

## **LEAVITT FAMILY FINDS LITTLE TO SALVAGE AS THEY SIFT THROUGH BELONGINGS**

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Gov. Mike Leavitt returned to the burned-out interior of the Governor's Mansion Thursday to sift through the family's smoke-damaged belongings but found that little could be salvaged.

The governor; his wife, Jacalyn; and their five children spent the night in a hotel room after hastily shopping for a few new outfits as well as toothbrushes and other personal items. Their home - one of the state's most treasured historic buildings - was extensively damaged in a fire late Wednesday morning that was started by lights strung around the 25-foot Christmas tree placed in the mansion's open center.

The Leavitts' tour Thursday confirmed the family's fears that the fire had severely damaged most of their clothes and other personal belongings on the second-floor living quarters. "Everything is covered with soot and has severe smoke damage," the governor said.

His spokeswoman, Vicki Varela, said Thursday that few of the family's possessions would be salvaged. "It doesn't look good at all," she said, citing smoke and heat damage to almost everything the Leavitts had at the mansion.

The family did lose all of their Christmas packages to fire, except for a yellow tractor purchased for 3-year-old Westin and hidden in the carriage house behind the mansion.

But the family appeared calm and upbeat at a press conference shortly after the fire. The only time the governor seemed about to give into his emotions was when he was asked about Christmas.

"We're going to have Christmas. We're all together," he said. "We're very grateful and feeling rather blessed." Jacalyn Leavitt repeated the same sentiment several times.

The first lady was home with Westin when the fire started. The Leavitts and the two staff members also in the mansion were momentarily trapped when the vacuum created by the fire sealed a door shut.

"I was the first one to the back door. I tried to open it and couldn't," Jacalyn Leavitt recalled calmly just a few hours later. Members of the work crews in the mansion to test the fire alarm and security system were able to tug open the door, and everyone escaped safely.

The first lady and her youngest child were quickly joined by the governor and the four older children, who were picked up at their schools by Utah Highway Patrol troopers and rushed to the scene.

The family comforted one another privately at the Utah Arts Council before the governor and 10-year-old Chase took a brief tour of the mansion and emerged with two of the governor's suits and a pair of basketball shoes autographed by Utah Jazz star Karl Malone.

Leavitt tried to make light of the fire during his budget speech before Utah legislators Wednesday evening. "When you face something like this, you seem to find your priorities. My 10-year-old boy was most worried about his Karl Malone-auto-graphed basketball shoes and his baseball card collection.

``He kept asking the firefighters as they came out if they'd seen them. My thoroughly Republican 16-year-old son was most worried about his autographed picture of Bill Clinton. I'll have to talk to him about that."

After his tour of the mansion, 16-year-old Michael Jr. wondered who had closed his bedroom door, or if the back-draft of the intense fire had slammed it shut. ``You didn't close it, the fire didn't close it," his mother said. ``I closed it in the morning (before the fire). You didn't make your bed."

The governor's office has received hundreds of calls since the fire, offering everything from condolences to help replacing Christmas gifts and places to stay, receptionist Doris Christensen said. Governors from Nevada, Mississippi and other states who saw news reports of the fire, also called.

``Once they started, they were just coming in faster than I could take them," Christensen said.

State work crews were on the scene late into the night Wednesday, boarding up the broken windows while a steady stream of onlookers drove past the eerie, darkened mansion.

Insurance adjusters have already begun assessing the damage, which could exceed the state's self-insurance plan's \$1 million limit. The state has an insurance policy to pick up any additional cost, according to Alan Edwards, state risk manager.

Leavitt, an executive in the family's insurance company, has a personal policy to cover the loss of personal belongings.