

Republican candidates split over racist remarks by Donald Trump

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The brigade of Republican US presidential candidates have faced questions about racism and anti-immigrant bigotry in the wake of fascistic rants against Mexican immigrants by billionaire developer Donald Trump.

After toying with presidential politics in 2012, Trump announced an actual bid for the Republican presidential nomination at a press conference June 16, where he made the first in a series of rambling, racist references to immigrants crossing the US-Mexico border.

He denounced the Obama administration, which has deported more immigrants than any in US history, for being too soft in its border enforcement policies, promising to “build a great, great wall” on the Mexican border.

He would make the government of Mexico pay for the wall, Trump continued, because, “They’re sending people that have lots of problems... They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

Trump repeated these ignorant libels in numerous campaign appearances in Iowa and New Hampshire, where the first caucus and primary votes will be held early next year, and in media interviews.

The corporate reaction to Trump’s comments closely tracks the response to the issue of the Confederate flag in the wake of last month’s massacre at a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, when most big retailers hurriedly declared they would stop selling Confederate-themed merchandise because it was racially offensive.

NBC Universal, the longtime broadcaster of Trump’s “The Apprentice” and “Celebrity Apprentice” programs, announced it was ending its relationship with him. Macy’s and several other retailers announced they would stop carrying lines of clothing co-sponsored by Trump. The top US Hispanic television network, Univision, canceled plans to televise the Miss USA

pageant, a Trump-NBC joint venture for many years.

The Republican Party establishment has spent heavily on attempts to win support among sections of the Hispanic population. An internal party review of the 2012 election campaign concluded that presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s support for what he called “self-deportation” of millions of undocumented immigrants—in other words, harassing them so unmercifully that they would voluntarily flee the US—contributed to his record deficit among Hispanic voters.

Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus called Trump’s comments “not helpful” to the effort to reach Hispanic voters, but could not bring himself to actually condemn the remarks, adding that voters would decide the eventual Republican nominee. “We don’t get to pick and choose who runs, who doesn’t,” he said.

The pack of Republican presidential candidates seemed split about how to respond to Trump’s comments.

Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, whose wife is Mexican, called the remarks “extraordinarily ugly” and “way out of the mainstream of what Republicans think.” Former Texas Governor Rick Perry said on ABC’s “This Week” program Sunday, “Donald Trump does not represent the Republican Party. I was offended by his remarks.” Senator Marco Rubio of Florida called the comments “not just offensive and inaccurate, but also divisive.”

Those who voiced condemnation of Trump, however, were outnumbered by those who were silent, equivocated or tacitly supported the racist billionaire.

Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, appearing on CNN’s “State of the Union” interview program Sunday, refused to comment directly on

Trump, saying, “I think what I have been doing is focusing on what my own views of immigration happen to be, rather than weighing in on getting in this battle of, are we with Trump or against Trump?”

Former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum said Trump’s language was wrong, but otherwise tried to appeal to anti-immigrant prejudice: “I think Donald points to a very important thing, which is we have a serious problem of illegal immigration in this country that is undermining American workers.”

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, in response to a question at a news conference, called Trump’s comments “wholly inappropriate.” Later in a radio interview he called Trump “a really wonderful guy [who’s] always been a good friend.”

Several other candidates have said nothing, in effect, refusing to go even as far as the Republican National Committee in distancing themselves from open anti-immigrant racism. These include Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, former Hewlett Packard CEO Carly Fiorina and retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson.

One leading Republican candidate, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, vehemently defended Trump during an appearance on the NBC Sunday interview program “Meet the Press.” Using coded language that sought to identify critics of Trump with narcotics traffickers, Cruz declared, “I salute Donald Trump for focusing on the need to address illegal immigration. The Washington cartel doesn’t want to address that. The Washington cartel doesn’t believe we need to secure the borders. The Washington cartel supports amnesty and I think amnesty’s wrong. And I salute Donald Trump for focusing on it.”

He claimed he wouldn’t “engage in the media game of throwing rocks and attacking other Republicans.” His interviewer, Chuck Todd, failed to ask the obvious question of how he could run for president against 15 other Republican candidates without criticizing any of them.

In reality, Cruz has been the most vituperative and bombastic of any of the Republicans, with the possible exception of Trump himself. His solidarizing himself with Trump was an open bid to solicit both Trump’s racist supporters and Trump’s billions (if they actually exist) in support of his own campaign.

The Republican candidates are walking on eggshells

on the issue because they are caught between the corporate reaction, largely hostile to Trump out of concern for their interests in the Hispanic-American market and in Mexico itself, and the desire to appeal to the substantial section of Republican primary voters for whom anti-immigrant racism is attractive rather than repulsive.

Trump has shot up to second place in national polls of Republican primary voters, with 12 percent, trailing only the nominal frontrunner Bush, with 19 percent. Trump is second in New Hampshire polls to Bush, and tied for second in polls of likely Iowa caucus voters, trailing only Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker.



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