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Carl Paladino is considering running for governor in 2018. (Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News file photo)

Paladino considering a run for governor in 2018

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Carl P. Paladino has looked around the nation's political landscape in recent months and likes what he sees.

And that's Donald J. Trump leading in GOP presidential polls, and the "political correctness" that Paladino has denounced for years under fire on a national stage.

Paladino believes New York State is now ready for the Paladino brand of politics, and that is why he says he might run for governor again in 2018.

"I'm really seriously considering it," he said. "A guy like Trump speaks like I do, and he's running away with this thing."

Paladino, who failed in his 2010 run for governor on the Republican line, first mentioned the possibility of a repeat run during an interview with Fox Business News on Monday. Since then, he said he has received encouragement to run, especially from those recalling his landslide primary victory over "establishment Republican" Rick A. Lazio in 2010. The Buffalo real estate developer and current School Board member beat the former Long Island congressman 64 to 34 percent that year, racking up overwhelming pluralities in places like Erie County, where he won 94 to 6 percent.

Paladino thinks the anti-Albany message that won him overwhelming support among Republicans in 2010 resonates even more now.

He said he believes he has better name recognition than any other potential Republican candidate. Republicans said to be considering a 2018 run include former Environmental Conservation Commissioner John P. Cahill, Rep. Chris Gibson of the Hudson Valley and Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino, who was the 2014 Republican candidate.

Paladino said he considers Cahill, who was the 2014 GOP candidate for attorney general, a "straight

But now the criminal convictions within 11 days of former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and former Senate Majority Leader Dean G. Skelos bring it all home, Paladino said. He even suggests Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo belongs in the same category.

"Those three men in a room will soon be in three little rooms in some federal prison camp," he said.

Trump leads the field of Republican presidential candidates with 35 percent of the primary vote in the latest CBS/New York Times poll, more than double his nearest competitor, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who has 16 percent. Paladino said their anti-establishment campaigns lend credence to the idea of a repeat effort for him, and that he expects to play a part in Trump's campaign for president.

"Trump is saying there is a lack of leadership," Paladino said. "In the past, even a dopey leader like George Bush was in charge. There is no respect for this guy now in the White House, so Trump is saying the things people are thinking. He hits the nail on the head."

Even though the next gubernatorial election lies almost two years in the future, Paladino should be considered a serious contender at least for the GOP nomination, said Kevin R. Hardwick, a Republican county legislator and Canisius College political scientist. Paladino maintains close relations with the local and state Conservative Party, he pointed out, and could benefit from the investigations and corruption trials that resulted in the Skelos conviction as recently as Friday.

"With all these investigations and rumors of Cuomo being next – I'm not predicting that but not saying it won't happen either – if he gets stained by the corruption infesting Albany that an outsider like Carl Paladino might have a fighting chance," Hardwick said.

Recalling that Paladino swept nine Western New York counties in his race against Cuomo in 2010, Hardwick said local Republican leaders should welcome another Paladino candidacy because of the success of so many GOP candidates riding his coat tails. But Paladino would have to avoid the confrontations with reporters and other controversies that earned him "Crazy Carl" headlines in the New York City tabloids, he added.

"Maybe it will be live and learn," Hardwick said. "But he certainly had a message that resonated with people in the same way as Trump resonates with people."

But Gerald Benjamin, a SUNY New Paltz political scientist and veteran observer of New York politics, said the state's overwhelming Democratic demographics would prove a major challenge to Paladino in a general election. He believes a "center right" contender with military experience like Gibson would prove a more attractive Republican in New York, and that Trump's embrace by the far right will not prove strong enough here.

"I think the real agenda is the promotion of Donald Trump," he said. "He may be most surprised as any person in America as to where he is."

Paladino, meanwhile, acknowledged he said on Election Day 2010 he would never again run for public office, a promise he broke by running for the Buffalo Board of Education. He said he no longer feels the same way.

"Yeah, y'know, we all have our moments," he said. "We get re-energized."

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