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Evening Edition

Perry goes New Age when it comes to personal health

Texas Gov. Rick Perry often channels his macho side, but he has a definite New Age bent when it comes to his personal health: diet and exercise, antioxidant fruit drinks for energy, experimental stem cell treatments for back problems.

Perry edged into the presidential race this summer in orthopedic shoes because of back problems. His poor first debate appearance made some wonder whether he was in pain.

His confused query of opponent Mitt Romney in the third debate led to musings about whether he was medicated. The campaign blamed it on lack of sleep.

Then there was a strangely animated speech last week in New Hampshire that had comedians claiming Perry was intoxicated. Jon Stewart of Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" said Perry looked "hammered." On MSNBC's "Morning Joe" on Monday, the hosts suggested Perry might have mixed painkillers for his back with alcohol.

Perry told the San Francisco Chronicle that he was neither drunk nor on drugs. "I've probably given 1,000 speeches. There are some that have been probably boring, some that have been animated, some that have been in between," Perry said.

Because some of Perry's trouble on the presidential campaign trail has been caused by showcase performances that led to questions about whether he is on painkillers, the American-Statesman requested a copy of his medical record from the campaign.

Spokeswoman Catherine Frazier declined, saying, "We'll give that proper consideration at the appropriate time." Perry has a long history of promoting physical health, and some of it has been more New Age alternative than small-town West Texas.

During his 1994 campaign for re-election as Texas agriculture commissioner, Perry was featured in a newsletter promoting an antioxidant and fat metabolizer product called Youngevity. "Instantly my energy level was higher, and I needed less sleep," Perry wrote.

"I'm campaigning this summer and fall with George W. Bush in the rural areas of the state as he seeks the governorship. Yesterday, I mentioned to him and his staff that they all need to be on Youngevity products."

Perry concluded by saying, "My wife says don't ever run out of this product."

Perry got to know Youngevity founder Craig Keeland through Texas A&M University classmate Phil Adams, who was one of Keeland's early investors.

Keeland has since sold Youngevity and as an outgrowth in 2003 launched a new company, ViaViente Global, that sells a Whole Food Puree named ViaViente, which also is an antioxidant to provide more energy. Perry still uses Keeland's product, which is described like this on the company website:

"The idea of ViaViente began in 1991 when company President and Founder Craig Keeland asked, 'How can we live younger longer and in a state of youthfulness?' His quest took him deep into the heart of the rainforest, high in the Andes Mountains to the Vilcabamba Valley where 1 in 64 people live to be over 100 years of age (as compared to 1 in 7,000 in the US)."

Keeland said he and Perry share a deep Christian faith and a love for health and fitness. He said there is nothing strange about his product.

"We just take the best of what the Lord has put here in the fruits and minerals," Keeland said. "One ounce is the equivalent of antioxidant servings of five fruits and vegetables every day."

Asked whether Perry should continue using his product on the campaign trail, Keeland replied: "It would give him a longer sustained energy. It would give him a higher antioxidant value, and it would go toward mitigating any aches and pains he might have because of the schedule."

Pain has been something of a problem for Perry. He had arthroscopic knee surgery in 2001 and 2010.

Then in July, Perry underwent a spinal

fusion and nerve decompression that involved a controversial experimental treatment using his own adult stem cells to help him heal faster.

The procedure, which has not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, was done to alleviate what Perry aides have described as a recurring back injury.

That surgery led to continuing questions about whether he is suffering pain. Perry has denied it, telling the San Francisco Chronicle on Thursday that he ran that morning and is not taking any pain medication.

Immediately after the surgery, Perry wore a combination of running/orthopedic shoes instead of his cowboy boots. But the boots have returned. He also was stretching and swimming instead of running, but in late September he told reporters on Mackinac Island, Mich., that he was back to jogging.

Paul Carrozza, Perry's longtime running buddy and co-founder of the RunTex running stores, said this week that Perry has fully recovered.

"Rick has had a speedy recovery from his back surgery and is able to run again," Carrozza said. "I know being able to run will help him on the campaign trail."

Perry in 2008 explained that he took up running about a decade before because he was losing sleep and energy. "I found myself struggling with sleeplessness about 10 years ago, battling insomnia that I figured was caused by the challenges of my job," Perry said.

A friend suggested he start running. "The first couple of runs left me a little sore, but I found myself sleeping better, more energetic during the day and anxious to start my next run," Perry said. "I have been running regularly ever since and can personally attest to the benefits of increased physical activity."

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