover-up of his affair with his most trusted aide.

"While I do not believe I did anything illegal, or ever thought I was doing anything illegal, I did an awful, awful lot that was wrong and there is no one else responsible for my sins," Edwards said on the courthouse steps.

He also said he had hope for his future. "I don't think God's through with me. I really believe he thinks there's still some good things I can do."

Edwards would have faced up to 30 years in prison and \$1.5 million in fines if convicted of all charges. He did not testify, along with his mistress Rielle Hunter and the two donors whose money was at issue.

Jurors acquitted him on a charge of accepting illegal campaign contributions, involving \$375,000 from elderly heiress Rachel "Bunny" Mellon in 2008. He had also been charged with illegally accepting \$350,000 from Mellon in 2007, other donations from wealthy Texas attorney Fred Baron, filing a false campaign finance report and conspiracy.

The jurors, who deliberated nine days, did not talk to the media as they left the court-



CHUCKY LIDDY/RALEIGH NEWS & OBSERVER/MCT

Former Sen. John Edwards helps his father, Wallace, down the stairs of the federal courthouse at the end of his trial in Greensboro, North Carolina, Thursday, May 31, 2012. Edwards was found not guilty on one of six counts in his campaign finance trial and announced it could not agree on the five remaining counts.

house. Prosecutors did not immediately comment on whether they would retry Edwards.

Kieran Shanahan, a former federal prosecutor and Raleigh defense attorney who has been attending the trial, said he doesn't think prosecutors will retry the case.

"They got their best witnesses, their best evidence and the judge ruled in their favor on all major evidentiary issues. The jury didn't believe them," he said.

The case was thrown into confusion earlier Thursday after observers filled the court-

room expecting to hear a verdict on all six counts. Jurors had sent a note to U.S. District Court Judge Catherine Eagles, reading, "we have finished our deliberations and have arrived at our decision on counts one through six."

But when the jury came into court, the foreman said jurors only had a decision on one count. Eagles sent jurors back to deliberate. About an hour later, the jury sent another note saying it had exhausted its discussions.

Defense of Marriage Act Heads To Supreme Court

BY DENISE LAVOIE

AP Legal Affairs Writer

BOSTON — A battle over a federal law that defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman appears headed for the Supreme Court after an appeals court ruled Thursday that denying benefits to married gay couples is unconstitutional.

In a unanimous decision, the three-judge panel of the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston said the 1996 law deprives gay couples of the rights and privileges granted to heterosexual couples.

The court didn't rule on the law's more politically combustible provision — that states without same-sex marriage cannot be forced to recognize gay unions performed in states where it's legal. It also wasn't asked to address whether gay couples have a constitutional right to marry.

The law was passed at a time when it appeared Hawaii would legalize gay marriage. Since then, many states have instituted their own bans on gay marriage, while eight states have approved the practice, led by Massachusetts in 2004.

The court, the first federal appeals panel to rule against the benefits section of the law, agreed with a lower court judge who in 2010 concluded that the law interferes with the right of a state to define marriage and denies married gay couples federal benefits given to heterosexual married couples, including the ability to file joint tax returns. The ruling came in two lawsuits, one filed by the Boston-based legal group Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) and the other by state Attorney General Martha Coakley.

"For me, it's more just about having equality and not having a system of first- and second-class

marriages," said plaintiff Jonathan Knight, a financial associate at Harvard Medical School who married Marlin Nabors in 2006.

"I think we can do better, as a country, than that," said Knight, a plaintiff in the GLAD lawsuit.

Knight said the Defense of Marriage Act costs the couple an extra \$1,000 a year because they cannot file a joint federal tax return.

Opponents of gay marriage blasted the decision.

"This ruling that a state can mandate to the federal government the definition of marriage for the sake of receiving federal benefits, we find really bizarre, rather arrogant, if I may say so," said Kris Mineau, president of the Massachusetts Family Institute.

Since Congress passed the law, eight states have approved gay marriage, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York,

Iowa, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maryland, Washington state and the District of Columbia. Maryland and Washington's laws are not yet in effect and may be subject to referendums.

Last year, President Barack Obama announced that the Department of Justice would no longer defend the constitutionality of the law. After that, House Speaker John Boehner convened the Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group to defend it. The legal group argued the case before the appeals court.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said the appeals court ruling is "in concert with the president's views." Obama, who once opposed gay marriage, declared his unequivocal personal support on May 9.

Carney wouldn't say whether the government would actively seek to have the law overturned if the case goes before the Supreme Court.

Thune

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he said. "And my coach comes up to me and taps me on the shoulder and says, 'John, it's time to get on the bus. And by the way, track starts next week.'"

Thune said his coach knew he hated track, "but he was sending me a very important message, and that is, 'I know you played as hard as you could, I know you gave it everything that you have. It didn't work out ... but there's always another opportunity.'"

A commitment also is important, Thune told the Girls Staters.

"Character has to do with the kind of person that you are, the quality, the attributes that you have as an individual," he said. "Are you honest? Are you fair? Do you treat other people with respect? Do you play by the rules? Do you take responsibility for your actions?"

Acting with character may mean not doing the "popular thing," Thune said, but it may mean doing the right thing.

"Character is what defines you as a person. It's how you'll be remembered after you're gone," he said.

schools should receive a tax break for their children's education.

"While I am a fan of our public schools, I support South Dakotans' rights to choose their child's education venue," he said.

"In an ideal world, I would like to see parents have the full option of deciding where their children go to school with full in-state portability of education funding."

Schoenfish noted that educational programs, along with greater use of drug courts, can help reduce the state's prison population, which has hit record numbers in recent months. The drug courts generally treat people with drug and alcohol problems rather than send them to prison.

"It costs \$64 a day to keep a person in prison, compared to the \$3 a day when using the drug court," he said. "Drug courts and rehabilitation are helping to save the state hundreds of thousands of dollars."

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at

twitter.com/RDockendorf



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