



## From Cruz to Christie to Perry, “Conservatives” Address CPAC

The 2014 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) commenced on March 6 at National Harbor, Maryland, with Texas Senator Ted Cruz kicking off the annual gathering of leaders proclaiming themselves to be political “conservatives.” Cruz, who earned a 100-percent score on *The New American’s* latest “Freedom Index” (a congressional scorecard based on the U.S. Constitution) is unquestionably deserving of CPAC’s designated description.



“There are a lot of D.C. consultants who say there’s a choice for Republicans to make: We can either choose to keep our head down, to not rock the boat, to not stand for anything, or we can stand for principle,” Cruz was quoted as saying by the *Deseret News*. “They say if you stand for principle you lose elections. The way to do it — the smart way, the Washington way — is don’t stand against Obamacare, don’t stand against the debt ceiling, don’t stand against nothing. I want to tell you something — that is a false dichotomy.”

Cruz offered the elections of 2006, 2008, and 2012 as examples of how Republicans “got walloped” when they didn’t stand on principle.

Although several other speakers preceded him — Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey (FI score: 80 percent), Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan (70 percent), South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott (90 percent), and Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell (90 percent) — it was the address of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie (shown) that received widespread headline coverage in the media. A *New York Times* writer offered his view that, by making an appearance at CPAC, Christie, “sought Thursday to both ingratiate himself with conservative activists and press them to broaden the appeal of the Republican Party, warning that ‘we’ve got to start to talk about what we are for and not what we are against.’ ”

Christie, hinting that Republican colleagues who might sacrifice electability for uncompromising adherence to principle might bend a little, told the audience at CPAC that “we don’t get to govern if we don’t win.” “Please, let’s come out of here not only resolved to stand for our principles, but let’s come out of this conference resolved to win elections again,” he said.

Christie’s CPAC statement was more subtle, but, in essence, reflected what he said during a speech in Chicago a few weeks back: “Parties tend to become pragmatic when they are powerless. It’s time for us



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 7, 2014

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to get pragmatic.”

The New Jersey governor appealed to conservatives on both economic and moral grounds: “We need to also talk about what we are for,” he said. “We need to talk about the fact that we are for a free-market society that allows your effort and your ingenuity to determine your success, not the cold, hard hand of government ... which is what this administration is all about.”

Stressing his opposition to abortion, Christie told the crowd that “twice — twice — for the first time since *Roe v. Wade*, New Jersey has elected a pro-life governor.”

Recalling that Democrats had not allowed an anti-abortion Democrat to address their national convention, Christie said, “They’re the party of intolerance, not us.”

Christie, who has often been embroiled in controversy — most recently when several of his aides were accused of diverting traffic approaching the George Washington Bridge to create a traffic jam for political reasons — was not invited to CPAC last year, a snub that some observers attributed to his praise of President Obama during the president’s visit to the New Jersey Shore following Hurricane Sandy. Many Republicans believe that Christie’s favorable comments helped Obama’s reelection prospects.

Compared to several other speakers at CPAC, Christie’s record often defies the description “conservative,” raising questions as to whether he belongs at the conference and what purpose his appearance there serves.

Christie has developed a reputation as a conservative for standing up to New Jersey’s unions. In an interview with ABC News anchor Diane Sawyer in 2011, he said: “I believe the teachers in New Jersey in the main are wonderful public servants that care deeply. But their union, their union are a group of political thugs.” He has received both criticism from the faint hearted and respect from those who like to call a spade a spade for his often blunt remarks, but he defended his confrontational style, telling Sawyer: “We’re from New Jersey and when you’re from New Jersey, what that means is you give as good as you get.”

While this native New Jerseyan can affirm that statement, tough talk aside, Christie’s actions have often been at odds with his carefully crafted conservative image. For example:

- Speaking at the Republican Governors Conference in Aspen, Colorado, last July, Christie said: “As a former prosecutor who was appointed by President George W. Bush on Sept. 10, 2001, I just want us to be really cautious, because this strain of libertarianism that’s going through both parties right now and making big headlines, I think, is a very dangerous thought.”
- While he just made an appeal to social conservatives at CPAC by stressing his “pro-life” credentials, Christie betrayed moral traditionalists in his state by signing a bill into law last August making it illegal for licensed therapists in New Jersey to help minors overcome homosexual attraction — even with the approval of their parents. Therapies and treatments prohibited by the legislation include “efforts to change behaviors, gender identity, or gender expressions, or to reduce or eliminate sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward a person of the same gender.”
- Last October, after the state Supreme Court denied an appeal led by Christie of a lower court order requiring same-sex “marriage” to move forward, Christie’s characteristic chutzpah abandoned him and he advised his attorney general to drop the state’s appeal.
- And last August, much to the dismay of Garden State defenders of the constitutionally protected right



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to keep and bear arms, Christie signed into law 10 bills tightening restrictions on guns in the state. “These common-sense measures will both strengthen New Jersey’s already tough gun laws and upgrade penalties for those who commit gun crimes and violate gun trafficking laws,” said Christie.

With a history like this, it raises questions not only about Christie, but about CPAC, itself, which decided to invite him this year. As noted above, several speakers are members of Congress who have respectably conservative voting records. Also addressing CPAC were Florida Sen. Marco Rubio (FI score: 70 percent), Utah Sen. Mike Lee (100 percent), Texas Sen. John Cornyn (90 percent), and Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul (100 percent). Since the Freedom Index does not rate governors, the records of other speakers addressing this year’s CPAC — Bobby Jindal of Louisiana, Rick Perry of Texas, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, former senators Jim DeMint and Rick Santorum, and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich — can be evaluated from their past performances, as well as what some of them said during the last Republican presidential debates.

Suffice it to say that those invited to address CPAC span the range from constitutionalist to neoconservative, with every shade in between.

CPAC displayed a curious bias in 2012, when it announced that the constitutionalist John Birch Society “will not be invited to participate in a formal role for CPAC events scheduled during the 2012 election cycle.” The John Birch Society had previously been invited to set up an exhibit at the convention. The society’s public relations manager, Bill Hahn, found this unfortunate, as he had a nice chat with a member of the board at CPAC 2011 who said he was happy JBS was there and appreciated its work.

When we asked Hahn about this year’s event, he commented:

Isn’t it interesting to see how easily a crowd can be manipulated by a politician’s rhetoric? Yet when it comes to what actually counts, like his voting record and adherence to the Constitution, he receives a pass. It’s one indication why the term “conservative” has changed so much over the years. CPAC participants are hearing great rhetoric, but unfortunately are certainly missing constitutional substance. It’s this substance and understanding that will make all the difference in restoring and preserving American liberties.

Part of the difficulty in getting a handle on CPAC is that the term “conservative” has lost much of its meaning in recent years, which is why The John Birch Society and *The New American* prefer the more meaningful term “constitutionalist.”

*Photo of Chris Christie: AP Images*

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