

Republican presidential campaign begins: A mixture of corporate cash and far-right politics

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An array of prospective Republican presidential candidates took part last weekend in the first two significant events in the campaign for the party's presidential nomination.

A dozen or so appeared Saturday at the Iowa Freedom Summit, a gathering of extreme-right Christian fundamentalists and Tea Party activists sponsored by Republican Congressman Steve King, a virulent promoter of anti-immigrant chauvinism. About 1,000 people attended the event, held more than a year before the Iowa caucuses, the first actual vote in the campaign for the presidential nomination.

Four candidates attended a conference of big-money donors in Palm Springs, California sponsored by Charles and David Koch, the billionaires who were the largest single Republican campaign contributors in 2012 and 2014. Three of the aspirants for the GOP nomination made an 80-minute joint appearance Sunday night in what was, in effect, the first debate of the Republican presidential campaign.

Two candidates—Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Texas Senator Ted Cruz—attended both meetings and received the warmest response from the ultra-right audience in Iowa, according to press accounts. They were also well received by the assembled billionaires and their political aides in Palm Springs, along with Senator Marco Rubio of Florida and Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, who skipped the Iowa event.

Of the two events, the donor conference was by far the more important, since money will be the deciding factor among the various reactionary blowhards and demagogues seeking the Republican nomination. By one estimate, it will cost \$75 million just to run a campaign in the Republican primaries, a figure that

only a handful of potential candidates are expected to raise.

A recent report by Politico found that the 100 largest donors gave \$323 million to candidates in 2014, as well as comparable sums to secretive committees that don't identify contributors. The total spending by these 100 donors was greater than the total contributions of all those who gave \$200 or less to Republican and Democratic candidates, some 4.75 million people.

While the Iowa forum consisted mainly of speeches in which the candidates sought to pander to the prejudices of the religious right, particularly on immigration, the donor summit in California included some revealing discussion of foreign policy.

The three-candidate debate between Cruz, Rubio and Paul brought out significant divisions over Cuba policy, with Paul supporting the Obama administration's decision to open diplomatic relations and attempt to subvert the Castro regime from within, rather than relying on the 50-year-old policy of blockade.

Both Cruz and Rubio are Cuban-Americans and voice the anti-communist mania of the most hysterical right-wing Cuban exiles. Paul pointed out—before an audience of billionaires and corporate bosses—that ending US trade with China, Saudi Arabia and other dictatorships would be a financial disaster.

Both Cruz and Rubio openly threatened war with Iran over its alleged nuclear program, while Paul was more cautious, again siding with the foreign policy of the Obama administration, which seeks to use the pressure of economic sanctions to reach a deal with the bourgeois regime in Tehran. Cruz was the most vituperative, calling the leaders of Iran “radical religious Islamic nutcases.”

The Koch forum ended with a question posed by ABC reporter Jonathan Karl, the moderator, on the role of billionaires in politics. The three Republicans abased themselves before their wealthy patrons, calling them “patriots” who had “stood up for free-market principles.” Charles and David Koch are the fifth- and sixth-richest individuals in the United States, with fortunes of over \$40 billion apiece.

It is a measure of the continual shift to the right in American official politics that speakers at both weekend gatherings attacked the 2012 Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney for being insufficiently right-wing. Both the fundamentalists and the billionaires groaned at the prospect that he might once again seek the party’s nomination.

Similarly, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, who has accumulated the most money and the most official support in the early weeks of the campaign, was a target of criticism in Iowa for his supposed moderation, particularly on the question of immigration (his wife is Mexican). He is also, of course, the son and brother of presidents who are now regarded by the Republican ultra-right as quasi-liberals.

Bush had considerable support at the Koch gathering, however, and is already said to be by far the best funded of all the prospective Republican candidates.

The Republican sweep of the 2014 congressional elections, the vast sums that will be made available for the presidential campaign, and the absence of a single “front-runner” have combined to attract an ever-growing cast of potential candidates for the 2016 presidential nomination.

Anywhere from 17 to 25, depending on the publication doing the counting, are considered “serious” by the standards of the US two-party system: current or former officeholders, multimillionaires, or both, with some support in the right-wing corporate media, particularly Fox and talk radio.

One group of candidates is identified primarily with the party establishment, including Romney if he runs, Jeb Bush, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, Ohio Governor John Kasich and Michigan Governor Rick Snyder.

Appealing mainly to the religious right and Tea Party are Cruz, Paul, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal and

former Texas Governor Rick Perry.

Rubio and Walker are seeking to combine support from both wings of the party. Walker, in particular, with his record of smashing a public workers revolt in Wisconsin, thanks to the capitulation of the AFL-CIO, AFSCME and other unions, is regarded by corporate America as a proven defender of their interests.

Then there are a larger than usual number of publicity hounds, self-promoters and people seeking employment in a future Republican administration, including Donald Trump, Sarah Palin, retired medical doctor and author Ben Carson, former IT boss Carly Fiorina, former UN Ambassador John Bolton and former New York Governor George Pataki. As one columnist noted, “They all want to be president, but if it doesn’t work out, most believe they can at least make money (or get a talk show) off running for it.”

This is in stark contrast to the campaign for the Democratic nomination, where former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is the prohibitive frontrunner, hiring dozens of political operatives and locking up hundreds of millions of dollars in promised cash that will deluge her campaign as soon as the formal announcement, now expected in April.

A report last week suggested that Clinton would raise between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion for her presidential campaign, three times the amount Obama raised in 2008 and 2012, and more than the entire cost of any US election in the 20th century.



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