

Bush/Race here is 'dead even or up or down a few points,' strategist says

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Talk show host Regis Philbin (center) on Thursday checks out the suit and tie worn by Texas Gov. George W. Bush with co-host Susan Hawk, a cast member of the popular television series "Survivor."

Bush compares presidential race to TV's 'Survivor'

Republican nominee makes appearance with Philbin, guest co-host Susan Hawk

Associated Press

New York — George W. Bush likened the closely fought presidential contest to the TV show "Survivor" on Thursday and told TV host Regis Philbin he expected to prevail.

Wearing a dark blue shirt and matching solid tie to mimic Philbin's signature attire, Bush promoted his plan to "share some of the surplus with the people who work hard."

"I want you to get some tax relief, Susan, so you can save and dream and build," Bush told co-

"I was fascinated to see who was going to survive. Kind of like me."

George W. Bush, discussing TV show "Survivor"

host Susan Hawk, a cast member of the popular summer television series.

"For me?" asked the former castaway, a Town of Eagle truck driver and a "Survivor" semifinalist. She seemed receptive to Bush's plan to allow workers to separately invest some of their Social Security money in the stock market.

"That's going to be a tough transition, though. But I'm willing to try it," she said.

The Republican presidential nominee's appearance on the widely watched daytime talk show came during a week in which he was actively courting women voters who remain undecided or who are leaning toward Democratic opponent Al Gore.

The show has an estimated audience of 5 million, most of them women. On Tuesday, Bush appeared on the Chicago-based Oprah Winfrey show.

Bush was clearly enjoying the less formal talk-show format and the sometimes unexpected questions that spring forth.

Philbin asked Bush if he had ever watched "Survivor," in which 16 people were stranded on a remote jungle island.

"I did. Coming down the stretch, in particular, I was fascinated to see who was going to survive. Kind of like me," Bush said. He added that he expected to be the political season's survivor.

Of the outspoken Hawk, who interrupted Bush several times, Bush said, "I like her spirit."

"Do you think the best man always wins?" Philbin said.

"I didn't think so in 1992," Bush said, referring to his father's re-election defeat by Bill Clinton and Gore. "The only thing I know to do is just to speak my mind, tell people what's on my heart and just let the chips fall where they may."

Rove said both Bush and running mate Dick Cheney plan upcoming visits. According to an invitation to state Republicans from the Wisconsin Bush for President Finance Committee, Dick and Lynne Cheney are the scheduled guests at another campaign fund-raiser Oct. 2 in Pewaukee.

*Regis
Susan
Hawk*

Rove characterized the Wisconsin race as tight.

"I think it's roughly where the national landscape is, which is a very close race, dead even or up or down a few points, which is great news for us because Wisconsin is a state that Republicans haven't won since '84," he said.

In fact, Wisconsin wasn't seriously contested four years ago by GOP nominee Bob Dole. This year is a much different story, as both parties have spent heavily on television.

While there have been no statewide public surveys since Bush lost his lead in the national polls last month, Wisconsin still is widely perceived as a battleground.

"We believe it's competitive as well," said Gore spokesman Doug Hattaway, who conceded

that Thompson was a political asset to Bush.

"Sure, it helps him to have a governor on his side. That makes our efforts that much more critical to get out the message and turn out the vote," Hattaway said.

Rove argued Thursday that the popularity of Thompson's agenda in the state — especially on such issues as taxes and education — bodes well for Bush's prospects.

"This is a state that understands education reform and likes the Bush message on education. It likes the idea of tax cuts," said Rove, a Texan whose father grew up in the Milwaukee area.

"You clearly have this attitude on Gore's part that all smart things and all good things come from Washington and people in Wisconsin know that isn't true," he said.

"A voucher plan does not an education policy make," countered Gore aide Hattaway, a reference to support by Thompson and Bush for the use of taxpayer money, under certain circumstances, for private school tuition aid.

Hattaway said Gore's appeal to Wisconsin voters would center on his prescription drug plan, targeted tax cuts, "smart investments in education" and paying down the national debt.

"Midwestern people feel like we need to be prudent to keep the economy going and also build on it," said Hattaway, who criticized the size of Bush's proposed tax cut.

Asked about the dates of future visits by Bush and Cheney, Rove said, "I've got three dates, but I've probably told you too much already."