

Religion, Budget Issues Dog Rick Perry

Rick Perry seems like a dream candidate for the GOP, but some activists have reservations

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He's the longest-serving governor in Texas history, and under his watch the state has bucked the national downward trend in unemployment. He's a solid conservative who appeals to the Republican base—on both economic and social issues—but he also has 10 years of executive experience to back it up. He's jumping into the [primary](#) just when it needs a jolt, with Republicans still feeling unenthusiastic about the current slate of candidates. So why isn't Rick Perry, who will officially announce his candidacy on Saturday, the presumptive front-runner in 2012 GOP primary?

While conservatives are mostly thrilled about the prospect of a Perry candidacy, some activists harbor doubts about the Lone Star governor. Although he's overseen a state which has not raised [taxes](#) and has seen economic growth, it is also mired in a fiscal mess. Conservatives with a libertarian bent worry about his campaign style, especially after his recent "prayer rally" in Houston's Reliant Stadium. And some also wonder whether the former Democrat has the intellectual heft to lead the movement. "There are people who have raised questions about whether Perry is as sharp as you'd need to seek the presidency," said David Boaz, executive vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute. [See cartoons about the 2012 GOP hopefuls.]

Perry's campaign will likely center on his economic record in Texas. According to the Dallas Federal Reserve, nearly half of the country's net [job](#) gains since June of 2009 have been in Texas. Although economists debate the reasons that Texas has stood out, Perry will likely tout business-friendly and antitax policies. But Texas has also faced a \$27 billion budget shortfall this year for the 2012-13 biannual budget. "Fundamentally, there are questions as to whether or not his fiscal record really stands on its own," one D.C. conservative activist, who has yet to pick a candidate, says. But different observers look at the issues in different ways. Although the shortfall developed during his tenure, he refused to raise taxes to cover it, and crafted a budget which dealt with the deficit by slashing spending. "He demanded an all-cuts budget, and he ended up getting it," said Joshua Trevino, spokesman for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a free market-oriented think tank.

Part of Perry's appeal is that he'll be able to combine support from religious and economic conservatives. He is strongly conservative on social matters, but also touted his opposition to federal government initiatives in his recent book, *Fed Up*. But his recent "prayer rally," which was used as a sort of pre-campaign kick-off on August 6, may have spooked some economic conservatives. "There's the impression that he's a southern social conservative, and not primarily focused on economic issues, and not primarily focused on the size of government," Boaz says. [Vote now: Who is your pick for the 2012 GOP presidential nomination?]

Because Perry waffled over whether or not to run—he initially promised to stay out of the race last year, only to go reconsider this summer—many potential allies picked other horses, and now have vested reasons to snipe. And while some conservatives quibble with his moderate immigration policies, Perry doesn't have the political baggage haunting current frontrunner Mitt Romney, who as Massachusetts governor signed into [law](#) a healthcare overhaul similar to the plan enacted by President Obama. Perry has emerged as a very strong candidate to win the GOP nomination, but he'll still have to tackle some skepticism from the Republican base.

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