

## Chris Christie Delivers an Electrifying Speech, but He's No Conservative Savior Time.com

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By [Michael Crowley](#)

Despite the entreaties of wealthy Republican donors and reporters yearning for a hot new storyline, Chris Christie [looks like](#) he's [not going to run](#) for President. Speaking at the Reagan library in California on Tuesday night, Christie delivered a crowd-pleasing address complaining that President Obama had failed to meet his promise and that America needs new leadership to restore its greatness. "This is not a leadership style, this is a re-election strategy," he said of the current administration's stewardship. "What happened to State Senator Obama? When did he decide to become one of the 'dividers' he spoke of so eloquently in 2004?"

Christie gave no sign that he actually intends to run. When an audience member posed the question, he declined to issue a straight-forward denial, but referred to an online [video montage](#) of the countless ways he's ruled out a White House bid in the past. "Those are the answers," he said. And why would he run? However weak the Republican field may look right now, ChristieMania has always been out of sync with his true prospects as a Republican primary candidate.

The problem for Christie is that he's a moderate in a party with little taste for moderation. From a distance, that may not be clear. Everyone knows that Christie's blunt and tough, happy to [tell off](#) his critics with raw Jersey attitude. He's also taken on public employee unions and slashed his Democratic-leaning state's budget by \$3 billion without raising taxes. He's avowedly [pro-life](#) and [opposes](#) gay marriage. He thinks "Jersey Shore" is [idiotic](#).

But it wouldn't be long before conservative voters came to learn about candidate Christie's many conservative heresies. On illegal immigration, for instance, Christie has [called for](#) "an orderly process... for people to gain citizenship," and groused about "demagoguery" on the issue. He supported the federal assault weapons ban, and in 2009 his campaign [called it](#) a "lie" for Democrats say that Christie "stands with" the National Rifle Association. He has [praised](#) Obama's education reform agenda, calling Education Secretary Arne Duncan "a great ally" on the issue. Christie has [also said](#) he believes human activity "plays a contributing role" in global warming (though [he did](#) pull New Jersey out of a regional cap-and-trade system), and that he "[couldn't agree more](#)" with President Obama's emphasis on green energy. Christie even [bashed](#) his 2009 opponent, Democratic governor John Corzine, for not delivering subsidies to the state's solar power manufacturers—a particularly awkward position given the GOP's fixation with the Solyndra bankruptcy.

Last, and certainly not least, is perhaps the most emotional issue for conservatives: Islam and the war on terror. On this score, Christie sounds practically like a liberal blogger. Last summer he chided opponents of the Ground Zero mosque for "[overreacting](#)" to the threat of Islamic terrorism. He [appointed](#) a state judge who is a Muslim, and denounced people who worry about creeping Sharia law in America as "[crazies](#)."

Think about that last comment in the context of conservative anger at Rick Perry for suggesting that anyone who opposes tuition breaks for the children of illegal immigrants doesn't "have a heart." The conservatives activists who seem most interested—apart from Chris Christie's friends, and national political reporters—in finding a substitute candidate are sure to loathe his record. Christie's only real hope would be to draw moderate voters away from Mitt Romney. Most likely, the two men would split the

party's relatively small pool of moderates, allowing Perry to gallop to an easy win. A Christie candidacy would be the best thing that could happen to Perry. (Though he did take a swipe at Perry's support for in-state-college tuition for some illegal immigrants on Tuesday night.)

No wonder many of the people most eager for Christie to run seem to be wealthy New York-area Republicans with little connection to their party's conservative-populist base. The New York *Times* [identifies](#) two of Christie's most ardent backers as the hedge fund mogul Paul Singer and Home Depot Founder Ken Langone, two billionaires who [both supported](#) Rudy Giuliani's 2008 campaign. The group also includes Daniel Loeb, who supported Barack Obama before growing disenchanted with the President's posture on Wall Street.

In many ways Giuliani is a good point of comparison. Rudy, too, was a blunt-talking tough guy who hammered through his agenda on hostile Democratic turf. Rudy was also far more moderate than his party. His Wall Street Republican supporters focused on the former point and overlooked the latter. The result was the Giuliani 2008 campaign, one of the [greatest disasters](#) in political history. And since Rudy's '08 bid, the Republican party has only grown more hostile to wish-washy collaborators. Should he stun everyone by diving into the race, Chris Christie might fare less dismally than Rudy. But there's plenty of reason to doubt whether he could win the 2012 Republican nomination.

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