

The First Candidate Has Left the Presidential Race

Republican Rick Perry, struggling to raise money and languishing near the bottom in presidential opinion polls, on Friday became the first member of the crowded Republican field to drop out of the 2016 White House race.

Perry, the former Texas governor, had been excluded from the initial prime-time Republican debates and was forced to stop paying some members of his staff recently after his campaign funds ran low.

"Today I am suspending my campaign for the presidency of the United States," he said during a speech in St. Louis, Missouri, adding that the Republicans have a "tremendous" field of candidates.

"I step aside knowing our party is in good hands, and as long as we listen to the grassroots, the cause of conservatism will be too," he said.

Perry was making his second bid for the White House after a failed campaign in 2012 that was most remembered for his "oops" moment in a debate when he forgot the third government department he was pledging to eliminate.

Perry, the longest-serving governor in Texas history, had languished near the bottom of the 17-strong Republican presidential pack since he entered the race in June.

"I give you this news with no regrets," Perry said of his decision to end his White House hopes, saying it had been "a privilege and an honor" to run.

Perry was excluded from last month's first prime-time televised debate because he was not among the top 10

Republicans in opinion polls. On Thursday, CNN, the host of next week's second prime-time debate, announced that Perry did not make the cut for that one either.

Perry had to stop paying some staff in key early-voting states such as South Carolina and New Hampshire in August as his campaign funds began to dry up, although some staff stayed on as volunteers.

His Republican rivals rushed to offer praise after Perry withdrew. Donald Trump, the real estate mogul and Republican front-runner who earlier this year mocked Perry's thick-framed glasses, tweeted that Perry was "a terrific guy and I wish him well – I know he will have a great future."

Perry had presented himself as a more thoughtful, policy-oriented candidate during his campaign, calling on Republicans to court black voters and touting his record in Texas as a national model for economic success.

He stressed his experience dealing with immigration issues as Texas governor and pledged to secure the southern U.S. border with Mexico and tear up the nuclear agreement with Iran.

But he also had to grapple with charges against him in an abuse-of-power case stemming from his time as governor.

(Reporting by Erin McPike and Ginger Gibson; Writing by John Whitesides; Editing by Sandra Maler and Leslie Adler)

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