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Donald Who? New York GOP Leaders Won't Comment



Donald Trump draws crowd in Bethpage this week, but some NY Republicans have yet to endorse the frontrunner.

(Andrew Renneisen / Stringer)

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Donald Trump has secured dozens of endorsements from party leaders in New York upstate and on Long Island — but the full Republican establishment in New York has yet to get behind him in a unified front.

In fact, most high-profile Republican legislators have been reluctant to talk about who they're endorsing in the New York primary.

"I can't answer that question accurately because we don't know who the Republican nominee is," said New York State Senator John Bonacic (R-Middletown).

Political insiders say their silence is strategic, and that they have reason to be cautious: Every seat in the state legislature is up for grabs in November, and the name voters see at the top of the Republican ticket can help or hurt the other candidates on the ballot.

Republican strategist William O'Reilly said elected GOP officials are in a difficult spot. If they openly refuse to endorse Trump, his supporters could publicly go after them. And if they do endorse, they take on some of Trump's political baggage, he said. That includes what O'Reilly calls a "trifecta of insults to women" — his tweeting an unflattering photo of rival Ted Cruz's wife; his support for his campaign manager, who was caught on camera manhandling a female reporter; and comments by Trump on MSNBC that a woman should be punished for having an abortion.

"Donald Trump is radioactive," says Gerald Benjamin, a political science professor at SUNY New Paltz. He says it's unusual for elected officials not to acknowledge who they're backing this far into the campaign season.

"They don't want the people mad at them who are mad at Trump, and who are going to demonstrate that in the general election," he said.

But Trump does have support, especially on Long Island, where Joseph Mondello has endorsed him. Mondello once led the state Republican Party and chairs the Nassau County Republican Committee.

Assemblyman Bill Nojay, a Republican who is also a conservative talk radio host, also supports Trump. He said he believes Trump will win the general election in November because he is appealing to independent voters, and blue collar Democrats — not just traditional Republicans.

