

Could Rick Perry Be a Viable Candidate in 2016?

☒ Governor Rick Perry made some news earlier this week when he appeared on Jimmy Kimmel's show (from Austin, Texas) and discussed the possibility of decriminalizing the use of marijuana in the Lone Star State.

Listening to Perry, I thought he laid out a pretty decent, thoughtful argument for moving in that direction. He also touted some past reforms he made in his state to lessen the severity of pot-related charges. He qualified the measures by saying, "you don't want to ruin a kid's life for having a joint."

Though the drug conversation was what spawned some headlines, it wasn't what made the interview interesting to me.

As I watched Perry discuss his accomplishments, and state his views on different issues, I was taken back by how relaxed, articulate, and confident he seemed, even with the liberal Austin audience giving him a hard time. It reminded me quite a bit of Perry's early presidential primary debates back in September of 2011. As you might recall, Perry was a last minute entrant into the race, filling a void that some within the GOP establishment recognized as a weak field of candidates.

In his first debate, Perry was bold, self-assured, and spoke with moral clarity. He was unafraid to say the things he truly believed.

In regard to Social Security's financial outlook, he said, "It is a Ponzi scheme to tell our kids that are 25 or 30 years old today, you're paying into a program that's going to be there. Anybody that's for the status quo with Social Security today is involved with a monstrous lie to our kids, and it's not

right.”

The statement drew questions about Perry’s commitment to our Social Security system, an issue that Democrats have long used to fear-monger votes away from Republicans.

In his second debate, Perry voiced a view on illegal immigration that wasn’t very popular with a lot of conservatives.

“If you say that we should not educate children who come into our state for no other reason than that they’ve been brought their through no fault of their own, I don’t think you have a heart.”

It was clear that after those first couple of performances, Perry’s consultants rushed in to advise him not to show such candor, and to recognize the political ramifications of making such statements. I think they got into his head, and his campaign suffered from it.

He went from being a steadfast, breath of fresh air, to an empty Republican suit who was so over-rehearsed and careful about what he said, that he no longer appeared comfortable in his own skin. He began botching his talking points left and right, and by the end of the campaign, he was making appearances on shows like *David Letterman*, merely to poke fun at himself.

It was a shame.

I think many people, like myself, viewed him as an independent-minded conservative that could strike a chord with the broader electorate. He was a highly successful governor who had a fantastic, pro-business record of job creation in his state, at a time when desperately few jobs were being created elsewhere in this country. He was an undoubtedly strong leader, yet he let people convince him not to be himself, and his campaign never recovered from it.


I think he probably learned a lot from the experience.

When Jimmy Kimmel asked Perry if he planned on running again in 2016, Perry answered, "You know, America is a great place for second chances."

Does he have a point?

We know that Democratic politicians are always receiving second chances. America certainly gave Bill Clinton a second chance after the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Hillary Clinton, who was one of the most despised political figures in the nation following the *Hillarycare* debacle, now enjoys an astonishingly high public approval rating. A second presidential term for Barack Obama was certainly an example of a second chance, after his record of success in the first term was virtually non-existent.

Of course, what Democrats have working for them is a very supportive national media that has the influence to help redeem people. Republicans aren't afforded that luxury.

In fact, the media is always eager to use a branding iron to immortalize the petty failings of Republican politicians. If you don't believe me, look at the legacy of Dan Quayle – a man whose entire career is defined by him misspelling a word. Next, look at the mind-numbingly extensive list of Joe Biden gaffes that the media frames as an endearing footnote in an otherwise distinguished career. 

A challenge for Republicans is to not let the liberal media define which candidates are viable and which ones aren't. In some cases they might be right, but it needs to be understood that their rationale for elevating and dismissing individuals comes with very little objectivity.

It's hard for me to accept that blowing some lines in a couple of debates, as Perry did, is enough to end one's presidential aspirations. It's not as if he made up some story about

dodging sniper fire in Bosnia alongside comedian, Sinbad. It's certainly not as if he blamed a YouTube video for the death of four American patriots in Libya.

I, for one, would like to see Perry run again in 2016. I think he could surprise a lot of people and turn out to be a strong, independent-minded candidate. Part of me just wants to see him prove those who wrote his obituary four years ago wrong.

Then again, I could be the one who's wrong. Either way, I'm a believer in second chances.