

Who Will This Influential Iowa Christian Activist Pick?

There are a number of important endorsements presidential candidates will attempt to snag in the run-up to the first-in-the-nation Iowa Republican Caucus, but to many longtime observers there are two that matter most.

U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) landed the first one a few weeks ago by U.S. Rep. Steve King, who represents the northwest quadrant of the Hawkeye State—sometimes referred to as Iowa's Bible Belt—and is immensely popular statewide with grassroots conservatives. Could Cruz possibly land the second?

The FAMiLY LEADER (TFL), an Iowa-based pro-family Christian organization closely affiliated with Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council, announced late Tuesday afternoon it will officially announce its presidential endorsement Thursday morning. A media event has been scheduled for 11 a.m. CST on the west steps of the Iowa Statehouse in Des Moines.

CEO Bob Vander Plaats will be on hand for the announcement, as well as Vice President Chuck Hurley and Board Chair Robert Cramer.

As has been the case in past presidential election years, Vander Plaats, himself a former gubernatorial candidate prior to launching TFL, has been tight-lipped about the decision-making process. The organization was created after the 2008 election cycle, so it has only endorsed one candidate: former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) in 2012.

Three things to keep in mind ahead of the endorsement:

- Although Vander Plaats is only one of several TFL board members who will weigh in on the final endorsement, his input will likely carry the most weight.

- It was firmly implied that last month's Family Presidential Forum in Des Moines would weigh heavily in the endorsement process.
- In addition to the past Santorum endorsement, Vander Plaats and TFL have strong connections to Cruz and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee on pro-family and religious freedom issues.

Based on those points, it's highly likely the endorsement will go to Cruz, Santorum or Huckabee. Regardless of who receives the endorsement, it is sure to provide a good bump in future polling, as well as an additional voice championing that candidate's cause to Iowa Christian voters.

Evangelical Christians make up about half of the voters every four years at the Iowa Republican Caucus.