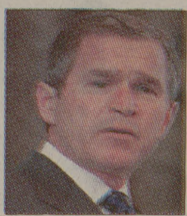


# GOP donor signs on for Bush candidacy

WASHINGTON (AP) — A key GOP fund-raiser among grass-roots conservatives has signed on with Texas Gov. George W. Bush as Republican legislators from three more states urged him Monday to seek the presidency.



BUSH

Jack Oliver, who raised nearly \$3 million last year for Missouri Sen. John Ashcroft, will become Bush's finance director if the governor gets into the race, a Bush ally said Monday.

Oliver, 30, already is working for Bush in Austin.

"He's a supporter of the governor, and he's offered to help, and he's down here to help out, contingent on an announcement about a decision regarding an exploratory committee," Bush spokesperson Mindy Tucker said.

Bush is expected to announce in mid-March he is forming an exploratory campaign committee to test the presidential waters. He already is building a campaign team.

Bush had lunch Monday at the governor's mansion in Austin with Republican State legislators from North Carolina, South Carolina and Connecticut. The governor did not say whether he will run, Monday's visitors all said.

"My gut feeling is that he is going to run," said Patrick Ballantine, GOP leader of the North Carolina Senate.

David Wilkins, speaker of the South Carolina House, gave Bush a letter signed by 59 of the state's 66 Republican House members urging him to run. Wilkins said Bush's message of "compassionate conservatism" and his electoral success in Texas make him a candidate who can reclaim the White House for the GOP.

Connecticut House GOP leader Bob Ward said 90 percent of the Republican

legislators in his state had signed a letter asking Bush to run.

As director of Ashcroft's fund-raising committee, Oliver built an impressive mailing list of more than 120,000 donors from the freshman senator's conservative base.

Ashcroft's performance was considered one of the strongest among those who have dropped out of White House contention. In an interview Monday, the senator said Oliver developed strong ties to conservatives.

"It's certainly fair to say Jack is familiar with that community, and there are certainly people in that community who have a high degree of comfort with Jack," Ashcroft said.

A native of Cape Girardeau, Mo., Oliver was Ashcroft's finance director in his 1994 Senate race and has worked and campaigned for a long line of Missouri Republican politicians.

# Texas Senate takes stab at bill requiring parental piercing approval

AUSTIN (AP) — Parental permission would be required for Texans under 18 to pierce body parts ranging from navels to noses under a bill approved Monday by the Senate.

The bill also would require body-piercing studios to be licensed by the Texas Department of Health, which could charge them a fee and conduct inspections to ensure equipment is sanitary.

Ear-lobe piercing facilities would be exempt.

"I'm pleased that the Senate took a stab at putting a fine point on the regulations for body-piercing establishments in Texas," Lt. Gov. Rick Perry said after the bill won Senate approval, sending it to the House for consideration.

The measure by Sen. Frank Madla, D-

San Antonio, would help ensure that piercing is done as safely as possible, Perry said.

"It also protects children and parents by requiring that those under 18 years of age have permission from a parent before being pierced," he said.

The Health Department last year had 69 complaints regarding body piercing that included unsanitary conditions, inappropriate touching and injuries, according to a bill analysis. Madla has said earlier piercings would be exempt because they have brought few if any complaints.

There are about 500 body piercing studios statewide that would require license and inspection, according to the Health Department. It is estimated about 400 are located in tattoo studios.

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