

Christie not running, but what about Iowa trip?

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No matter where Governor Christie goes, the question of whether he's running for president still follows him like a state trooper protective unit.

Two trips he is now embarked on — to Salt Lake City and Iowa — are not likely to tamp down speculation about just what the Republican governor from New Jersey is up to.

Christie is scheduled to attend an annual conference of the National Governors Association's in Salt Lake City beginning today. But it's his trip on July 25 to Iowa, the site of January's influential caucus, that is most likely to stoke more speculation about his Oval Office ambitions.

"What the governor is doing is taking an opportunity to raise his national profile, whether or not he's particularly interested in running this time," said David Redlawsk, a former University of Iowa professor who now heads the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers. "Iowa is where the activity is."

Christie has denied — repeatedly, emphatically and sometimes with colorful imagery — that he isn't running for president in 2012, though he hasn't ruled out a candidacy in 2016.

Christie is traveling to Iowa to address an education summit where the state's governor, Terry Branstad, will be the host. Last year, Christie campaigned for Branstead, and he has made several out-of-state appearances to talk about his education proposals, which include eliminating teacher tenure as it is now known and offering job protection to those who show a high level of performance.

In addition to the education summit, Christie will be the main speaker at a fund-raising event for U.S. Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa.

And while Christie has said the Iowa trip is not intended as a way to lay the groundwork for a 2012 run, Redlawsk, who wrote "Why Iowa?" said meeting with Republican donors is exactly the kind of steps needed to set up a 2016 campaign.

"It's too early to look like you're starting for 2016," said Redlawsk. "But in the context of presidential politics, it's probably never too early to be doing behind-the-scene stuff."

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