

White House Bid? Huckabee's Openness to Run Again

The new year is just around the corner, but in the political world talk centers on who will be in the running for the 2016 presidential race. The jockeying for position has already begun.

In Little Rock, Ark., former Gov. Mike Huckabee attended a private event recently with local pastors with the American Renewal Project.

His speech sounded and felt more like a GOP primary rally as the former presidential candidate talked about his recipe for healthcare success.

"We don't have a health care crisis in America," Huckabee told the crowd. "What we have is a health crisis, and the health crisis is that chronic disease accounts for 75 to 80 percent of all the expenditures of healthcare in America. And until we address that, we can spend more money but we're not going to address the fundamental issue."

To Run or Not to Run?

Another fundamental issue for Huckabee is whether to run for president again. Those in the crowd wanted to know, too, but Huckabee avoided the question for now.

"Will I run? The Lord knows, but He's not telling just yet," he quipped.

The former pastor and governor came up short in 2008 but in an exclusive interview with CBN News, he hinted at another run.

"I'm not even close to being ready to saying, 'Yeah, I'm going to run.' But I think that there's an openness now," he said.

That openness comes courtesy of some key evangelical and

financial types who didn't back him in 2008, but are changing their minds this time around.

"A lot of it has to do with the fact that I've had some incredible encouragement from people that I wasn't expecting to get it from, I think even from people who didn't support me before," Huckabee told CBN News. "I'm a little surprised at the intensity people feel."

Huckabee's recent appearance at this event gave him a chance to speak privately with pastors from Iowa and South Carolina who could provide important, early primary support. Huckabee said he was encouraged.

"Probably a great many of them in this room certainly want me to take another shot at it and they said that, they expressed that," he told CBN News.

Early polling in the key states of Iowa and South Carolina show Huckabee leading the pack. Still, some evangelical leaders who attended the private meeting with the former governor pushed him on the issues of the day.

"They appreciate his faith, that's crucial, but where will he be on policy like Common Core, Obamacare, China, foreign trade, some of those things that came up?" Tamara Scott, a key evangelical leader in Iowa, questioned. "We were asking tough questions and rightfully so. This is what each of us should be doing."

Party Competition

Huckabee is one of a few politicians who has made his way to these private pastors events. Sens. Rand Paul, R-Ky., and Ted Cruz, R-Texas, have already come to similar gatherings trying to establish important evangelical relationships.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., went a step further, traveling to London to enhance his credentials for a speech on the importance of a strong U.S. partnership with Britain.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker comes armed with a new book touting his conservative pedigree, highlighting how those skills are transferable to Washington. In an interview with CBN News, he played up his Midwestern, results-oriented approach.

"We're just kind of no-nonsense, there's not a lot of flair, and we're not about personalities as much as we are about just getting things done," he said.

The main attraction, however, could be New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who hasn't been shy about his White House interests. While his center-right resume would probably make him the pick of the GOP establishment crowd, his well-known temper may hurt him.

Entering the Ring?

With Christie a wild card, the opening for Huckabee could be that he's performed this national dance before and his folksy, humor-filled approach can win over a crowd.

That skill was on display in Little Rock when he told the crowd how he lost his iPhone.

"It scared me to death. I had emails, addresses, and phone numbers and all sorts of stuff. And then it hit me, I know exactly how to get it. I just call the NSA. They told me exactly where it was," he said to laughter.

While Huckabee entertained the crowd with jokes like that, his serious message to these pastors focused on how it's time to concentrate on spiritual revival and biblical compassion for others rather than simply politics.

"When the politics of this country are affected by the spiritual life of the country, then I can assure you that as people become aware of God's love in their life it will change the culture of this nation," Huckabee told the crowd. "We far too often fight the culture when we need to proclaim the

Christ.”

For that message to work, Huckabee will need to decide if he’s ready to enter the political ring again.