



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 25, 2015

Dr. Carson Wins Southern Republicans' Straw Poll; Walker Second

Oklahoma City — Dr. Ben Carson won a decisive victory at the Southern Republican Leadership Conference, held in Oklahoma City, defeating several other Republican presidential hopefuls. The increasingly well known pediatric surgeon-turned-political candidate garnered 25.4 percent of the vote, capturing the first major straw poll of the 2016 presidential campaign. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker finished second, at 20.5 percent, followed Texas U.S. Senator Ted Cruz, with 16.6 percent. They were followed by several other candidates, all of whom were in single digits.



Carson clearly made the biggest effort at the conference, with a large contingent of volunteers advocating for him with attendees, passing out a small laudatory biographical paperback about Carson by John Philip Sousa IV. He also caught a break when Cruz was unable to attend the Friday night Oklahoma Republican Party Gala as the scheduled featured speaker, allowing Carson to take his place. Cruz and Senators Marco Rubio (Fla.) and Lindsey Graham (S.C.) all remained in Washington for the Senate's discussion of high-profile bills on trade and civil liberties/terrorism issues. Senator Rand Paul (Ky.) had already declined the invitation to attend the conference.

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The fourth-place finisher was New Jersey Governor Chris Christie (5.3 percent), followed by former Texas Governor Rick Perry (5 percent); and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush (4.9 percent). Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, Florida Senator Marco Rubio, and Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal each garnered 4.1 percent; California businesswoman Carly Fiorina and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee drew 2.7 percent; former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum (1.9 percent); tycoon Donald Trump (1.2 percent); former IRS Commissioner Mark Everson (0.8 percent); South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham (0.5 percent); and Ohio Governor John Kasich (0.2 percent).

Carson's keynote speech at the Friday night gala may be best described as motivational — short on specific policies, and long on his amazing rise from underachieving student to world-famous surgeon. He related how his mother had finally made him read books, transforming him from the worst student in his school to the best. He is in the record book as the surgeon who performed the first separation of Siamese twins conjoined at the head.

"You hear so many bad-mouthing America, but you don't see anyone trying to escape," Carson told the enthusiastic audience. He advised those drawing government benefits to instead take a minimum-wage job, because the job skills they will acquire will allow them to move up the ladder. Unknown to most of the Republican activists in the room, however, was Carson's recent advocacy of raising the minimum wage, thus giving government the power to set any wage or price.



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Besides relating his own inspiring life story, Carson took the same approach as the other candidates, delivering such “red meat” comments as, “People don’t go into business to support the government; they go into business to make money.”

Though Senator Ted Cruz was unable to fulfill his role as the keynote speaker at the Saturday night gala, attendees were shown a video of him speaking to them from Washington. He stirred the crowd when he called for abolition of the IRS, pulling back the “army of locusts” sent out by the federal government, and again when he promised that if elected he would “rein in the Environmental Protection Agency.” He vowed to work to have Congress repeal “every word” of ObamaCare and Common Core. He assured that if he were to win the White House, on Inauguration Day in 2017 he would rescind every one of Obama’s unconstitutional executive actions.

In *The New American’s* “Freedom Index,” a congressional scorecard based on the U.S. Constitution, [Senator Cruz](#) has a cumulative score of 89 percent.

In regard to his chances of being elected, Cruz answered the assertion that he can’t win because the Washington elites despise him. “That whole point of the campaign,” he explained, noting that he had set a fundraising record the first week after his entry into the race, from over 50,000 contributors, 95 percent of whom gave \$100 or less. He expressed his desire to create a coalition of conservatives, libertarians, and evangelicals by advancing both free market principles and fidelity to the Constitution. He then introduced his father, Rafael, who spoke for his son.

This reporter interviewed the elder Cruz, who related that Fidel Castro, like all tyrants, had seized Cuban citizens’ guns upon taking power in the island nation. In his speech, Cruz’s father noted that though he had lost his freedom in Cuba, he had been able to come to America. “If we lose it here,” he warned, “there is no other place to go.”

Governor Scott Walker, who spoke the first day of the conference, finished second in the polling. His talk, along with the presentations of Rick Perry and Rick Santorum, were covered by *The New American* [here](#).

Senator Lindsey Graham also spoke via video, devoting most of his time to his interventionist views on foreign policy. He urged his audience to “vote for a commander-in-chief who knows what the hell they are doing,” offering himself as someone who could fulfill that role. He finished next to last in the polling. [His cumulative “Freedom Index” score](#) is 62 percent.

