

Drug-treatment center 'inspires' Bush in Pinellas

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PINELLAS PARK — Vice President George Bush spent what he called "probably as inspiring a 20 to 30 minutes as Barbara and I have had in our lives" Tuesday at a Pinellas County drug-treatment center.

Bush and his wife had a front-row seat at Straight Inc. as young people who have kicked drug habits detailed how the drug-rehabilitation program changed their lives. The young people were joined by their parents at the meeting.

"I don't see why there's a dry eye in the house," Bush said, after witnessing the group-treatment session.

Bush stopped at Straight Inc., which was visited by first lady Nancy Reagan in 1982, as part of a two-day Florida campaign trip.

Raising \$500,000 in campaign money was the chief goal of Bush's trip. But the vice president's staff also sprinkled the Florida visit with guaranteed attention-getters such as the Straight Inc. stop.

"I'm trying to raise a bunch of money," Bush admits, saying he will probably spend at least \$12 million,

plus an equal amount of federal matching money, in seeking the presidency.

An early Florida visit also was important to Bush because the vice president said Florida and Texas will be the most important states on so-called "Super Tuesday", March 8, 1988, when 15 states, most in the South, will hold their presidential primaries.

Bush spoke for less than three minutes at Straight Inc., and it was the only one of his campaign events Tuesday that was open to press scrutiny. Fund-raisers in Palm Beach and at the Belleview Biltmore Hotel in Belleair were closed.

But the vice president made the most of his opportunity, with television cameras trained on his every move during the Straight Inc. program.

A crowd that consisted of parents of youths in the program and public officials such as U.S. Rep. Michael Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor, and St. Petersburg Mayor Ed Cole Jr. applauded when Bush praised the "unsung heroes" who are trying to stop the flow of drugs into the United States.

See **BUSH**, Page 5B

Bush

• From Page 1B

"Without sounding conceited about it, we have done a good job" of interdicting drugs, Bush said, referring to law enforcement task forces that have been established to curb drug trafficking.

But, Bush said, "it's (the drug problem) got to be solved by what we've seen here today. By faith, by love of family, and by young people determined to just say no.

"Happiness lives in faith and in family," Bush said.

Bush also seized a chance to take a political shot at Florida Democratic Sen. Lawton Chiles, who the Republicans want to oust in 1988.

Praising the courage of a 16-year-old youth named Todd for discussing his drug problems in front of the crowd, Bush implied he could be a budding politician and said, "I tell you to get up and talk like that. You better watch out. Sen. Lawton Chiles, beware."

Todd, who said he's been in the Straight program 28 days, said he considers himself an addict. But the youth said his life is changing and his goal is to go back to high school,

graduate and go on to college.

A parade of participants in the program also included a 20-year-old reformed drug user named Andy, who is studying for an accounting examination at the University of South Florida, and a couple who said they thought they had lost their son before putting him in the Straight program. The mother said she felt her son was going to end up in jail or dead.

After leaving Straight Inc., Bush attended the Belleair fund-raiser, which was arranged by a committee that included developer Mel Sembler and investor Joe Zappala,

Those paying \$1,000-a-person to attend the luncheon were served gazpacho, lobster and shrimp salad, cantaloupe, garlic bread and key lime pie.

There also was a cocktail reception during which the guests met and had their photographs taken with Bush.

Those attending the closed luncheon said Bush spoke for about 15 minutes and among other things said he hopes the controversy over the arms sale to Iran and the support of the Contras was over so President Reagan could get back to running the nation.