Snyder in 2016? GOP's election wins fuel speculation

Associated Press *9:21 a.m. EST November 5, 2014*

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder's possible presidential rival Chris Christie say big GOP wins show voters want leaders who will "get things done."



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AUSTIN, Texas – And so it begins.

Even before the polls closed on Election Day, Republicans shifted their focus to 2016 and the party's top target: Hillary Rodham Clinton. And by the end of the night, the GOP had claimed victories in Senate contests and governor races that will serve as a White House launch pad for the party's most ambitious.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, who has acknowledged presidential aspirations, won his third election in four years, while Ohio Gov. John Kasich and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder earned second terms amid White House whispers of their own.

Neither Snyder nor the other ambitious governors has ruled out a 2016 presidential run.

The governors and their Senate allies won with the backing of high-profile Republicans thinking about the next election: New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul.

Speaking Wednesday, Christie said the Republican victories in governor's race across the country show that voters want leaders who will "get things done," rather than focus on ideology. He said the Republican rout was also fueled by an unpopular President Barack Obama.

"It's a reflection of the president's lack of leadership," Christie, chairman of the Republican Governors Association, said. Christie made the rounds on the morning news shows, including NBC, ABC and Fox.



New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie prepares to cast his vote in the midterm elections on Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2014. He said his midterm efforts helping other Republicans get elected "helps to get me and Mary Pat and our children used to what it would be like to be on the road so much. And that's a huge part of deciding whether you want to run for president or not." He hasn't decided whether to run in the 2016 presidential race. *(Photo: Jeff Zelevansky/Getty Images)*

Rand Paul offered an analysis that pointed firmly to the next election. "Tonight was really a referendum not only on the president's policies, but really a referendum on Hillary Clinton," Paul said. The Democrats' midterm struggles, he said, represent "an epic failure of the Clintons."

Paul is among several leading Republicans who have spent months laying the groundwork for presidential campaigns, often while also helping GOP colleagues campaign in the midterms. But in the crowded Republican field, party insiders believe as many as three candidates may form presidential exploratory committees by the end of January — with several more joining them in the subsequent months.



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"They're going to need to get out there quickly," said Republican National Committee chief of staff Mike Shields, predicting a rash of presidential activity in November, December and January as candidates compete for the same pool of staff and donors. The RNC, he said, already has eight to 10 staffers focused exclusively on weakening Clinton's potential candidacy.

The overwhelming Democratic frontrunner should she run, Clinton is expected to announce her decision around the end of the year. The former secretary of state did not appear publicly Tuesday, but spent recent weeks campaigning extensively for Democrats in competitive races for Senate and governor, appearing at 45 political events during a two-month run through 19 states.

Republicans noted Clinton's ties to two of the biggest defeats for the party — Arkansas Sen. Mark Pryor's loss to Republican Rep. Tom Cotton and Alison Lundergan Grimes' defeat to Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell in Kentucky. Clinton headlined fundraisers for both and made appearances in Kentucky for Grimes.

In a difficult year for Democrats, some of the former first lady's allies prevailed, including Tom Wolf in Pennsylvania, who defeated Republican Gov. Tom Corbett, and Sen. Jeanne Shaheen and Gov. Maggie Hassan in New Hampshire, who received help from Clinton during the campaign's final weekend.

But Tuesday belonged to the GOP.

"It will be beneficial not just to Republicans, it will be beneficial to the country," said Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran, who leads the Senate GOP campaign arm. "But it also sets the stage to demonstrate that Republicans can be trusted to be elected to the presidency in 2016."

Walker said that any decision about whether he will run for president "will have to wait long after" he works with Wisconsin lawmakers to pass the next state budget.

"The bottom line is: People elected me to get the job done in Wisconsin," he said.

In Texas, three prospective presidential candidates gathered at a Republican celebration in downtown Austin. Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who is weighing a second presidential bid, joined former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush as his eldest son, George P. Bush, was elected as Texas land commissioner. The elder Bush, a leading contender should he run, did not speak publicly Tuesday night. At the same event, Cruz said the 2016 field would begin forming as soon as January.

"In all likelihood, we will see a crowded field next year. And that's a good and healthy thing," Cruz said. "The test that I think Republican primary voters should apply is who is standing up and leading."

Christie spent much of the last year helping to reelect GOP governors — while courting donors and key activists — as chairman of the Republican Governors Association. His organization had a big night, winning seats previously held by Democrats in Maryland, Massachusetts, Arkansas and Illinois.

Christie's midterm effort, he said, "helps to get me and Mary Pat and our children used to what it would be like to be on the road so much. And that's a huge part of deciding whether you want to run for president or not — it's the effect it has on your family."

"I know people don't believe this, but we have not had the time, been together enough, to talk about it in any kind of serious way," Christie said while campaigning Monday in New Hampshire. "But we will."