

Non-Candidates Christie, Daniels Loom Over Presidential Race

By Terrence Dopp - Sep 22, 2011

Governors [Chris Christie](#) of [New Jersey](#) and [Mitch Daniels](#) of Indiana have ruled themselves out of the 2012 race for the White House. Yet both Republicans are keeping themselves in the public eye.

Daniels, 62, a two-term governor who was a budget director for President [George W. Bush](#), released a book this week entitled "Keeping the Republic: Saving America by Trusting Americans." Christie, 49, is the subject of a \$1.5 million television [ad campaign](#) by a children's advocacy group touting his 20 months in office.

Today, the men appeared at [Rider University](#) in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and said the current crop of Republican presidential candidates must take a harder line on issues such as federal entitlement spending and debt.

"I hope in some small way through things like this, and maybe more to the point in the way we perform our duties in our respective states, it will embolden some of our national candidates to do something similar," Daniels said. "I'd like to think, whether it's by example or encouragement like we just gave, that some of them will take note."

Daniels announced in May he wouldn't challenge President [Barack Obama](#) because his wife, Cheri Herman Daniels, and four daughters were opposed. Christie has said repeatedly he won't seek the office, even though he told the National Review in March: "I already know I could win."

Both governors have been critical of current hopefuls. Daniels said this month in a New York Times interview that a Republican might still enter the race with a chance to win the nomination. Republicans running, including former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, have courted Christie's endorsement.

Voter Dissatisfaction

Christie took office last year as the first Republican elected governor in New Jersey since 1997. He defeated incumbent Democrat [Jon Corzine](#) in the 2009 race as he rode voter dissatisfaction over the state's high property taxes and sluggish economy. The victory was only the second time in recent history a sitting New Jersey governor lost a general election.

Both Christie and Daniels said they sense similar voter discord with [Washington](#), where they said politicians need to address spending on entitlements such as Medicare and Social Security.

Daniels said today he hopes the Republican nominee doesn't "play it safe," given Obama's political vulnerability.

"My one question right now is, who will step out a little more with specifics and speak a little more boldly both about the urgency of our national situation and the best set of answers as they see it to address these problems," Daniels said.

Shaping the Debate

The New Jersey governor said even though he and Daniels aren't running, they need to shape the debate in Washington in a way current candidates aren't.

"We're not talking about -- on our side or any of the folks -- these things in a forthright way," Christie said during the joint appearance. "They're dancing around on other stuff and just trying to get four or five sound bites."

Republicans including Kenneth Langone, co-founder of Home Depot Inc., have urged Christie to enter the race. The executive has helped increase out-of-state donations to New Jersey's [Republican Party](#) by more than 10 times this year. All 120 members of the state Legislature stand for re-election in 2011.

Christie said today that those asking him to run aren't the ones who will "wake up alone at 5 a.m. in a Des Moines hotel room when it's 15 below and you have to go greet voters at a meat-packing plant."

Political Speculation

Speculation about Christie's political future was rekindled this week when the [Committee for Our Children's Future](#), an independent organization based in [Basking Ridge](#), New Jersey, began a \$1.5 million television ad campaign promoting the governor's efforts to cut spending and balance the state's budget.

"Governor Christie is certainly an ambitious guy and there's no question that he sees himself somewhere else eventually," said David Redlawsk, director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at [Rutgers University](#). "The underlying question of course, is whether he's trying to position himself this time around. I don't see that as a possibility."

The [Indiana](#) governor has said he wants to continue influencing public policy, and that his book, released Sept. 19, is part of that effort.

It fits Daniels's personality to influence events and "not have to be the public face of what happens," said Margaret Ferguson, chairman of the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis political science department.

Eric Holcomb, who was Daniels's campaign manager and deputy chief of staff before becoming chairman of the Indiana State Republican Party in January, said he expects that Daniels "would be on anyone's shortlist" to be a Republican presidential running mate in 2012.

"At this point," he said, "it's just fantasy to contemplate that."

To contact the reporter on this story: Terrence Dopp in Trenton at tdopp@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Mark Tannenbaum at mtannen@bloomberg.net