

The Washington Post

What about Jeb?

By Jennifer Rubin
February 25, 2014

As the mainstream media aim their fire at New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, another potential 2016 GOP candidate has the luxury of sailing above the fray.

[CNN reports:](#)

[Former Florida Governor Jeb] Bush, the featured guest Monday at the Long Island Association's biannual luncheon, a popular stop for former presidents and White House hopefuls, was asked about the recent comments from his mother. Former first lady Barbara Bush told CSPAN that "there's no question in my mind that Jeb is the best-qualified person to run for president, but I hope he won't," adding that "there are other families," who deserve a chance.

"It's an issue for sure," Bush admitted.

Bush told the story of sitting next to a man on a plane who talked about having a Bush and a Clinton and then a Bush in the White House, with the prospect of another Clinton and Bush to come.

Bush said "I get the point. It's something that, if I run, I would have to overcome that. And so will Hillary, by the way. Let's keep the same standards for everybody."

The remarks suggest that the "Bush" problem, at least in Jeb's eyes, is reduced so long as Hillary Clinton is the presumptive Democratic nominee. That is one factor weighing in favor of a Bush run in 2016, but it will take more than that.

The overwhelming sense one gets from talking to Bush confidantes, GOP operatives and big donors is that if top-tier, mainstream Republicans such as a bridge-recovered New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie or Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) run, Bush won't. He is obviously not someone who has been pining for the presidency and, consequently, most observers believe, he'd have to be prevailed upon to run. (Ironically this is how Christie almost got into the race in 2012; a large cadre of donors came to implore him to run.) Bush is focused on a set of policy initiatives — primarily education and immigration reform — he thinks are critical for the country and the GOP.

Although seen now as a “moderate,” he was a fiscally conservative governor. In 2006, the [Cato Institute](#) wrote, “Jeb Bush leaves office with a well-deserved reputation as one of the most aggressive tax-cutting governors in the nation. He has proposed and signed into law a tax cut virtually every year of his tenure, ranging from cuts in property taxes to a phaseout of the intangibles tax — a levy on certain financial assets like stocks s tax code hostile to capital formation. It is the strength of his tax cutting that has sustained his grade through the past eight years. . . .”

Like some on the right seeking a revitalization of the party, e.g. Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), his current concerns transcend budgets, deficits and spending. If there is no one carrying the reform banner with a realistic chance of winning the nomination, Bush is much more likely to run.

The results in 2014 midterm may also influence his decision. A wipe-out of far-right candidates (of the type who detest the “compassionate conservative” image that got George W. Bush elected twice) would signal a shift in the party toward more compatible terrain for him.

Developments on the international scene also may play a role. As our international standing deteriorates and President Obama continues to shrink from projecting U.S. power and defending U.S. values, the desire for an internationally minded grown-up as commander in chief will increase. (Here the real question is whether Sen. Marco Rubio can overcome his gravitas deficit.) Throughout his tenure as governor and beyond, Jeb Bush has stressed improved ties and trade with democratic countries in our hemisphere. Rebuilding defense, enhancing trade and reiterating America’s support for free people may again become the uncontested formula for conservative foreign policy — not a message a Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) or governors with little interest in or experience with foreign policy are likely to project.

I’d still put chances of a Jeb Bush run at less than 50-50. But events may weigh in favor of a Bush run. Obama’s foreign policy reminds us of the follies of isolationism. The GOP’s search for an affirmative, people-oriented agenda reminds voters that being against Obamaism is not enough to garner an national electoral majority. In short, if no other credible mainstream candidate looks capable of winning the nomination, Jeb Bush will come under tremendous pressure to run.