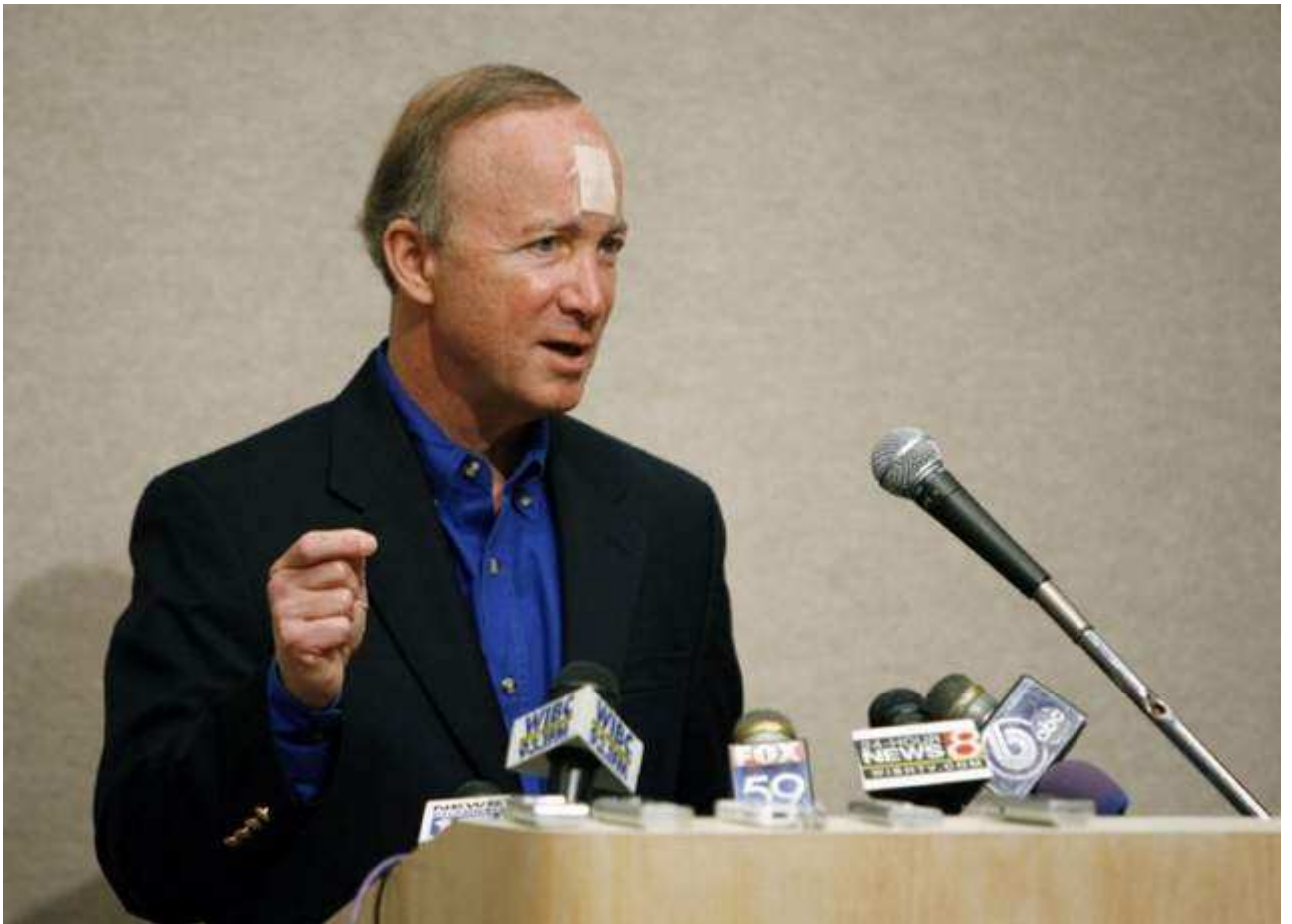


Presidential bid rejected, Mitch Daniels takes part in financial summit

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Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels addresses the room during a press conference after Indiana's Education Roundtable at IUPUI Conference Center in Indianapolis, Tuesday, May 24, 2011. Two days ago Daniels announced he will not run for president in 2012. (AP Photo/The Star, Danese Kenon) / Danese Kenon/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Written by

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WASHINGTON — Less than a week after deciding not to seek the GOP nomination for president, Gov. Mitch Daniels participated Wednesday in a summit on the nation's shaky finances, the issue that would've been the centerpiece of his campaign.

But the national political reporters who swarmed Daniels when he spoke on education at a Washington, D.C., think tank earlier this month were listening instead to presidential hopeful Tim Pawlenty talk at the Cato Institute about shrinking the federal government.

A gaggle of reporters, which included an Al Jazeera reporter and some who cover fiscal issues, did approach Daniels after his event.

“It's good to have it behind me,” Daniels said of his decision not to run.

Asked how he can get his message out now that he's rejected a bid, Daniels said he'll “try in a modest way to make these points and try to further public understanding.”

A book he's written on the issue comes out this fall.

“That might give me a little chance to go around and speak about it,” Daniels said. “Maybe two or three people will actually buy the thing.”

At the fiscal summit, Daniels answered questions posed by conservative commentator George Will, who is a Daniels fan.

Will said Daniels' decision not to run because his wife and daughters were against it reminded Will of the late political reporter David Broder's rule that “anyone who will do what you have to do to become president shouldn't be allowed to be president.”

“We respect as much as we regret your recent decision,” Will told Daniels.

Daniels' prescription for fixing the nation's finances includes revamping Social Security and Medicare for future recipients, rewriting the tax code, and examining all aspects of federal spending, including defense spending.

The summit was held a day after Democrats picked up a House seat in a special election in New York in a race many regarded as a referendum on House Republicans' plans to restructure Medicare.

Daniels said that race wasn't necessarily a sign of how his own message would have fared had he decided to run.

“Who knows? I think first of all you need to avoid dividing that coalition that sees the need for change,” Daniels said. “Secondly, I don't know how active and aggressive and affirmative the case was made for saving the safety net. I suspect it wasn't as aggressive as it can be and will need to be.”

Daniels said Americans shouldn't be blamed for their apparent reluctance to deal with the nation's deficit through measures that include restructuring Medicare and Social Security.

“Most of them have never been told the facts. No one has explained to them that the current system leads to plundering the next generation,” Daniels said. “But I honestly believe that we can as a republic deal with these issues before the worst happens.”