



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 20, 2012

## Rick Perry Drops Out of GOP Presidential Race, Endorses Gingrich

"I know when it is time to make a strategic retreat," said Perry at a late morning press conference in South Carolina, where other Republican primary candidates were aggressively campaigning ahead of the state's January 21 primary. "I will leave the trail, return to Texas, and lay down my 2012 campaign."



In suspending his campaign, the Texas Governor said he would throw his support behind former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, whom he said "has the heart of a conservative reformer." As Gingrich was bracing for an [ABC Nightline](#) interview featuring one of his former wives recalling that he had wanted an "open marriage," Perry took up the former Congressman's defense. "Newt is not perfect, but who among us is," said the departing Perry. "The fact is there is forgiveness for those who seek God. And I believe in the power of redemption, for it is a central tenet of my Christian faith."

Gingrich expressed due gratitude to his erstwhile opponent, telling reporters that he was "humbled and honored to have the support of my friend Rick Perry. His selflessness is yet another demonstration of his deep sense of citizenship and commitment to the cause of limited government, historic American values, and greater freedom for every American."

Gingrich predicted that Perry would "continue to be a leader for the cause of conservatism, especially for more American energy and for implementing the 10th Amendment across the country."

While initially popular among many evangelicals, Perry failed to light a fire under the bulk of conservative voters. Although he started out strong in the summer of 2011, achieving top-tier status, he quickly sputtered, in part on the basis of a series of high-profile blunders during televised debates.

[CBS News](#) recalled that "Perry's initial debate performances were so bad that they prompted speculation that his struggles were due to the influence of pain medication following summer back surgery. Perry eventually got better, but not before he [offered up the YouTube moment of the campaign](#): His inability to remember the third cabinet agency he would cut." CBS likened the dazed candidate to a "high school student who had forgotten a list he had memorized, not someone who understood the issues at hand. And that wasn't the sort of thing voters were willing to shrug off."

Perry's performance in crucial contests doomed his campaign from the very start. After placing a



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distant fifth behind both co-winners Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum in the Iowa caucus, Perry retreated to Texas for a few days before re-emerging for one more futile effort at gaining a measure of his former momentum. Perry performed dismally in New Hampshire, a state he skipped to set his sights on South Carolina, and when a group of evangelical and social conservative leaders meeting in his home state bypassed him to endorse Santorum, Perry knew his campaign train had run out of steam.

Perry's departure may give Gingrich a crucial boost in the days ahead. CBS News reported that "Gingrich [appears to be gaining momentum in South Carolina](#), and Perry's endorsement could give the former speaker a critical boost just two days ahead of the Palmetto state primary. A senior campaign aide said Gingrich's staff had begun reaching out to Perry's campaign 'aggressively' in recent days. Gingrich himself had suggested on the campaign trail that it would be helpful for him if Perry were to drop out."

As for the damage the *Nightline* interview with Gingrich's ex-wife Marianne might do to his campaign, the [Los Angeles Times](#) reported that while dismissing reporters' questions about it, Gingrich "seemed to allude to it during a speech to supporters here, when he said he, his wife, and his two daughters had deep discussions about whether he should run for president."

Gingrich told supporters that he and his present family "spent almost a year talking about this because we knew there would be days that would be miserable. We knew we would have attack ads, we knew the news media would be as destructive as they could be, and so we had to raise the question, 'Do you really want to go through that?'"

But Gingrich added that after thinking about his grandchildren, and "the other young people who are here today," he and his wife came to the conclusion that "if we don't get a leader who actually knows what he's doing, we're in deep trouble. We could end up with China passing us as the leading country in the world. That would be bad."

With Perry in his rearview mirror and Romney within striking distance, "Gingrich urged voters to turn out for him Saturday, saying that if he can win the primary, he will be the GOP nominee," reported the *Times*.

Plying South Carolina supporters with rhetoric about American exceptionalism, while criticizing Romney as a "Massachusetts moderate," Gingrich warned that to bypass him could quite possibly mean four more disastrous years under Obama. Declared the hopeful GOP nominee: "This is the most important election of our lifetime."

*Photo of Gov. Rick Perry: AP Images*



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