

LETTER TO CHRISTIE: YOUR TIME IS NOW

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Body

DEAR Governor Christie, I am writing to you to add my voice to the cacophony of voices calling on you to run for president, if you haven't already decided.

Unlike many of the voices you are hearing, I am not a California tech-billionaire willing to invest millions in your campaign. I am not a Tea Party activist thinking you are the best thing since sliced bread. I am not an Evangelical Iowan who sees you as the savior of American democracy.

I am not affiliated with either political party, so I can't even vote for you in any primary.

Heck, I haven't agreed with many of your key policies. I have been disappointed in your leadership (or lack thereof) on some issues. I have criticized your cozy relationships with state party bosses, criticized your use of shadow PACs to shape public opinion about your policies, and as a long-time political observer, I strongly object to the divisiveness your brand of politics has brought to the state.

So let's just say that I am arguing my position while recognizing your flaws.

And flaws aside, you should run.

Opportunities like this typically don't knock more than once. You've created this opportunity, and to ignore it, is, perhaps, to ignore your destiny.

In the back of your mind is 2016. But in 2016, you will no longer be the upstart, the outsider. Right now you are the Bill Clinton, the George W. Bush, and yes, the Barack Obama of your time -- the cool new kid in school. But by 2016, will you be the Newt Gingrich? You'll be part of the party establishment, and there will be some younger, newer, fresher face.

And no offense, but you might not get reelected here in New Jersey. I know it is rather bizarre that you may be more popular out there than you are here, but the reality is that New Jersey's politics are much different than those early Republican primary states, and you've managed to irritate some people here at home. Although losing New Jersey is not necessarily the kiss of death in Republican Party politics, it would render you damaged goods. Part

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of your appeal to national Republicans is that you can get elected in a state like New Jersey. If you can't get reelected, that opens the door for potential 2016 rivals.

Also, the longer a politician is in office, the more adversaries he or she creates. You have successfully countered the influence of your adversaries (read: labor unions) by exploiting a loophole in the current campaign finance system that enables your friends to purchase campaign ads for you without disclosing donor names. Chances are that Congress will close that loophole, as it did with soft money. But right now, you are succeeding at getting people to pay \$100,000 to have dinner with you (pretty heady stuff, huh?) and with corporations now able to spend freely on political campaigns thanks to the Citizens United decision, now is your time from a campaign finance standpoint.

We don't know the shelf life of your personal style of politics. Right now, the non-New Jersey public finds your frank brashness refreshing (as New Jersey voters did). But from polls we know that your style can be wearing - that there is a fine line between tough talk and bullying. A line that many women voters eventually jump over. And the longer you're on the scene, the more people you tell to jump in a lake, the higher the chances that your brand of rhetorical politics might pass its expiration date.

You'll always be a favorite of your core demographic constituency - the middle-class, young to middle-aged white guy - and that alone may deliver a Republican nomination your way. But it's not enough to deliver the presidency. So run while people still find your straight-shooting charming.

We also know that your message has particular saliency right now -- your brand of small-government politics resonates in an economy in which people are more territorial about their money than a Rottweiler with a juicy steak bone. Today, people want lean government. Though you are true-believer in the smaller-government-is-better model, you must recognize that this is not always the case among a national constituency. And as the economy improves, so, too, does the possibility that people will be willing to spend a bit more to solve society's problems and that your message will not appeal to the swing voters as it does today.

And then there is the field. The reason why you are such an appealing candidate is because the others are not. Chances are that Texas Gov. Rick Perry cannot beat President Obama. And Mitt Romney is failing to ignite the passions of conservatives in your party. You are your party's hope: conservative enough to appeal to primary voters, sophisticated enough to win a general election.

If you are to take my advice, your election is not assured. But you have a chance, particularly if the nation's economic recovery continues at its snail's pace. Here's what we know: Consumer confidence -- often used as a measure gauging the public's sentiment about where the economy is headed -- is one of the best predictors of presidential elections. In fact, it has correctly predicted the outcome of every presidential election since 1972. No incumbent president or nominee of the incumbent's party has ever won reelection with the Consumer Confidence Index at less than 99 in the summer before a presidential election.

With the index at 62 in 1992, George H.W. Bush lost (remember the Clintonian mantra of, "It's the economy, stupid!"). Confidence in Jimmy Carter's economy stood at 65 in 1976. Today's Consumer Confidence is at 45, indicating that a Republican nominee has a fighting chance. That is, your election as president would not be secure. But it would be a possibility.

And as Gen. Douglas MacArthur said, "There is no security on this Earth. There is only opportunity."

This unique opportunity, Mr. Governor, is yours for the asking. Seize it.

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