

Bush just says yes to anti-drug telethon

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ST. PETERSBURG - In a departure from business as usual, Home Shopping Network Inc. will broadcast a six-hour national fund-raiser on Christmas Eve featuring an appearance by President-elect George Bush.

Proceeds from the event will benefit Straight Inc., a drug-rehabilitation program that has St. Petersburg shopping-center developer Mel Sembler as its chairman.

The Straight Holiday Telethon will air from noon to 6 p.m. on cable-television systems that carry Home Shopping's video-retailing program. The fund-raiser will also appear on Home Shopping owned and affiliated UHF broadcast-television stations.

Bush, like many of the other guests on the fund-raiser, will not appear live. The vice president, along with his wife, Barbara, was taped delivering a statement in support of Straight.

Home Shopping decided to run the fund-raiser because drug and alcohol abuse "is a monumental problem that we need to address," said Home Shopping chairman Roy M. Speer. "It's got to start somewhere. We're rewarding Straight."

Ken Yates, president of HSN Entertainment Inc., the Home Shopping subsidiary that is producing the fund-raiser, said President Ronald Reagan has also agreed to be taped for an appearance on the program.

Yates said that a number of other political figures, including Florida Gov. Bob Martinez and U.S. Rep. Connie Mack, who will become Florida's U.S. senator in January, have also agreed to put in taped appearances. Entertainment figures such as Sheena Easton, Carol King and David Crosby will also appear on the fund-raiser.

If the fund-raiser is a success, Speer said, it will be repeated next year and perhaps last longer than the six hours planned.

Bush is no stranger to either Straight or Home Shopping.

Sembler was co-chairman of the finance committee of Bush's Florida campaign and was also a member of the Republican Party's national finance and steering committees. Sembler was in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday in his role as co-chairman of the Presidential Inaugural Committee. As one of the nation's largest fund-raisers on behalf of Bush, Sembler has been cited as a candidate for a post in the new administration.

Home Shopping chairman Speer also plays a role in Republican politics. He was an important Bush backer and, like Sembler, is one of three local figures who will cast an electoral vote for Bush on Dec. 19 in Tallahassee. The third local elector is Joseph Zappala, a St. Petersburg real estate developer who has built projects with Sembler.

Speer denied that Bush's appearance was a return of a favor for the aid given to the vice president's recent campaign.

"I don't owe him nothing and he don't owe me nothing," Speer said. "I supported him and it's nothing more than that."

[Illustration]

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO, (2); Caption: Roy M. Speer; Mel Sembler

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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