

Ahead of Iowa caucuses

Republican presidential candidates campaign on mass deportations, abolishing right to asylum

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In their last major television appearances before the Iowa caucuses, to be held on January 15, the three major Republican presidential candidates—ex-President Donald Trump, his former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis—centered their campaigns on fascistic anti-immigrant agitation.

The latest polls project Trump to be the winner of both the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, the latter scheduled for January 23. However, some polls have Haley within single digits of Trump in New Hampshire.

DeSantis has cratered in polling since first announcing his campaign last year. Reports are emerging that should DeSantis have a poor showing in Iowa, his presidential run will be over.

Trump, Haley and DeSantis are all proposing the same basic anti-immigrant policy, effectively ending the right to asylum and carrying out mass deportations and detentions of undocumented workers.

In the CNN debate held Wednesday night between Haley and DeSantis, moderator Jake Tapper dedicated several questions to the war on immigrants. Tapper provided ample airtime for the right-wing candidates to compete for the mantle of being the most brutal and sadistic enemy of refugees.

“This has been one of the biggest years for illegal border crossings into the United States,” Tapper fear-mongered. Referring to Trump’s incomplete border wall, Tapper asked DeSantis, “How will you succeed where [Trump] failed?”

“We will build the wall,” DeSantis replied, adding that he would impose the cost on migrants living in the US. “We are going to charge fees on remittances that workers send to foreign countries,” he boasted.

Promising to deport millions of people, DeSantis added, “Biden has let in 8 million people in four years. They have to go back.”

Turning to his Republican rival, DeSantis hissed, “Do not trust Nikki Haley with illegal immigration. That’s like having the fox guard the hen house... She’s weak on immigration. She’s bankrolled by people who want open borders and she said there shouldn’t be a limit on immigration...”

DeSantis made a point of denouncing Haley for humane comments she previously made regarding immigrants while speaking at the Aspen Institute, a capitalist think tank. The CEO of the Aspen Institute at the time was Walter Isaacson, the former chair and CEO of CNN and one-time editor of *Time*.

Tapper then asked Haley if she stood by her 2015 comments, in which she said, “We don’t need to talk about them,” referring to immigrants, “as criminals. They are not. They are families that want a better life and they are desperate to get here.”

Replying to Tapper, Haley said that she “saw them,” but it “doesn’t mean we should let them into our country.”

The former South Carolina governor called for “building the wall” and “putting 25,000 Border Patrol and ICE agents on the ground and let them do their job.” She spoke in favor of “defunding sanctuary cities” and reinstating “remain in Mexico so no one even steps foot on US soil.”

Tapper turned back to DeSantis for a reply. The governor, who has campaigned on a “shoot on sight” policy for the southern border, claimed that “military-aged males” were coming from all over the world, including “China, Iran, Russia, the Middle East.”

Calling migration a “ticking time bomb,” he added, “Of course, there are going to be terrorist cells.”

Throughout the back and forth, Tapper never raised the plight of immigrants or even hinted at humanitarian or democratic concerns. Instead, he asked DeSantis, “There are currently 10 million undocumented immigrants living in the

United States, according to Pew Research. Will any of them be allowed to stay in the United States under your administration?”

DeSantis said “zero” people would be granted amnesty under his presidency. Asked the same question, Haley replied, “You have to deport them.”

At a question-and-answer town hall held at the same time on Fox News, which registered double the ratings of the CNN event, Donald Trump reiterated his desire to carry out the biggest deportation operation in US history.

All the questions from the audience were pre-screened by Fox prior to airing.

Asked by an audience member how he would “gather the several millions that have already entered our country illegally and return them to their country of origin?” Trump replied, “Great question. It’s not sustainable for our country, we have millions and millions of people here, it is not sustainable.

“Did you see in New York City where they are getting the regular students out and they are putting migrants in their place? We are going to have the largest deportation effort in the history of our country. We are bringing everybody back to where they came from. We have no choice, we have no choice.”

As he does on the campaign trail, Trump claimed during the program, without evidence, that many immigrants were from “mental institutions and insane asylums,” many were “terrorists” and the “Trump travel ban” had prevented “terrorists” from coming into the country.

In the friendly confines of Fox News, every lie Trump told, no matter how big, went by without any push-back.

At one point, Trump ludicrously claimed that there was “very little” political violence in the United States during his term, ignoring the very violent failed coup he led on January 6, 2021, which resulted in hundreds of injuries and multiple deaths.

Coinciding with the televised Republican campaign events, on Wednesday the House Homeland Security Committee held its first formal impeachment hearing against Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Despite the fact that the border police under Mayorkas are holding some 37,000 immigrants in detention as of December 31, over 10,000 more than capacity, and deportations doubled in Fiscal Year 2023, matching Trump-era levels, Republicans have accused Mayorkas, the son of a Cuban Jew, a former prosecutor and the first Latino head of the department, of “abandoning” the border.

If Mayorkas were to be impeached, it would be the first impeachment of a cabinet secretary in over 150 years and only the second in US history. US Secretary of War William

Belknap was impeached on March 2, 1876, for corruption. He was acquitted at his Senate trial.

In his opening remarks, Homeland Security Committee Chair Rep. Mark Green (R-Tennessee) cast Mayorkas as the “architect of the devastation we have witnessed for nearly three years.” Seeking to meet the threshold of “high crimes and misdemeanors” required for impeachment, while also appealing to fascists, Green accused Mayorkas of “intentionally” enacting policies that “kill Americans.”

Green held up former President Barack Obama, known as the “deporter-in-chief,” as an example for Mayorkas to follow. “In Fiscal Year 2013,” Green said, “according to DHS’s own numbers, the Obama administration detained 82 percent of illegal aliens from the moment they were encountered until their case was decided, and another 9 percent were held for some portion of time after that.

“That’s a pretty good track record, and under a Democrat administration,” Green chortled.

The remarks of the ranking Democrat on the committee, Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, showed that the Democratic Party, no less than the Republicans, is an enemy of immigrants. In his opening statement, Thompson launched into a right-wing defense of Mayorkas, accusing Republicans of blocking funding to expand border security.

“But for all their border security bluster,” Thompson said, “the Republicans oppose funding necessary to secure the border. They tried to cut money from Customs and Border personnel and have refused to take up the president’s supplemental funding request.”

The \$110 billion supplemental funding bill, which includes \$14.3 billion for military equipment to Israel and another \$65.5 billion for the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, also provides \$14 billion for the border. According to the White House, the Department of Homeland Security funds would be used to hire an additional 1,300 border patrol agents, 375 immigration judge teams and 1,600 asylum officers, and deploy “over 100 cutting-edge inspection machines.”

Thompson attacked Green for not supporting the war/border package. “It should be unthinkable that a chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security would threaten to defund DHS, but that is exactly what happened,” Thompson said, adding, “This is funding our front line border and immigration agencies need.”



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