Republican split deepens over Trump nomination

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9 May 2016

Several former leaders of the Republican Party have declared that they will not support the presumptive presidential nominee of the party, billionaire real estate tycoon Donald Trump. Their statements underscore the explosive character of the political crisis building up in the United States, which threatens the break-up of the two-party system through which big business has exercised a political monopoly for more than a century.

Beginning with House Speaker Paul Ryan, who announced Thursday that he was “not ready… at this point” to endorse Trump for the presidency, the list has grown to include both living former Republican presidents, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush, the 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, several former candidates for the 2016 nomination, and numerous other elected officials.

While Ryan presented his rebuff of Trump as conditional, pending a meeting between the two now set for May 12, the repudiation of the Republican frontrunner by the others was more definitive. A statement issued on behalf of the two former presidents announcing that they would not endorse Trump indicated that neither Bush would have anything to say about the presidential campaign until after the November 8 election.

Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, an unsuccessful candidate for the Republican nomination and the younger brother of George W. Bush, posted a statement Friday on Facebook declaring, “Donald Trump has not demonstrated [the] temperament or strength of character” necessary in a president. He continued: “He has not displayed a respect for the Constitution. And, he is not a consistent conservative. These are all reasons why I cannot support his candidacy.”

Mitt Romney appeared Thursday night at a gala dinner in Washington DC to benefit the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. When asked if he would run as an independent candidate for president, he said he was not interested. He then added, “I don’t intend on supporting either of the major-party candidates at this point.” He continued: “I am dismayed at where we are now, I wish we had better choices, and I keep hoping that somehow things will get better, and I just don’t see an easy answer from where we are.”

Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who like Jeb Bush was a candidate for the Republican nomination and signed a pledge last year to support the eventual nominee, said Friday that Trump was unfit to be commander in chief. “I don't think he’s a reliable Republican conservative,” he said. “I don’t believe that Donald Trump has the temperament and judgment to be commander in chief. I think Donald Trump is going to places where very few people have gone and I’m not going with him.”

An even more scathing denunciation came from former US senator Gordon Humphrey of New Hampshire, who will be a delegate to the Republican National Convention pledged to Ohio Governor John Kasich. “Unequivocally, I am not supporting Donald Trump,” he told the press. “I think he is a sociopath.”

While saying he would vote for Trump in November, Arizona Senator John McCain, the Republican presidential nominee in 2008, said he would not attend the July convention in Cleveland. This is the increasingly common choice of those who won’t oppose Trump publicly but don’t want to be associated with his coronation as the nominee.

The executive director of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, Ward Baker, told a briefing for lobbyists and donors Thursday that Republican candidates should skip the convention if they felt it was to their advantage in November.

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Some of the most right-wing members of the House Republican caucus have declared their opposition to Trump, including Justin Amash of Michigan, who bills himself a libertarian, and Steve King of Iowa, a ferocious anti-immigrant bigot who supported Texas Senator Ted Cruz and is aligned with the most extreme Christian fundamentalists.

While those publicly opposing Trump include some of the most prominent Republican Party leaders, they are in a distinct minority.

Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell have both declared their support for Trump as the presumptive nominee. They were joined by former vice president Dick Cheney, the 1996 Republican presidential nominee Robert Dole, and a slew of Republican governors, including many, like Mike Spence of Indiana and Pete Ricketts of Nebraska, who had supported rival candidates for the nomination.

Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin, who dropped out of the presidential race last September and urged his rivals to unite against Trump, said he would support Trump over likely Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

Some of the Trump endorsements came from rivals who once described him in scathing terms. Former Texas Governor Rick Perry called Trump a “barking carnival act” and a “cancer on conservatism” when he was running against the billionaire last year. On Thursday, he endorsed him and indicated he was available to be his running mate.

Former Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal described Trump last fall—before he abandoned his own presidential campaign—as “dangerous” and “a narcissist and egomaniac.” That didn’t stop him from endorsing Trump as well.

Another unsuccessful candidate for the Republican nomination, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, had called Trump “a delusional narcissist and an orange-faced windbag,” adding that “A speck of dirt is way more qualified to be president.” Last month he said he would support Trump if he became the Republican nominee.

There is cynicism and duplicity on both sides of the Republican divide. But there are significant underlying political conflicts, which have nothing to do with characterizations of Trump as a maniac or buffoon.

There is substantial opposition to the billionaire’s muddled views on foreign policy, a mixture of isolationism and extreme militarism, and his promotion of economic nationalism, where the dominant factions on Wall Street and in the military-intelligence apparatus see Democrat Hillary Clinton as a more reliable defender of their interests.

Powerful sections of corporate America reject Trump’s attacks on trade agreements that have been engineered, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, to favor the interests of the biggest US companies and banks.

Trump did not help himself in this quarter with his declaration that Britain would be better off pulling out of the European Union, followed by his suggestion that the US government could pressure creditors to accept less than full payment on the national debt. In both cases, Wall Street is adamantly opposed because of the potentially catastrophic damage to its financial interests.

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