

Decision 2016

The GOP Field Is Set; Here's How They Rank

BY DAVID LIGHTMAN
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WASHINGTON — The Republican free-for-all is about to become a 17-candidate scrum.

Never in modern times has a major political party had so many prominent candidates vying at once for its presidential nomination. The 2016 field is all but set, as Ohio Gov. John Kasich will formally join the race Tuesday morning and former Virginia Gov. Jim Gilmore plans an early August announcement.

So far, familiarity and intrigue with some new players have boosted a handful of candidates to the top. Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush is the brother and son of presidents. Real estate mogul Donald Trump is classic Internet click bait. Sens. Marco Rubio of Florida, Ted Cruz of Texas and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker are younger upstarts whose success in swing states rates them close looks from insiders.

As the race begins in earnest, here's where the candidates stand:

TOP TIER: The front-runners

JEB BUSH

Pros: The former Florida governor and his supporters have raised \$114 million, more than double any other Republican. He can keep tapping the loyal family network that's won the White House three times.

Con: Too tight with big donors. Plodding campaign style. And that network last won 11 years ago.

MARCO RUBIO

Pros: At 44, the senator from Florida has the look and vigor of a new generation's leader. Hispanic heritage is a big advantage. Stirs intrigue among the party establishment.

Cons: Backed a bipartisan path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in 2013, then took a tougher stance. A first-term senator who could be seen as too inexperienced to be commander in chief.

SCOTT WALKER

Pros: The Wisconsin governor successfully battled state public employee unions. Won three statewide elections in four years. First governor in the nation to survive a recall effort.

Cons: No foreign policy or Washington experience. Can be awkward in unscripted settings. Hasn't proven widespread appeal outside Midwest.

SECOND TIER: Potential, but ...

DONALD TRUMP

Pros: The real estate billionaire's stardom and bluster attract big, adoring crowds and media attention. His demands that the U.S. get tougher with illegal immigration is popular in conservative circles.

Cons: Unusually high negatives. Critics deride his immigration views as intolerant. Alienates many in his own party.

TED CRUZ

Pros: The senator from Texas' passionate style is a big hit with conservative audiences, particularly evangelical voters. He and backers raised \$51 million this year, second only to Bush among Republican presidential candidates.

Cons: Polarizing figure, disliked by many Republicans. Once called a "wacko bird" by 2008 GOP presidential nominee John McCain.

RAND PAUL

Pros: The senator from Kentucky inherits his father's libertarian following. Has strong views on individual rights and a less intrusive foreign policy. Has made efforts to reach out to minority voters.

Cons: His father's libertarian following and those strong views.

BEN CARSON

Pros: The retired neurosurgeon has a strong grass-roots network. His low-key, thoughtful style plays well with conservative voters.

Cons: No government experience. Has made controversial statements. Gentle style may be too gentle in a 17-person brawl.

TIER THREE: Struggling

RICK PERRY

Pros: The former Texas governor's down-to-earth manner plays well with voters. Strong on issues he's familiar with, notably economics and border security.

Cons: One of the 2012 presidential campaign's biggest flops. Under indictment for abuse of power. Not sharp when unfamiliar with issues.

JOHN KASICH

Pros: Popular governor in Ohio, the nation's premier swing state. Approachable and eager to talk issues at length. Carried 86 of Ohio's 88 counties in November election.

Cons: Too moderate for national Republican electorate. Regular-guy demeanor doesn't seem presidential. Entering the race late.

CHRIS CHRISTIE

Pros: The New Jersey governor's tough talking, brutally frank and popular with audiences eager for an unscripted candidate. Won twice in a Democratic state, did well with minority voters.

Cons: Hurt by George Washington Bridge scandal. Bombastic style gets tiresome and is sometimes marred by flashes of temper. Too centrist and culturally distant for Southern and Midwestern Republicans.

BOBBY JINDAL

Pros: The Louisiana governor won statewide office twice. Strong background on health issues. Talks passionately about his deep religious beliefs.

Cons: Talks passionately about his deep religious beliefs, a turnoff for mainstream voters. Highly unpopular back home, as fiscal policy has proven shaky.

MIKE HUCKABEE

Pros: The former Arkansas governor is a vigorous, entertaining campaigner, popular with Christian right audiences. A pastor with solid evangelical credentials.

Cons: Views on moral issues such as same-sex marriage are toxic to many Republican voters. Won the 2008 Iowa caucus, then fizzled fast.

TIER FOUR: The unpredictables

RICK SANTORUM

Pros: The former senator from Pennsylvania won the 2012 Iowa caucus. Strong Christian right following. Tireless one-on-one campaigner.

Cons: Had his shot in 2012. Too many others vying for the same constituency this time.

CARLY FIORINA

Pros: The retired business executive wows crowds with her energetic style and pointed criticism of Hillary Clinton. Only woman in the Republican race.

Cons: Lost 2010 U.S. Senate race in California by 10 points. Opponents raise questions about layoffs during her time at Hewlett-Packard.

TIER FIVE: Who?

LINDSEY GRAHAM

Pros: The senator from South Carolina is an expert on military and national security matters. Strong one-on-one campaign skills.

Cons: Lagging in money, barely known. Unclear whether he can even win his own state's critical primary.

GEORGE PATAKI

Pros: The former New York governor won three terms in a Democratic state. Helped lead state's recovery from 9/11 attacks.

Cons: Too moderate for conservative electorate. Barely known outside New York.

JAMES GILMORE

Pros: The former Virginia governor has a solid political resume. Former Republican Party chairman. Headed terrorism policy advisory panel under two presidents.

Cons: Last won political office in 1997. Crushed in 2008 Senate bid.

Who's in the race?

Here are the people who have officially announced a campaign for the 2016 presidential election:

Democrats



Hillary Clinton
Bernie Sanders



Martin O'Malley
Lincoln Chafee



Jim Webb

Republicans



Ted Cruz
Rand Paul
Marco Rubio
Ben Carson



Carly Fiorina
Mike Huckabee
Rick Santorum
George Pataki



Lindsey Graham
Rick Perry
Jeb Bush
Donald Trump



Bobby Jindal
Chris Christie
Scott Walker

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