

## Paul Ryan isn't committing to 2016

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CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa — Paul Ryan is not running for president — at least not yet.

The Wisconsin Republican was but a blip on the radar here Friday, in his second visit to the Hawkeye State since 2012.

No meetings with party bigwigs, no fundraising, no network building.

He dipped in after a fundraiser for two House colleagues in Chicago, took photos with donors before giving a 20-minute speech in front of a few hundred people at the Iowa Republican Lincoln Dinner. He shook hands and went back to Wisconsin, where one speaker said he wanted to get home in time to tuck his kids into bed.

([PHOTOS: Paul Ryan through the years](#))

So why did he even come?

“Because they asked me to,” Ryan told a small clutch of reporters. “It was a commitment I made, gosh, I don’t know ... a good year ago.”

He continued: “It’s a commitment — I keep my commitments.”

One commitment he hasn’t made: to run for president in 2016.

While Ryan’s allies say he doesn’t have to, since there are still 16 months until the presidential contest begins in earnest, his machinations — or lack thereof — stand in stark contrast to the rest of the field, who have begun laying the groundwork for a run.

Ryan’s moves in Iowa so far help reinforce what many in his inner circle privately believe: He’ll take a pass on 2016.

Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee was here last week, meeting with his supporters from 2008 and other influential Republicans as he mulls

another presidential bid.

A few weeks ago, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz came for a home schooling conference and had a quick conversation with a former key Sen. Rick Santorum staffer. Cruz was trailed by an aide, who is already jotting down the names of potential supporters.

Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, meanwhile, has snapped up the outgoing state party chair as an aide and is using his political action committee to position himself. He's considered the early frontrunner here, with the strongest in-state network.

Paul, Santorum and Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal are all scheduled to speak at Iowa's GOP convention in June — and sources here say all three are scheduling events to begin drumming up support for a possible 2016 run.

[\(Also on POLITICO: Ryan on Obama: I told you so\)](#)

So, while high-profile Republicans begin revving up for the brutal caucus season less than two years away, Ryan is acting more like the future Ways and Means chairman than a White House hopeful.

"I'm not going to get into any of that stuff," Ryan said, when asked if the chairmanship would preempt running for president. "Right now I am focused on doing my job, I'm focused on 2014. I'm focused on helping out my party. I'm focused on getting us to win elections, and it's just premature to get into all that stuff."

Not to Iowa insiders.

[\(Also on POLITICO: Paul Ryan raises record \\$1.4 million\)](#)

They say the time is just right to begin making the rounds across the state. Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), who has served with Ryan for more than a decade, said Ryan should start, noting that it's important "because it's your neighboring state. It's different if you're coming from, say, Massachusetts. So I think that he would want to put together, early, an effective Iowa strategy if he's interested in running."

"I don't see signals that he is positioning himself as aggressively as some of the other people that are likely candidates," said King, whose advice is frequently sought by potential candidates. "He's got a good image in Iowa, and he's a neighbor, from a neighboring state, and he built a good image as a vice presidential candidate, that's all

a plus for him. But whether he's ready to make that move or not, I'm not seeing those indications. I'm not seeing it by the moves he's making by the hires, I'm not seeing it just watching the flow of interactivity here in the House, that organism that after a while you get the feel for — it's not telling me he's positioning himself aggressively that way."

Not even Ryan's closest friends know whether he will run. When Ryan visits supporters in places like Boston and New York, he's often encouraged to consider to jump aggressively into the 2016 fray. He prefers to talk about his agenda to cure poverty — he also spoke about it here. Close friends of his in D.C. quip that he would loathe the kitchen-table ring kissing and glad-handing that are hallmarks of the early-state campaign.

And unlike Huckabee and Santorum, Ryan has a day job as an elected official. He passed a bipartisan budget deal last year and just finished writing — and passing — his 2015 spending plan. Not to mention, he has a wife and three young children who live in Wisconsin.

While he's certainly not building a huge ground game, Ryan has connections here. As he circled the large ballroom, shaking hands and taking photos, he remembered many faces. When Ryan was introduced to the president of the statewide college Republicans, Ryan's political aide swiftly asked for his email address.

Big-picture problems were on Ryan's mind. His speech — which he gave off the cuff, with minimal notes — was laced with references to his failed 2012 campaign alongside Mitt Romney.

"We face an uncontrolled government that threatens to overwhelm us," Ryan said. "You see, one of the challenges that Mitt and I had in 2012 is we sort of had to shadow box against big government in theory. We kept trying to say this is what Obamacare is going to do."

His message, while not explicitly presidential, was hardly confined to his southeastern Wisconsin district. Mentioning the barrios of West San Antonio, the inner city of Chicago and rural Oklahoma, Ryan said the status quo is not working.

"We need to spell out a very specific vision," Ryan said. "Here it is, using our birth certificate, the declaration, and the ideas, the rights and the foundations from it, this great operating system, road map, operating manual, the Constitution, how we get this country back on track. Here's a clear set of principles, here's a clear operating

manual, here's an actual plan. This is the horizon we're shooting for — right there — and here's how I choose to do it.”

Shortly after, he added: “We have to be not just the good opposition party, we have to be a great alternative party.”

He also waded into contentious local politics, telling a fractured Iowa Republican Party to “give up the infighting” for Lent.

“Let's give up the tunnel vision,” Ryan said to the party, which is torn between Ron Paul-inspired libertarians and more traditional conservative forces. “Let's give up the acrimony. The left loves to say that our party is in this big civil war — that we're tearing each other apart. I don't see it that way.”

There's some weariness with Ryan. Veterans don't know what to make of cuts to military benefits in his bipartisan budget deal. People are still digesting his 2015 Republican budget.

“I think people want to get into the budget and digest it more, and understand it more,” said Tamara Scott, a Republican National Committee member. “There've been so many budget plans come out and I think people want, first off, they just want the debt taken care of.”

Ryan's ambivalence is no secret. He says he will make a decision about his political future sometime after the midterm elections. But in a state where the rest of the field is aggressively positioning itself, Ryan, and his intentions, have proved enigmatic.

“To be honest, there isn't much buzz, but I'm not sure that's not because it's just too early,” said Gabe Haugland, the 32-year-old Cerro Gordo County Republican chairman. “I don't want to say there isn't any buzz for Paul Ryan, but on the other hand, it's not a name I hear come up very often.”