

Scott Walker: Where Does He (Really) Stand?

He's the talk of the Republican Party. He's polling first in Iowa. He is considered by many the man to be reckoned with in the 2016 primaries. And as of today, he's officially a candidate for president of the United States. But is Scott Walker the right candidate for conservative Christians? **A GOP Favorite** The two-term governor of deep-blue Wisconsin has been touted as a presidential contender for years. He took on his state's public sector unions, ending public employees' ability to strike and cutting benefits for state workers during the national economic downturn. That led to a statewide recall effort, making Walker the only sitting governor to win three elections in four years. Pols believe Walker can bring all factions of the Republican Party – economic, social, and national security voters – together under his leadership. "The real opportunity for the party is if someone like a Scott Walker can unite this populist wing with the more establishment wing," said John Weaver, a liberal Republican and sometimes Democratic consultant who is now advising Gov. John Kasich. "He has the opportunity to do so." His feisty takedown of public unions reportedly won him the support of David and Charles Koch, two of the wealthiest donors in the GOP. (Overall, the Cato Institute – funded, in part, by the Koch brothers – rated Walker a B on economic issues for 2014, placing him just outside the top 10 governors nationally.) The GOP Establishment would prefer Jeb Bush or Chris Christie, but they find Walker's foreign policy and pro-business stance acceptable. But what about Christian conservatives? Should they support him? **A Man of Deep Faith** Walker is the son of a Baptist minister whose faith is a guiding force in his life. A man who attended Walker's church when the future governor was in his early 20s, told me that Walker "didn't at that time, seem interested in the parties, women, and night life of the

college scene, so I'd be surprised if someone could dig up some kind of serious personal moral scandal." "He was, then, what I would consider to be an observant Christian," he said. Those close to him say his Christian faith comforts him during legislative battles. "I was floored by his calm. You know, he's a man of deep faith," Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch told CNN. "We don't go into meetings and quote Scripture – as a lot of people assume of evangelicals, right? – but you can see how he cares deeply." Walker said he had a moving experience visiting Israel in May. "Seeing all of those things from the New Testament—going to the Sea of Galilee where Christ lived as an adult, where the Sermon on the Mount was, where the feeding of the 5,000 was—just all of those things as a Christian was very profound for me but also from a historical standpoint," he said. While there, he met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his chief rival, Zionist Union leader Isaac Herzog, pledging to renew America's commitment to Israeli security – something he said both men questioned under the Obama administration. But what about his stance on the issues evangelicals care about? **Life and Marriage: The Record and the Rhetoric** What is Scott Walker's real position on abortion or same-sex "marriage"? His record has been commendable, but his words have often been confusing. As governor he helped defund Planned Parenthood, signed a bill requiring abortionists to let mothers see an ultrasound of their children before an abortion, and required abortionists to have admitting privileges at local hospitals. (The last provision, which has shut down dozens of fly-by-night abortionists in other states, is still tied up in court.) The state legislature just passed a bill barring abortions after 20 weeks, which the governor promised to sign whether or not it had an exception in the cases of rape and incest. The bill they passed does not exclude any baby from the protections of the law. As a state legislator, he voted for the state marriage protection amendment and defended it in court. State pro-life and pro-family leaders like him and believe he is genuine. But even some of them are occasionally put off by his

rhetoric. Last fall, he referred to abortion as a decision “to end a pregnancy.” When asked if he wanted to end all abortion, he said, “That’s not even an option in the state. The Supreme Court more than 40 years ago ruled that is not an option.” Asked about same-sex “marriage” after a district court overturned his state’s marriage protection amendment in 2014, he replied, “It really doesn’t matter what I think now. It’s in the Constitution.” However, following the Supreme Court’s *Obergefell* decision, he backed a constitutional amendment allowing states to define marriage for themselves. His defenders said his verbal evasions were necessary in a heavily Democratic state like Wisconsin. At the same time, socially liberal Wall Street investors are shying away from Walker, because they’re afraid he secretly *does* believe what he says. Billionaire Dan Loeb reportedly refused to support Walker, because the Wisconsin governor believes in marriage a little too sincerely. One Republican explained, “When Barack Obama said he’s against gay marriage in 2008, people didn’t think he meant it. But when Scott says it, people think he means it. This is a very big stumbling block for him on Wall Street.” But that uncertainty and his wife and sons’ liberal social views – his wife, Tonette, is from a liberal Democratic home and his two sons, Alex and Matt, openly support same-sex “marriage” – concern some. And Walker has seemed to indicate that he doesn’t really care about the issues evangelicals care about the most. **Social Issues: Not “Focused” On Those** Walker’s interests clearly lie with economic matters. In 2013, when asked by *Meet the Press* about young people’s support for same-sex “marriage,” he said, “I think that’s all the more reason, when I talk about things, I talk about the economic and fiscal crises in our state and in our country. That’s what people want to resonate about. They don’t want to get focused on those issues.” Well, Gov. Walker, millions of Americans do. If you want to coalesce the party, you’ll have to offer them a reason to choose you over 15 or 16 other options. Christian conservative voters will be just as loyal to you as you are to their principles.