

Christie still a key GOP figure, despite VP pass

By David Levinsky Staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, August 14, 2012 5:55 am

Mitt Romney may not have selected Chris Christie to be his running mate, but the soon-to-be Republican presidential nominee is still expected to lean heavily on New Jersey's Republican star in his bid to unseat President Barack Obama.

For starters, Christie, who was passed over as Romney's No. 2 in favor of Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan, is widely expected to deliver the keynote address at this month's Republican National Convention, an assignment that has been used by many politicians, including Obama, as a launching pad for future White House bids.

Christie also is expected to continue crisscrossing the country this summer and fall as a surrogate / fundraiser / attack dog for the Romney-Ryan campaign.

In a statement issued Saturday by Romney's campaign, Christie praised Romney's selection, calling them a team that "understands the economic stagnation our country has been facing the last four years."

"The Romney-Ryan team is uniquely positioned to make the tough choices necessary to confront our fiscal challenges and get results," Christie said.

Some believe Christie's political future is better served off the ballot this fall.

If Romney wins the White House, there's speculation Christie, formerly U.S. Attorney of the New Jersey District, would be the top choice to become Romney's U.S. Attorney General. In the event that Obama wins re-election, many view Christie as the Republicans' likely presidential frontrunner in 2016.

In the words of one New Jersey political watcher: Ryan's selection as VP "doesn't hurt Christie at all."

"He's still had a very good year and he continues to serve as a key Romney surrogate and fundraiser," said Daniel Douglas, director of the Hughes Center at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, who predicted Christie would perform well in the role of convention keynote speaker.

"He's demonstrated his speaking chops over the last few years, and (keynote speaker) wouldn't be a bad consolation prize, particularly if Romney doesn't win," Douglas said.

Although Ryan is popular among conservatives nationwide, Douglas said his selection does little to help Romney in the Garden State, where Obama remains a popular choice for re-election.

"I don't think Ryan changes that in any way," he said. "I've seen a lot of analysts call (Ryan) a bold choice, but I see it as the opposite. It's actually the safe choice. All he's really doing is exciting the base ... It's almost Palin-like; it'll create some excitement for some weeks and cause a bump in the polls, but it won't likely last."

If anything, he said Ryan's selection might create headaches for New Jersey Republicans down the ballot, particularly congressional candidates who will face scrutiny about the House budget committee chairman's proposals to revamp Medicare and Social Security.

Republican Jon Runyan, whose 3rd Congressional District race against Democrat Shelley Adler has been labeled as one of the nation's most competitive, supported both Ryan budgets and has defended his colleague's proposed entitlement reforms, arguing that the changes are needed to keep both programs solvent for future generations.

"During my brief time in Congress, I have seen firsthand what a smart, serious and solutions-oriented leader Paul Ryan is and I am proud to call him my friend," Runyan said in a statement. "Governor Romney knows that we cannot continue down the irresponsible path of raising taxes on working families, small businesses and seniors to pay for the runaway spending and borrowing of career politicians in Washington."

Adler responded that House budgets Ryan crafted and Runyan supported would vastly alter Medicare and provide tax cuts to millionaires and oil companies.

"Congressman Runyan has time and again sided with party leaders against the interests of middle-class families and

seniors," Adler said. "No greater example exists than the Ryan-Runyan budgets that would dismantle Medicare, costing future beneficiaries \$6,400 more a year, and providing tax breaks for millionaires, Big Oil and companies that ship American jobs overseas."

In New Jersey's U.S. Senate race, incumbent Democrat Robert Menendez blasted Romney's selection, calling Ryan "the architect of the budget plan that favors the nation's wealthiest people and corporations."

"As a result of Rep. Ryan's proposed budget, seniors on fixed incomes would face greater hardship, as there would be an end to Medicare as we know it, and the Social Security system they spent most of their lives paying into would be privatized and subjected to the whims of the stock market," Menendez said.

Menendez's Republican challenger, state Sen. Joe Kyrillos, responded with praise for Romney's pick and criticism of the incumbent Democrat's record.

"We need thoughtful leaders who want to solve our problems and strengthen our economy like Congressman Ryan, not politicians like Bob Menendez who make our problems worse," Kyrillos said.