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More candidates, please

At last count, 10 current or former governors had entered (or were shortly expected to enter) the 2016 presidential race. Most of the contenders hail from states in which, from a fiscal and entrepreneurial point of view, you wouldn't care to live. The essence of the survey now unfolding takes the form of a public-spirited plea: Can we not have a look at the other 40 possible entrants (never mind, for now, the governor of Puerto Rico)?

A new report from the Mercatus Center of George Mason University ranks the states by fiscal condition. The scorekeepers, led by Eileen Norcross, a senior research fellow at the center, use "14 metrics that assess whether the states can meet their short-term bills and long-term obligations." By Norcross's lights, solvency is a five-dimensional virtue, comprising the qualities of "cash, budget, long run, service level and trust fund." It happens that seven of the 10 announced governors, or ex-governors, preside or presided over states that fall in the bottom half of the rankings. They are Wisconsin, 28; Arkansas, 29; Louisiana, 35; Maryland, 37; Rhode Island, 38; New York, 46; and New Jersey, 49. (The Land of Lincoln is No. 50.)

You can't blame all of the Garden State's problems on incumbent governor Chris Christie, judges William Glasgall, an author of the Volcker Alliance's new, must-read report on state budgetary feascance and malfeasance; Trenton's game of budgetary musical chairs dates from the 1990s, at least. It so happens, says Glasgall, that Christie was in office when the music stopped. The silence left him seatless, although not without political and arithmetic resources. Under Christie, New Jersey has run down its

general account, borrowed from future lottery and tobacco-settlement earnings, and wiped out its rainy day fund. Judgment Day will surely come, but perhaps not until Christie has found alternative employment, in or out of the White House. "The state's declining liquidity has contributed to accelerated issuance of tax and revenue anticipation notes," according to the Volcker Alliance. "In fiscal year 2015, a sale took place on the first day, July 1."

Though New Jersey's constitution mandates a balanced budget (all but Vermont's do the same), "balance" is a defined term. To make ends meet in the new fiscal year, according to a June 4 Standard & Poor's bulletin, Christie & Co. are falling back on nonrecurring revenues and non-remitted contributions. If the state were funding its actuarial obligations in full, S&P relates, its budgetary hole would amount to \$4 billion, or 12% of planned \$33.8 billion fiscal-year 2016 outlays.

Not that the New Jersey narrative is without its shafts of sunshine. Under Christie's stewardship, only 35.5% of the state's bridges are judged to be in a state of obsolescence or decrepitude. On the campaign trail, the governor will not forget to mention that fully 37.2% of the bridges in his domain were so identified when he entered office in 2010.

The reason why many people cross bridges is to get to work. Without jobs—i.e., without entrepreneurship—you can stay home. The 2015 State Business Tax Climate Index, produced by the Tax Foundation, ranks the states by their fiscal hospitality to enterprise. And here, too, a curiously high percentage of the politically ambitious governors seem averse to cultivating the private income streams that ultimately pay the taxes.

Out of the 10 gubernatorial aspirants for the presidency, three govern, or governed, states that place in the Tax Foundation's bottom 10. They are Scott Walker of Wisconsin (he has one foot in the race), Gov.

John Kasich of Ohio and Lincoln Chafee, former governor of Rhode Island. Martin O'Malley, late of Maryland, missed the cutoff by the skin of his state's high-tax teeth: Maryland comes in at No. 40. Just five places less forbidding than Maryland toward business is Bobby Jindal's Louisiana.

Florida, which Jeb Bush governed between 1999 and 2007, occupies fifth place on the Tax Foundation list; Texas, in which almost one-third of all new private-sector jobs have been created since 2000—former Gov. Rick Perry may have cited this fact—ranks No. 10.

One of the above? Maybe—a suggestion—someone else instead.



World's big debtors form a defensive perimeter

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