

Republican Party crisis deepens over Trump anti-Muslim statements

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The political crisis triggered by the continued status of billionaire demagogue Donald Trump as the leading candidate for the Republican presidential nomination took a new turn Friday with reports that top Republican leaders had met in Washington to discuss the possibility that the primary campaign could extend right up until and even into the Republican National Convention.

The *Washington Post* reported that more than 20 top officials had attended a dinner December 7 hosted by Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus, with the presidential race and the possibility of a deadlocked or brokered convention (where no candidate has a pre-existing majority of delegates) as the major topic of discussion. The timing of the meeting at a restaurant near Capitol Hill was significant. It came only a few hours after Trump's public call for a "total shutdown of Muslims" entering the United States touched off a political firestorm over Trump's increasingly open fascist views.

Citing five unnamed officials who attended the dinner, the *Post* report that Priebus and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) listened largely without comment to several longstanding Republican campaign organizers who made presentations of possible outcomes of the presidential race. They warned that Trump, who leads with about 30 percent in national polls of likely Republican primary voters, would have both the delegates and the funds required to sustain his campaign through the convention, set for July 18-21, 2016 in Cleveland, Ohio.

Given the likelihood that the anti-Trump vote would be split up among as many as a dozen other candidates, and that more than half the states award convention delegates on a proportional or district-by-district basis, rather than winner-take-all, the campaign operatives

argued that it was increasingly likely that no candidate would have a majority of delegates prior to the opening of the convention. That would mean open floor fights, both for the nomination and on the party platform.

Most delegates are "bound" to vote for specific candidates on the first ballot, which would likely be inconclusive. In subsequent ballots, delegates would be free to switch their votes, or even to vote for someone outside the existing field of candidates, opening up a potentially chaotic arena for political scheming and horse-trading.

According to the *Post* report, Priebus and McConnell did not indicate any support for a concerted effort to deny the nomination to Trump, but those attending included supporters of Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio, as well as the heads of the campaign committees for both the House and Senate, where Republican incumbents have expressed nervousness about running as part of a ticket headed by Trump.

The chief spokesman for the Republican National Committee, Sean Spicer, would only confirm that the topic of a brokered convention has been discussed among top party leaders. "The RNC is neutral in this process, and the rules are set until the convention begins next July," he said in a statement. "Our goal is to ensure a successful nomination, and that requires us thinking through every scenario, including a contested convention."

Significantly, there is no indication from the *Post* report that the Republican leaders were angered or outraged by Trump's fascist anti-Muslim declaration, or that anyone proposed a public statement condemning his position as unconstitutional and anti-democratic. The discussion was focused on the implications of the Trump campaign for the internal functioning and electoral prospects of the Republican Party.

While six Republican presidential hopefuls have denounced Trump's call for a ban on Muslim visitors and immigrants (Jeb Bush, Chris Christie, Marco Rubio, Lindsey Graham, John Kasich and Carly Fiorina), a nearly equal number have been supportive (Ted Cruz, Ben Carson, Rick Santorum, Mike Huckabee and Rand Paul). Based on the most recent polls, candidates with the support of 69 percent of likely Republican primary voters have sided with Trump (counting the candidate himself), while the six candidates who have voiced opposition have a combined support of barely 30 percent.

These divisions will be further spotlighted in the next Republican presidential debate, set for Tuesday, December 15, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Based on current polling, the main debate, for candidates with 4 percent support either nationally or in Iowa or New Hampshire, the first caucus and primary states, would include Trump, Cruz, Carson, Rubio, Bush, Kasich, Christie and Fiorina.

The polls showed Cruz displacing Carson as the second-place candidate behind Trump, while polls in Iowa now show Cruz in the lead in the first caucus state. The ultra-right Texas senator has been endorsed by most leaders of evangelical Christian groups in Iowa, who comprise two-thirds of those expected to attend the Republican caucuses. Cruz issued a statement Tuesday distancing himself from Trump's call to bar Muslims from entering the United States, but warmly endorsing the overall focus of the Trump campaign. "I commend Donald Trump for standing up and focusing America's attention on the need to secure our borders," Cruz said.

Both Trump and Carson have threatened to bolt the Republican Party and mount independent campaigns if the party establishment intervenes against them in the presidential campaign. Earlier this week, Trump touted a poll showing that 68 percent of his supporters would follow him out of the Republican Party if he decided to run as an independent.

In response to the report on the secret meeting convened by Priebus, Carson's campaign released a vitriolic statement declaring, "If the leaders of the Republican Party want to destroy the party, they should continue to hold meetings like the one described in the *Washington Post* this morning."

"If this was the beginning of a plan to subvert the will

of the voters and replace it with the will of the political elite, I assure you Donald Trump will not be the only one leaving the party," the Carson statement warned. "If the powerful try to manipulate it, the Republican National Convention in Cleveland next summer may be the last convention."

Trump followed up his anti-Muslim ranting with a declaration Thursday that if elected president he would issue an executive order to mandate the death penalty for anyone who kills a police officer. He was speaking to a rally in New Hampshire, side-by-side with representatives of the New England Police Benevolent Association, which had just endorsed him.

Meanwhile, a prominent California Democrat made comments echoing those of Trump on the supposed dangers posed by Muslims and their religion. Loretta Sanchez, a congresswoman from Los Angeles who is seeking the party's nomination for a US Senate seat, said that as many as 20 percent of Muslims "have a desire for a caliphate and to institute that in any way possible." Speaking on the program "Politicking with Larry King," she declared, "They are willing to go to extremes. They are willing to use and they do use terrorism."

Sanchez represents a suburban district not far from San Bernardino, site of a December 2 attack that has been used by the entire US political establishment and the corporate-controlled media to whip up public fears of terrorism and distract attention from the deepening social and economic crisis of American capitalism.



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