

Don't Be Surprised if Jeb Bush Is Not the Establishment's Choice in 2016

At the outset of the 2016 Republican primary season, a lot of my fellow political pundits considered Jeb Bush the inevitable GOP presidential nominee. I never believed it. Now, I'm not even sure Bush will be the Republican Establishment's final candidate in the primaries.

To be sure, Bush-45 is the first choice of the corporate megadonors and party bureaucrats who have filled his father and brother's administrations. But as his campaign begins to flail, it's questionable whether the donors will still see him as their best bet to retake the White House.

To add to my perception is none other than Chris Christie, the New Jersey governor and onetime darling of the same donor class that fuels Bush family ambitions, who has been lashing out at Jeb in recent weeks.

Christie attacked Jeb on *Fox News Sunday* recently, saying he hasn't been "in a relevant campaign as a Republican since 1998."

"Guys like me and Scott Walker and Marco Rubio and John Kasich, we've been out there for the last six years fighting the fight for conservative Republicans across this country," he said.

Notice those names and their order: Christie, Walker, Rubio, Kasich. Those are the candidates the megadonors once considered in lieu of Jeb, in roughly chronological order.

Christie was a favorite, until he erred badly in numerous meetings with potential donors, including a speech before a Jewish group in which he never mentioned Israel.

Nonetheless, at least 12 billionaires donated to Christie's America Leads super PAC; eight fewer than the 20 who donated to Bush's Right to Rise super PAC. His comments on Fox News were intended as a subtle message to donors that they had other options.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker seemed to have everything the donors were looking for: A blue state governor who favored economic deregulation and had made uncertain noises on social issues. Their trouble, they confessed, is that Walker seemed too sincere when he said he was pro-life and supported traditional marriage.

Sen. Marco Rubio has raised money from 27 of the top 350 GOP donors, just behind Bush's 30. Rubio reached out to the party's base rhetorically on abortion during the Fox News debate, trying to make himself palatable to a broad cross-section of the party.

But the candidate who has set the GOP Establishment's heart aflutter has been John Kasich, two-term governor of Ohio, former Wall Street employee, and someone whose version of faith-based politics means expanding Medicaid spending.

In the Cleveland debate, Kasich went out of his way to affirm homosexuality, selling his decision to attend a gay "wedding" as a Gospel virtue in the rising cadences of an evangelist. He, too, sounded sincere. The donors had a new hero.

Now, many of Jeb's donors are contacting Kasich's New Day for America super PAC, something that spurred Bush's campaign to look for dirt on the Ohio governor.

A new NBC/Marist poll from New Hampshire shows Kasich pulling ahead of Bush into second place, in the second state to weigh

in on the nomination.

Meanwhile, Jeb Bush's poll numbers are in free fall. Bush slipped from first place at an impressive 22 percent in February (ahead of a second place Chris Christie) through mid-June, down to eight percent in the latest Monmouth poll (in a tie for third with Carly Fiorina)—and dropping.

Jeb entered the 2016 campaign ready to “persuade” the Republican Party's conservative base on amnesty for illegal immigrants. The donor class liked that; they want someone who will take on elements of their party they do not like, especially conservative Christians.

So far he has chosen to lay low on that issue. But now he's lashing out at Donald Trump, who has soared to first place because of the failures of the Republican Establishment best exemplified by Mr. Bush.

Incredibly, Jeb's campaign has launched a new campaign commercial portraying Bush as an outsider. He also lit into Trump as a “self-promoter.”

“Anybody can talk,” Bush says in his ad. “I've delivered.”

The other candidate to attack Trump, Texas' impressive former governor Rick Perry, is presently denying that his campaign is about to fold.

The GOP's donor class doesn't understand Christians, doesn't understand how to win elections, and doesn't understand most of America. But its members do understand one thing: a bad investment.

Increasingly, Jeb Bush is starting to look like one.