

## Christie's Out. Now Who for GOP Fiscal Conservatives, Romney?

**New Jersey governor's backers may stay on the fence, for now**

By [Alex M. Parker](#)

October 4, 2011

For the umpteenth time, New Jersey Chris Christie confirmed Tuesday afternoon that he's not going to enter the presidential race. That wasn't much of a shock. Christie has repeatedly said that he doesn't feel the fire in his belly to run, and he'd face an uphill climb if he suddenly changed his mind. "My [job](#) here in New Jersey is my passion," Christie told reporters. But he also admitted that the outpouring of requests from citizens and Republican party figures caused him to reconsider, if only briefly, his decision to stay out of the race.

As unlikely as a Christie run seemed, it ignited intense interest from a certain class of Republicans. Reportedly, industrialist David Koch, one of the intellectual and financial godfathers of the [Tea Party](#) movement, was among those pushing for a Christie run. Christie's high-profile battles with the state's public employee unions, and his full-throated and passionate case that entitlements are strangling the futures of New Jersey and America, made him look like the perfect candidate for the segment of the GOP concerned mainly with deficits and the size of government. While, on paper, former Massachusetts Gov. [Mitt Romney](#), another northeastern moderate, seems a logical choice for Christie backers to turn to, there are many reasons why they might look elsewhere—or sit out for the time being.

Those pining for Christie are just as likely to notice the ways that Romney is not like Christie. Much of Christie's appeal lies in his blunt and direct speaking style, which

contrasts with that of Romney, who has been accused of using mealy-mouthed talking points to try to reverse stances on social and economic issues. The healthcare overhaul in Massachusetts while Romney led that state represents, to many [GOP](#) voters, exactly the kind of government overreach that Christie has battled. Furthermore, Romney is a known commodity. Those who would have supported him have had ample time to do so. Texas Gov. Rick Perry has flailed on the campaign trail, and his strong socially conservative views may spook moderates looking to Christie.

Jon Huntsman, the former governor of Utah and another candidate who mixes moderate social views with economic conservatism, is another logical voice for Christie backers to turn to. But he's failed to muster the type of charisma that had voters swooning for Christie, and hasn't yet made a compelling case for his candidacy, in the minds of many Republican observers.

Ultimately, the GOP may have to recognize that Romney will be its candidate, for better or worse. But that doesn't mean that he will immediately pick up the enthusiasm, or supporters, that Christie had. "A lot of these folks, they're going to sit on the sidelines for another couple of months," says Michael Tanner, a political analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute. Tanner speculates that many may be waiting to see if Perry can turn his campaign around before grudgingly throwing their support to Romney.

So far, the GOP's excitement about removing President Obama from the White House has far exceeded any excitement about who they want to put in it. That's a serious problem for the party that no candidate has figured out how to solve.

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