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## Huckabee's tenure as governor saw many gifts bestowed upon Arkansas official

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WASHINGTON | If friends or admirers are considering a Christmas gift for suddenly surging Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, here are few things he might not need:

Custom-made cowboy boots; a canoe; fishing rods and tackle; a gun for him (\$800); a gun for his wife, Janet Huckabee (\$450); his-and-her watches (\$595 each); and an all-expenses-paid trip to Las Vegas to see a prize fight.

Those items — and hundreds more adding up to tens of thousands of dollars — have already been lavished on Huckabee and his family during his decade in relative obscurity as governor of Arkansas.

Now the inventory of gifts is filling in details as well as raising questions about Huckabee, who has sprinted from the back of the pack just weeks before the first primary balloting.

"Most governors in this day and age become much more circumspect in what they accept, if only to avoid the appearance of impropriety," said Kirk Jowers, who specializes in political law at the Washington, D.C., firm of Caplin & Drysdale.

In an interview, Huckabee's family attorney, Kevin Crass, said: "Despite 300-plus gifts and years of attacks against him by the (Arkansas Ethics) Commission, not one gift was deemed to have been received improperly" and added that at most "there were a couple of instances where there was an inadvertent omission" in the reporting.

Crass said that he once donated a modest amount of his annual legal fees to Huckabee.

Huckabee, the second most famous politician to come out of tiny Hope, Ark., birthplace of former President Bill Clinton, vigorously defends the gifts, which are cataloged in reports to the Arkansas Ethics Commission.

"I was never, ever found having received an illegal gift," Huckabee said this week on CNN's "Larry King Live."

Huckabee, who faced 20 complaints in the Ethics Commission on various gift and campaign funding issues, said the cases were brought "by editors of papers who were writing stories, or activists within the Democrat Party, or my political opponents." The complaints resulted in modest fines or reprimands in five cases.

Huckabee fought back against the complaints and frequently won ethics battles, as when he was accused of taking an illegal gratuity by accepting a \$500 canoe from a local Coca-Cola bottling company and also of failing to report the gift of a \$200 stadium blanket in 2001.

He appealed an adverse ruling by the Ethics Commission and won a court ruling declaring the canoe, which had the words "Coke, Arkansas and You," was not an illegal gift.

At the same time, the court upheld a reprimand for the failure to report the blanket on time. Huckabee said the flap was "a foolish thing" based on a misunderstanding over whether the handmade gift's value was enough to require disclosure.

Huckabee's gift disclosures draw a portrait of an avid outdoorsman who received not only fishing and hunting gear but also the use of private lodges and cabins, as well as free use of a motorboat with free supplies and fuel.

Both Huckabees were given airfare by charities. Several churches and religious groups paid to have

Huckabee, an ordained Baptist minister, attend and speak at conferences. The Christian Coalition in 1997 footed the bill to bring him to Atlanta for a conference.

In 1999, Janet Huckabee received \$23,000 for her inaugural wardrobe from medical lab entrepreneur Jennings Osborne and his family. Osborne touts his ties with famous friends and politicians.

The governor reported gifts of suits and shoes in addition to more than \$19,000 for clothes from Osborne in 1999 alone, as well as free eye care and eyewear, free car repairs, free fuel, gift certificates to Wal-Mart, movie passes and 50 percent off any meals at Wendy's.

#### **Some Huckabee gifts**

- Custom-made cowboy boots, \$3,695
- Use of fishing boat, \$2,500 per year
- Gift certificate in 2001 from the governor's Cabinet, \$3,600
- Pendant for Janet Huckabee, \$2,000
- Cashmere and fox cape for Janet Huckabee, \$795
- Cuff links for governor, \$2,000
- Bass guitar, \$350

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