Fourth in the polling was New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who began by addressing the common observation that he is direct and blunt. He explained that in New Jersey that’s called “survival.” His pitch centered around the assertion that he could win the general election, noting that he was the first Republican to win a statewide race in New Jersey in over a decade, despite being outspent three to one. He asserted that he had governed as a conservative, vetoing five income tax increases during his tenure, and presiding over an actual reduction in spending of \$2.5 billion, while reducing the number on the state payroll by 8,500. He also vowed that if elected he would concentrate on entitlement reform, and would rescind President Obama’s “ridiculous” executive orders on day one in the White House.

While stating that he did not believe the United States should be the world’s “policeman,” he contended that America must be militarily strong — not to wage war, but to avoid it. He also supported the extension of the ominous PATRIOT Act. He claimed could be done while respecting civil liberties, despite the warrantless surveillance authorized by the act.

Though former Governor Jeb Bush of Florida was not scheduled to attend the conference, he did make



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an appearance, finishing sixth in the straw poll. He boasted that he had always received an A+ rating from the National Rifle Association, had taken on the “trial bar” and won, and had vetoed so much spending while governor that the Democrats called him “Veto Corleone” (after the main character Vito Corleone in the *Godfather* book and films). He declared that the United States needed to fix a “broken immigration system,” as well as the “entitlement system.” Bush argued that the federal government should not dictate content and curriculum in the schools, but did not mention Common Core (which he strongly supports) or the No Child Left Behind law of his brother, which greatly increased federal involvement in public education.

Bush said that the PATRIOT Act “ought to be reauthorized,” because, he contended, “there is no evidence” of anyone’s civil liberties being adversely affected by the law. Turning to foreign policy, he insisted that the United States should not “lead from behind,” but instead should “re-engage with the rest of the world,” and that “our enemies need to fear us.” He summed up his views on international relations with the bizarre lament, “The whole world is wondering where the United States is.” In light of the fact that American troops are stationed in more than 150 countries around the world, it is hard to imagine that’s the question the world is asking, but he drew applause with the statement. An earlier article in [The New American](#) about Bush discussed his pledge to run as a moderate (not conservative) Republican.

Senator Marco Rubio (“[Freedom Index](#)” cumulative score: 80 percent) — who finished in a three-way tie with Senator Rand Paul (“[Freedom Index](#)” cumulative score: 93 percent) and Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal — addressed the conference with a short video, decrying “outdated Big Government ideas.”

Jindal, a Rhodes scholar, served in Congress before his election as governor of Louisiana. In his speech, he asserted that the American Dream is not about “envy,” pointing to such phrases as “You didn’t build that,” and Obama’s recent comment that those who have money have just been lucky — that they have “won life’s lottery.” He expressed concern about the “all-out assault on religious liberty,” such as the Obama administration’s attack on the Green family of Hobby Lobby and the recent attempts by the federal government to bully the governors of Indiana and Arkansas on the religious freedom protection laws. Referring to how those states buckled to the pressure of outside forces that bullied them into watering down the protections of religious liberty, Jindal thundered, “Don’t come to Louisiana and expect to bully the governor of Louisiana!”

He noted that Republicans rightly fight the redistributionist efforts of the Left, but urged the conference, “don’t become the party of Big Business, either.”

Recalling how his parents came to America from India, seeking a better way of life, Jindal said that he was proud to be an American, and that he was “tired” of all the “hyphenated” American words. “I am not an Indian-American. I am an American,” he declared, adding that if people want to come to America to live, they should want to be Americans.

Other speakers were Jim Gilmore, former governor of Virginia; California business executive Carly Fiorina; and former IRS Commissioner Mark Everson.

Fiorina called for arming the Ukrainians in their dispute with the Russians. She also criticized the fact that “Almost every agency has gotten more money for 40 years, whether Democrat or Republican.”

Former IRS Commissioner Mark Everson noted that there was no targeting of religious and conservative groups while he led the IRS. Former governor Jim Gilmore said that people such as Hillary Clinton belong in a “banana republic” because of ethics violations.



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With no clear-cut frontrunner in the Republican field, the Southern Republican Leadership Conference has begun the process of determining who will carry the Republican banner into the general election in 2016. One wag, playing on Obama's 2008 slogan of "hope and change," noted that they can *hope* that a true limited-government conservative will emerge from this field, for a *change*.

Photo of Dr. Ben Carson: AP Images



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