

Texas Governor Perry launches 2012 presidential bid
The Sun Daily
August 13, 2011

HARLESTON, S.C.(Aug 13, 2011): Republican Rick Perry (pix), the conservative governor of Texas, on Saturday declared himself a candidate for US president with a blistering attack on Democratic President Barack Obama.

"I realize that the United States of America really is the last great hope of mankind," Perry said, as he accused Obama of imperiling America's standing in the world with "disastrous economic policies" and the "incoherent muddle that they call foreign policy."

Delivering a speech to about 200 voters at a backyard cocktail party in the key primary state of New Hampshire, Perry, 61, touted his job creation record in Texas and promised to reduce taxes, business regulations and the overall role of government in people's lives.

He said leaders in Washington have lacked courage and Obama's "tax and spend and borrow agenda" had led to the downgrade of the U.S. credit rating.

Perry flew to New Hampshire after talking to 700 conservative activists in South Carolina, another state that hosts one of the first primary contests in 2012.

"Mr. President, let us tell you something. You cannot win the future by selling America off to foreign creditors. We cannot afford four more years of this rudderless leadership," Perry said.

Perry's entry shakes up the race for the Republican nomination to face Obama in the November 2012 general election.

Opinion polls indicate Perry is already close on the heels of former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, the early Republican front-runner.

Perry, who caused a stir in 2009 when he openly pondered his state's secession from the United States, was sharply critical of what he called an overbearing federal government.

"As Americans we realize that there is no taxpayer money that wasn't first earned by the sweat and toil of one of our citizens," said Perry, drawing a loud round of cheers and applause from the hundreds of people who packed into a Charleston hotel to hear him speak.

"That's why we reject this president's unbridled fixation on taking more money out of wallets and pocketbooks of American families and employers and giving it to a central government," he said.

"Spreading the wealth punishes success while setting America on course for greater dependency on government."

Perry's candidacy could steal support from fellow conservative Tea Party favorite Michele Bachmann, replacing her as Romney's top rival and potentially bridging the gap between the party's establishment center and right-wing activists.

'DOWNGRADING OUR STANDING'

The three-term Texas governor is an opponent of abortion rights and gay marriage. He is seen as a strong fund-raiser.

Perry seized on the fact that the U.S. credit rating was downgraded this month by a leading rating agency following the contentious deal to raise the U.S. debt ceiling this month.

"The fact is for nearly three years President Obama has been downgrading American jobs, he's been downgrading our standing in the world, he's been downgrading our financial stability, he's been downgrading our confidence and downgrading the hope for a better future for our children," Perry said.

He also blasted Obama's foreign policy.

"Our president has insulted our friends and he's encouraged our enemies, thumbing his nose at traditional allies like Israel," Perry said.

The announcement by Perry, who has made his deep Christian faith a big part of his public image, came one week after he led a seven-hour religious rally in Houston to pray for America, a nation he described as "in crisis."

He put his religious faith on display on Saturday in South Carolina, but in New Hampshire, where social conservatives have traditionally fared poorly in the Republican primary, he made only a passing reference to his faith and focused on economic issues.

Perry said his state has "the strongest economy in the nation" and that since June 2009 Texas, home to less than 10 percent of the U.S. population, has been responsible for more than 40 percent of all of the new jobs created in America.

Patty Pafford, 37, of Greenland, New Hampshire said she would consider supporting Perry because of the failure of Washington to manage the country's finances.

"It's so out of control," she said. "I think he has a legitimate chance."

Perry could draw comparisons to George W. Bush, the last Texas governor in the White House, raising the possibility of "Texas fatigue" among voters.

That also could hurt him in New Hampshire, which has shown a reluctance to support candidates from the South.

"I would hope his being from Texas wouldn't hurt him," said Diane Rogers, a 54-year-old pre-school teacher from Greenland. "But I think it could."

Raised on a west Texas farm, Perry has never lost an election.

After a stint in the Air Force, he rose through the ranks of Texas politics from the House of Representatives to agriculture commissioner, lieutenant governor and then governor in 2000 when Bush left for the White House. -- Reuters

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