

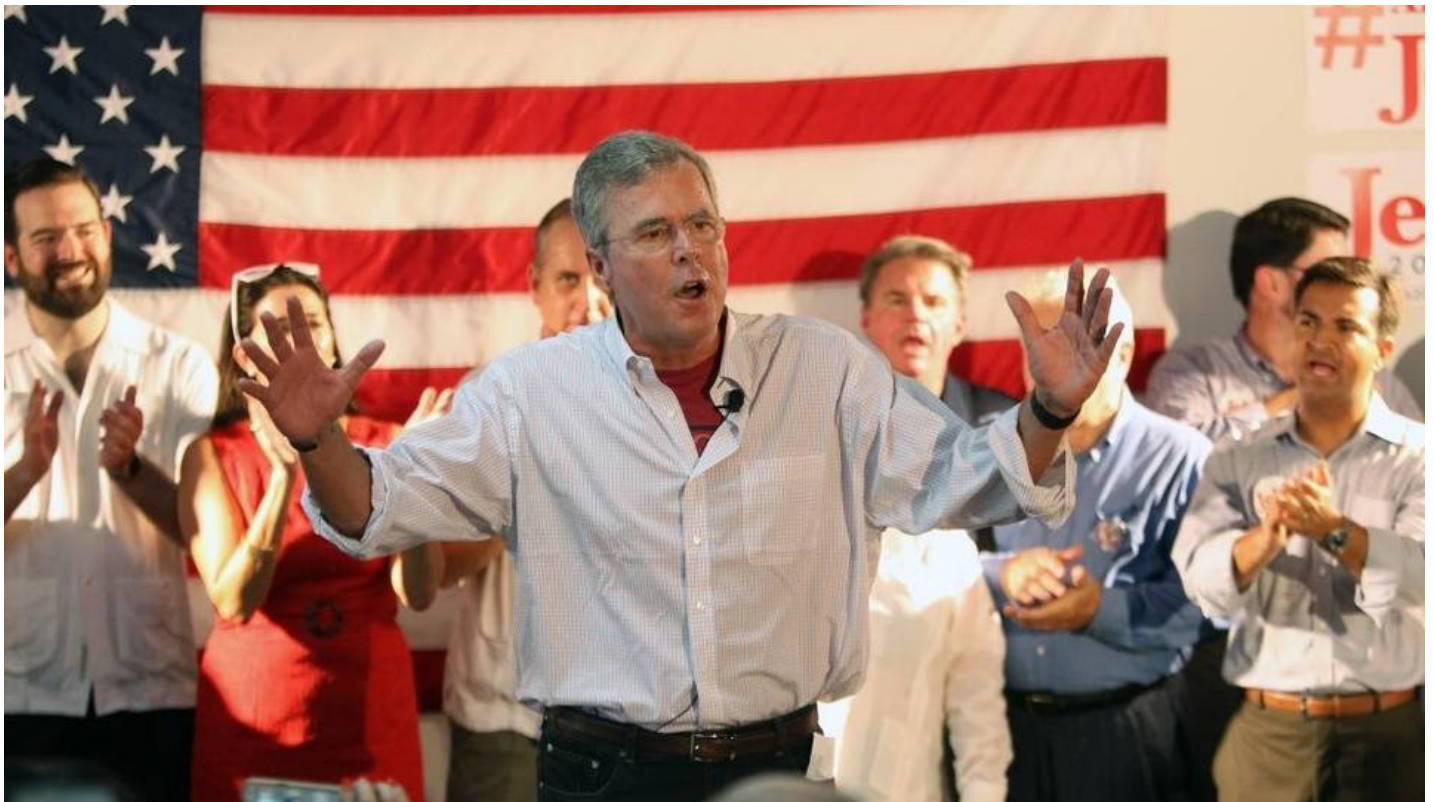
FRED GRIMM

Fred Grimm: Jeb's campaign ads exploit tragic demise of Terri Schiavo

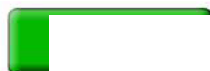
By Fred Grimm

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It would be only technically accurate to say that Terri Schiavo's hollow life was perpetuated by crass political opportunism. It was a life only if you define "persistent vegetative state" as living.



Terri had suffered a permanent, irreversible loss of all cognitive function long before the governor of Florida led an extraordinary, utterly unconstitutional attempt to block removal of her feeding tube.

It was Gov. Jeb Bush who turned the vacant shell that had been Terri Schiavo into a political icon, making a great show as he flouted the courts and the Constitution, and dismissed the judgment of bioethicists, neurologists and her court-appointed guardian to interject himself into a private family tragedy.

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Bush led an unseemly [clamor](#) of right-wing politicians, religious fundamentalists and right-to-life crusaders. His lawsuits and the legislation he wangled out of both the state Legislature and the U.S. Congress ultimately failed, of course, but he worked the Schiavo controversy to great political advantage.

The exploitation was grotesque then. A dozen years later, it's no less so as Right to Rise, the presidential candidate's \$100 million super PAC, [rolls out a TV ad](#) featuring a photo of the brain-dead woman. A narrator praises Jeb as "a man of deep faith who fought time and again for the right to life."

Jeb, indeed, managed to sustain the political and legal circus for another two years after Terri's guardian ad litem reported in 2003 that "highly competent, scientifically based physicians using recognized measures and standards have deduced, within a high degree of medical certainty, that Terri is in a persistent vegetative state."



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Guardian Jay Wolfson had spent weeks studying her medical records and court documents. He talked to nurses and doctors. He questioned medical, legal and bioethical experts, and religious scholars. He talked to family members. He spent time at her bedside. He concluded that she had no intellectual capacity — no hope of recovery. Neurological tests and brain scans, Wolfson noted, “indicate that Terri’s cerebral cortex is principally liquid, having shrunk due to the severe anoxic trauma experienced thirteen years ago.”

But that was not that. Bush pushed state legislation, “Terri’s Law,” allowing him to order her feeding tube reinserted. Then-Senate President Jim King later called his capitulation to Bush’s pressure “one of the worst votes I’ve ever done.”

When the Florida Supreme Court, including three of Bush’s own appointees, unanimously declared “Terri’s Law” unconstitutional, Bush and his brother George coerced similar legislation out of Congress. That version was undone by federal courts.

Terri’s depleted life ended March 31, 2005. But apparently not the political theater. “It is simply disgusting that Jeb Bush and his super PAC would exploit my wife’s tragedy for his crude political gain,” Michael Schiavo told me via email Tuesday. “Using his disgraceful intervention in our family’s private trauma to advance his political career shows that he has learned nothing.”

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The super PAC ad will only make most of us blanch at the reminder of his unseemly antics. This stuff won't revive a [moribund](#) presidential campaign, described lately as "on life support."

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