

Republican Party crisis deepens as candidates renege on “loyalty” pledge

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All three remaining candidates for the Republican presidential nomination declined to renew their pledges to support the party’s eventual standard-bearer, in back-to-back appearances Tuesday night at a town hall in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, televised over CNN.

While Texas Senator Ted Cruz and Ohio Governor John Kasich worded their statements carefully, billionaire Donald Trump, the frontrunner, flatly repudiated the declaration that he made last fall, agreeing to support the party’s nominee and not to launch a third-party or independent campaign if denied the Republican nomination.

Trump told interviewer Anderson Cooper that the Republican National Committee and the Republican Party “establishment” had not treated him fairly. He claimed “you’d have a lot of very upset people” if there is a contested convention in Cleveland in July which nominates someone else.

A contested convention would take place if Trump fails to reach the required 1,237 majority of delegates required for the nomination, as is increasingly possible given the fractured voting in primaries and caucuses. Trump currently leads with 763 delegates to 463 for Cruz and 143 for Kasich.

Only four weeks ago, at a March 3 Fox News debate in Detroit, all three candidates, plus Florida Senator Marco Rubio, who was still in the race, raised their hands to declare they remained committed to support the eventual nominee, whether Trump or someone else.

Asked if he stood by that pledge, Trump said Tuesday, “No, I don’t anymore.” He claimed that the RNC and Republican officials were not treating him with the respect due to his first-place position. “I’m the front-runner by a lot,” he boasted. “I’m beating Ted Cruz by millions of votes.” Trump went on to berate Cruz, declaring that he did not need his support in the

general election and would not want it.

Cruz responded in similarly bitter terms to a subsequent question about supporting Trump if he becomes the nominee, referring to a recent series of vicious Internet postings by Trump. “I’m not in the habit of supporting someone who attacks my wife and attacks my family,” he said. When pressed, Cruz continued, “Let me tell you my solution to that: Donald is not going to be the GOP nominee.”

Kasich said, “If the nominee is somebody I think is really hurting the country, and dividing the country, I can’t stand behind them,” but wouldn’t say Trump’s name, although that was clearly the reference. He said he had been “disturbed by some of the things I’ve seen” during the campaign, adding, “I want to see how this finishes out.” Asked about his pledge to support Trump at the Detroit debate, he said, “Frankly, all of us shouldn’t have even answered that question.”

The next major contest is April 5 in Wisconsin, with polls of likely Republican voters showing Cruz with a 10-point lead over Trump, 40 percent to 30 percent, with Kasich trailing with 21 percent.

There were signs of a more concerted anti-Trump campaign in Wisconsin, where virtually the entire state Republican Party is backing Cruz, led by Governor Scott Walker, himself a failed presidential candidate, who endorsed Cruz on Monday. Not a single Republican state legislator in Wisconsin is supporting Trump, an extraordinary situation for a presidential frontrunner.

Cruz, of course, is no less reactionary than Trump on virtually every significant issue. He hailed Walker’s endorsement, noting the Wisconsin governor’s role in the 2011 campaign against public employees, slashing wages, benefits and union rights while the AFL-CIO unions sabotaged a mass movement by the working

class to fight back.

The Texas Senator sought to outdo Trump last week in anti-Muslim vilification and paranoia, advocating a massive police mobilization in US cities to “patrol and secure Muslim neighborhoods before they become radicalized.”

Another effort to produce a contested convention came from Florida Senator Rubio, who had accumulated 171 pledged delegates before he suspended his campaign after defeat in his home state primary March 15.

Rubio has now asked the Republican National Committee and 21 state committees to have his delegates bound to vote for him at the convention’s first ballot, rather than allowing them to become uncommitted, and therefore available for poaching by Trump or Cruz. On Tuesday, Alaska became the first state to respond, agreeing to bind Rubio’s five delegates.

There were a number of signs that the mounting political pressure is taking its toll on the Trump campaign. On Tuesday, Trump’s campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, was indicted in Jupiter, Florida on charges of battery against a female reporter, Michelle Fields, then of Breitbart News, a right-wing Internet publication.

After Fields publicly accused Lewandowski of grabbing her and frog-marching her away from Trump after a Florida campaign appearance, Trump and Lewandowski both publicly declared her “delusional,” with Lewandowski claiming he had never even met her.

Fields filed charges with the Jupiter police, who found video footage of the incident that confirmed her account and proved both the candidate and campaign manager to be outright liars—not for the first time.

Trump’s own behavior appears increasingly unhinged, as demonstrated in last week’s exchange of insults with Cruz, culminating in Trump’s threat to “spill the beans” on Heidi Cruz, the candidate’s wife, and a series of demeaning twitter posts and emails. This has intensified in Wisconsin, where the candidate has met with hostility even on right-wing talk radio.

At an interview with MSNBC host Chris Matthews Wednesday, Trump reiterated his opposition to abortion rights and declared that if abortion becomes illegal, women who have an abortion should be “punished” in some unspecified way. Only after this statement was

denounced by both abortion rights and anti-abortion groups did his campaign issue a statement retracting his comments.

In the same interview, Trump declared his willingness to consider the use of tactical nuclear weapons against ISIS. “You have to keep all your cards on the table,” he said. Matthews, clearly dumbfounded, asked him if this applied to other theaters of potential conflict, such as Europe. Trump indicated that tactical nuclear weapons could potentially be used in Europe as well.

Trump has maintained a lead over Cruz and Kasich in polls of Republican primary voters, but his overall poll numbers have fallen considerably over the past two weeks. According to a *Washington Post*-ABC News poll this month, 67 percent of Americans had an unfavorable impression of the billionaire demagogue, which the newspaper described as “surpassing the highest negative marks for any presidential candidate in more than three decades of *Post*-ABC polling.”



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