

Will Rick Santorum Do It Again?

It's considered one of the greatest feats in American retail politics: visiting the voters of all 99 counties in Iowa.

Made popular by U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley, who is on the verge of become the state's longest-serving member of Congress, began making a point to visiting all 99 counties in his first year in the Senate. That was in 1981, when Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz were just 10 and 11 years old, respectively.

It has been calculated, prior to the 2012 Iowa Republican Caucus, that the trip takes a minimum of 2,739 miles and nearly 56 hours of driving time to complete. When you add in refueling stops, campaign stops, eating and sleeping ... well, you get the point.

In 2008, and again in 2012, the "Full Grassley," as it has become known became the gold standard by which the various campaigns measured each other. Keeping in mind the need to not lose focus on any of the other early voting states and the expense of jetting back and forth to one of Iowa's five airports—if you count Eppley Field in Omaha, Nebraska, and Quad City International Airport in Moline, Illinois—that offer major airline travel.

Since the inception of the first-in-the-nation Iowa Caucus as we know it today, every Republican caucus winner, except those with the last name Bush, have completed a 99-county tour of the state. And whether it's part of a candidate's original strategy or not, the expectations of the Iowa electorate eventually demand an attempt.

So far in the 2016 cycle, only former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum has completed a 99-county tour, although former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee and U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz are both on pace to

follow suit. In fact, the 2012 Iowa Republican Caucus winner is on pace to complete a “victory lap” around the state before the Feb. 1 caucus.

He’ll move closer to that goal beginning Thursday when he launches a new five-day swing through the Hawkeye State. The itinerary is not yet complete for the tour, but the stops he’s already announced will put him past the halfway point for a second Full Grassley.

Other than Huckabee, the 2008 Iowa Republican Caucus winner, and Cruz, the next closest candidates are Dr. Ben Carson and U.S. Sen. Rand Paul. Each of them has visited fewer than half of the 99 counties, spending most of their time in the more densely populated counties.

Santorum hasn’t specifically said he intends to complete a second 99-county tour, but has told supporters around the state that he will be the candidate who works the hardest to win the caucus vote.