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Republican hopefuls gear up for race

by Matt Campbell
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The 2012 presidential campaign field is filling up, and with several debates having been televised, voters nationwide are becoming familiar with the competitors.

There are currently 11 registered candidates, with eight of those being considered serious contenders. Other popular conservatives, such as media personality Sarah Palin and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie have been urged to run, but have yet to declare their candidacies.

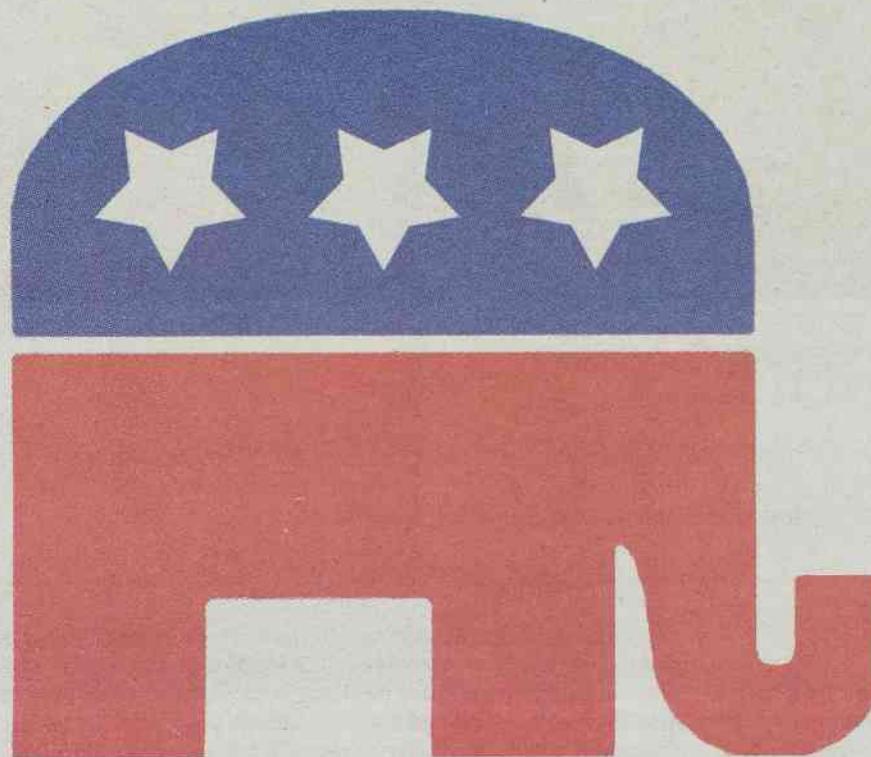
Tim Pawlenty, who recently endorsed Texas Gov. Rick Perry, dropped out of the race last month.

The batch of candidates includes former governors, state legislators, and businessmen. Michelle Bachmann, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, John Huntsman, Gary E. Johnson, Thaddeus McCotter, Ron Paul, Rick Perry, Buddy Roemer, Mitt Romney, and Rick Santorum have been campaigning heavily in historical right-wing states.

The crop of eight hopefuls represents a broad political spectrum.

On one end stands U.S. Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, who, has been, many argue, largely ignored by the mainstream media. Last month on *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart did a segment recognizing Mr. Paul's absence from the press. Others have referred to his possible appeal to independents and even some liberals as the partisan media's disinterest in him. "Unlike Obama, Ron Paul will tell the truth about foreign policy. He'll talk right to conservatives who have basically allowed their movement to degenerate into just, jingoistic USA, USA, anti-intellectual nonsense," said bestselling author and senior fellow of Ludwig von Mises Institute Tom Woods, staunch Paul supporter.

On the other end of the spectrum stands businessman and former governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney. Although he's considered one of the front-runners, his campaign has been overshadowed by a law he passed while serving as governor. He implemented a health-care law requiring every citizen in his state to buy health insurance, which he's come under fire for, because it bears resemblance to President Barack Obama's health-care law, but is downsized to a state level. His stance of social issues including abortion, have also put him at odds with evangelical conservatives.



Rep. Michelle Bachmann of Minnesota and Gov. Rick Perry of Texas, Tea Party favorites, have had strong leads this summer since the Iowa Straw Poll, in which Ms. Bachmann won. Her tough straight-talk and religious ideologies have earned her fans from the far-right. But, according to some right-wing media pundits, her stock has diminished since Mr. Perry entered the race in August.

Though Mr. Perry has attracted many Bachmann supporters, he has also drawn criticism for a book he wrote last year, in which he calls the current social security system a "Ponzi scheme."

Hanging on by threads, Newt Gingrich's campaign and finance issues have caused his brand to take a hit. The former house speaker's affair and two divorces haven't appealed to evangelicals, but he has strong base of Tea Party support, mostly due to his support of far-right fiscal policy.

Herman Cain, the only candidate without legislative experience, wasn't well known among far-right conservatives

and the Tea Party before entering the race. The former chief executive officer of Godfather's Pizza, "whose conservative fiscal credentials have made him a favorite among some Tea Party backers, has been aggressively crisscrossing the country trying to build name recognition," according to a *New York Times* profile, has excited some African-American conservatives. His extremely conservative views on Muslims have somewhat overshadowed his stance on economic policy, though successful businessmen have typically been able to easily garner Republican support.

Former Sen. Rick Santorum and former Gov. John Huntsman have also assembled strong conservative bases and media nods.

Mr. Santorum, a younger candidate, is popular among young conservatives, but has yet to establish a promising national base, while Mr. Huntsman, a Mormon, may risk being out-shined by his fellow candidates. He is the least popular of the strongest eight, but may have the biggest advantage when it comes to raising funds for his campaign.

Although there seems to be a healthy variation of ideas and beliefs between the candidates, it's still unclear whether or not they can appeal to swing voters and independents, which is key to Republican's securing a victory next year.

According to a recent national poll of Republicans by CNN, Perry is in the lead with 32 percent of conservative support. Romney is in second with 21 percent, and Paul is in third with 13 percent.

The Republican primary elections are scheduled from January 31 to June 26 2012, with North Carolina's being held on May 8. So far, there have been seven debates.

Upcoming Republican Debate

When: September 22

Time and Network: 9 p.m. on Fox News

Location: Orlando, FL

Sponsor: Fox News, Google, and Florida Republican Party

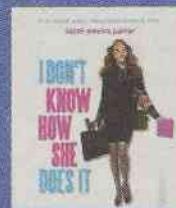
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