More bigotry from Republican presidential candidates

Patrick Martin
21 September 2015

One of the leading Republican presidential candidates declared Sunday that a Muslim should never be allowed to become president of the United States.

Speaking in defiance of the US Constitution, which explicitly prohibits religious tests for holding political office, retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson said on the NBC News program "Meet the Press" that being a Muslim should disqualify a candidate for the top position in the federal government.

Carson is currently running second or third in polls of likely Republican primary voters. He was given a hero's welcome Saturday when he addressed a conference called by the ultra-right Heritage Action Center in South Carolina, where seven candidates for the Republican nomination appeared.

On "Meet the Press" the next day, Carson was asked by host Chuck Todd whether the religious views of the president were relevant to his fitness for office. "It depends on what that faith is," replied Carson, a practicing Seventh-Day Adventist who has based his campaign on appeals to Christian fundamentalists.

"If it's inconsistent with the values and principles of America, then of course it should matter. But if it fits within the realm of America and consistent with the Constitution, no problem."

Todd then asked whether Carson believed Islam is "consistent with the Constitution." The candidate responded, "No, I do not. I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation. I absolutely would not agree with that."

Carson said he could potentially back a Muslim for the House of Representatives or US Senate. "Congress is a different story," he said. "But it depends on who that Muslim is and what their policies are." Given that he had just declared Islam to be incompatible with the US Constitution, this "concession" to Muslims only reveals the extreme shallowness of the political "thinking" underlying Carson's religious bigotry.

Todd did not point out, although other commentators did subsequently, that Carson's opposition to a Muslim in the White House amounts to a flat rejection of the US Constitution's provisions on the separation of church and state.

This includes not only the First Amendment, which forbids the establishment of a state religion, but also the last paragraph of Article VI, which reads, in part, "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

More than a half-century ago, John F. Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, cited Article VI in response to those who opposed his election on religious grounds. In his famous speech on September 12, 1960 to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Kennedy declared that he did not "look with favor upon those who would work to subvert Article VI of the Constitution by requiring a religious test, even by indirection. For if they disagree with that safeguard, they should be openly working to repeal it."

Carson's comments elicited a mixed reaction from his fellow Republican candidates. Billionaire Donald Trump, who leads in polls of Republican primary voters, gave the most cynical response. Asked the same question on "Meet the Press" about a possible Muslim president, he replied, "Some people have said it already happened."

This was a reference to the longstanding ultra-right campaign claiming President Obama is a Muslim (together with the related claim that Obama was not born in the United States and is therefore not eligible to be president). Trump was the leading proponent of the so-called "birthers" in the Republican Party, and he pandered to them again on Thursday.

© World Socialist Web Site

"We have a problem in this country. It's called Muslims," said a campaign supporter who stood up at a Trump rally. "We know our current president is one—you know he's not even an American."

"Right," Trump responded.

After media criticism that he had effectively agreed with the "birther" by declining to correct him, Trump responded on Twitter that "Christians need support in our country (and around the world), their religious liberty is at stake!"

Actually, the Obama administration has cringed before the Christian fundamentalist right as well as the Roman Catholic hierarchy, seeking to appease them by excluding both churches and church-run charities and social services from provisions of the Affordable Care Act relating to contraception and abortion services.

Another Republican presidential hopeful, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, rejected questioning whether Obama was a Christian and born in the United States, but expressed understanding for Carson's opposition to a Muslim president, citing the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. "I just think that it's hard for us--we were attacked by people who are all Muslim," Paul said.

Carson's attack on Article VI is only the latest in a series of increasingly flagrant attacks on the basic democratic precepts set down in the US Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Trump set the pace with a public denunciation of the 14th Amendment's provision for "birthright citizenship," under which the children of immigrants who are born on US soil are automatically American citizens. Seven other Republican presidential hopefuls have endorsed this reactionary reinterpretation of the 14th Amendment, which Trump repeated during the Republican presidential debate September 16.

Texas Senator Ted Cruz and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, among others, publicly declared their support for Kim Davis, the clerk of Rowan County, Kentucky, who defied a federal court order to begin issuing marriage licenses to gay couples. Asked what authority allowed her to override the US Supreme Court decision striking down state bans on gay marriage, she replied, "God's authority."

There was little discussion of the Davis case during last week's Republican debate, but at least half of the Republican presidential hopefuls have expressed sympathy for this theocratic view of the world, in which political office-holders are entitled to force their religious views on the public.

The author also recommends:

Republican candidates attack the Fourteenth Amendment

[24 August 2015]

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site