



Washington think tank president wooing Maryland Gov. Hogan to run against Trump for president

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he president of a Washington think tank said he's been pushing Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan for weeks to explore a Republican Party primary challenge to President Donald Trump in 2020.

Jerry Taylor, the founder of the Niskanen Center in Washington, said in an interview with The Baltimore Sun that he's been trying to persuade Hogan to run — and the governor hasn't turned him down.

“The increasing interest on Governor Hogan's part in what's going on in Washington, D.C., is encouraging,” said Taylor, a former senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute. “It's clear to me he's been thinking about it more than in the past. But he hasn't made any decision yet.”

A day after his second inauguration as governor, Hogan said he intended to finish his four-year term.

“That is certainly the plan at this point, but you never know what's going to happen,” Hogan said Thursday.

After taking the oath of office Wednesday, Hogan used his inaugural address to urge a different direction for the GOP. While he did not mention Trump by name, Hogan denounced the state of American politics in Washington, where the federal government is partially shut down over Trump's demands for a border wall.

Hogan invited former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush — who has called Trump a “loser,” “liar” and “whiner” — to introduce him Wednesday. Bush told the crowd that Hogan is a model for the rest of the country.

“I think Governor Larry Hogan is the best example in public life today to less coarsen our culture,” said Bush, the son and brother of former presidents.

Hogan is the just the second GOP governor in state history to win re-election and is vice chairman of the National Governors Association.

He said that just because he's talking more about national politics doesn't mean he's going to run for national office.

“I said right after the election that I was going to take more of a role in national politics,” Hogan said. “I’m becoming chair of the National Governors Association. I’m the chair-elect and the vice chair currently, so in that role I have an obligation to represent all 50 governors and I’m going to be more visible.”

“The things I said yesterday are nothing new,” the governor said. “I’ve been saying those same things for at least a decade, about my frustrations with Washington, about civility and about the fact that I think we ought to be reaching across the aisle and working together to get things done.”

The governor said the dysfunction in Washington is merely providing a new backdrop for his long-held beliefs.

“In the context of today’s world, maybe it sounded like earth-shattering kinds of things, but you know, a lot of that stuff I said four years ago in my speech, and I’ve said it every time,” Hogan said. “I just got sworn in, 24 hours ago, I think, so I’m going to focus on that for right now and have no further interest at this point in time. I’m not ready to make any announcements today, let’s put it that way.”

Taylor isn’t giving up.

He said Thursday that he wants Hogan to run with “every fiber of my being.”

The center, which says it advocates for a variety of issues based on “market principles,” is named after the late William A. Niskanen, a former economic adviser to then-President Ronald Reagan. It was founded in 2014 as a nonprofit organization and describes itself as moderate and nonpartisan.

Taylor said his organization advocates for the Republican Party to move away from “Dixiecrat” values and toward “center-right” policies, such as the social safety net and greater health care coverage. It released a report last month that advocated for adopting a model of a “free-market welfare state.”

New York Times columnist David Brooks praised the center in a piece last month as “one of the most creative think tanks in America today.” On Friday, Brooks tweeted: “I’m not sure any of the Dem presidential hopefuls are well positioned to take on the Republican nominee, Larry Hogan.”

In December, Hogan spoke at a conference called “Starting Over: The Center-Right After Trump” held by the Niskanen Center that featured several anti-Trump Republicans. Taylor met Hogan for lunch last week in Annapolis and attended the governor’s inaugural gala Wednesday night at the MGM Casino in Prince George’s County.

“We’re getting to know one another,” Taylor said. “We see politics and the state of the party in the same fashion.”

Chris Carr, political director for the Trump 2020 campaign, said the incumbent president is ramping up a formidable re-election effort.

“Any potential challenger should understand that the Trump campaign is better organized than any campaign in history, especially with the support of the Republican Party, which is firmly behind this president,” Carr said in a statement.

Political analysts interviewed by The Sun this week theorized that a Hogan primary challenge to Trump would fail — one described it as a “fool’s errand.”

But Taylor predicts the GOP base might begin to leave Trump by 2020 amid a federal investigation into his administration, continued gridlock in Washington and an economy that could take a downward turn.

“The political terrain next year is going to look a lot different than it does today,” Taylor said. “Strong contrasts work well for candidates. What is the exact opposite of Donald Trump? Larry Hogan is almost made to order here. He actually has a governing agenda that could appeal to the Republican base in a way Donald Trump can’t.”

Taylor described Hogan, Ohio Gov. John Kasich and Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker — all favorites of the “Never Trump” movement for their centrist leanings — as the best options to set a new direction for the Republican Party. But he said he hasn’t spoken to either Kasich or Baker about running.

“Ideas, if they are to have any political purchase, need to have political banner carriers,” Taylor said.