



Scaled-down Sixth Republican Debate Produces More Heat, Little Light

In a debate that had been pared down from nine candidates in December to seven last night, several candidates for the Republican presidential nomination who faced each other in North Charleston, South Carolina, on January 14 became increasingly combative.

Among the moments where a candidate directly question one of his rival's fitness to be president were Cruz's charge that Trump's recent questioning about whether he meets the Constitution's definition of a "natural born citizen" (a requirement for presidential eligibility) were motivated by Cruz's improved standing in the polls and the fact that Trump "is dismayed that his poll numbers are falling in Iowa."

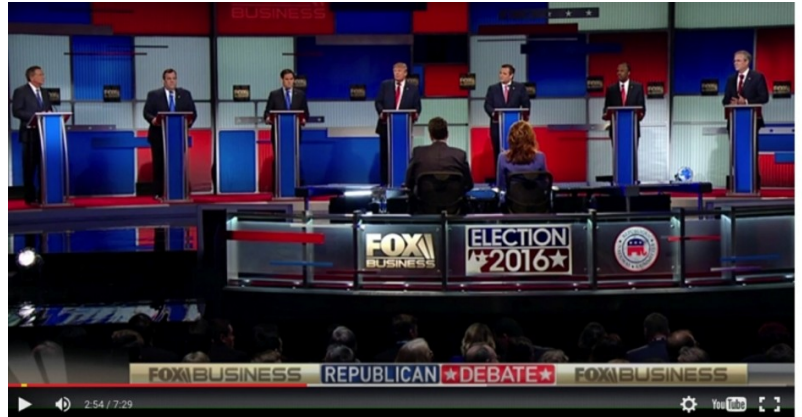
While Cruz's argument with Trump, in keeping with his generally placid personality, was fairly low-key, the same could not be said for Rubio's more impassioned attacks on both Christie and Cruz later in the debate.

Two candidates who participated in December's debate, former Hewlett Packard CEO Carly Fiorina and Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) were absent last night because they failed to rate high enough in the polls used by the debate's sponsor, Fox Business Network, in deciding who was included and who was relegated to an earlier "undercard" debate.

The seven remaining candidates who engaged in the sometimes heated debate in South Carolina were business magnate Donald Trump, neurosurgeon Ben Carson, Senator Marco Rubio (Fla.), former Florida governor Jeb Bush, Senator Ted Cruz (Texas), Ohio governor John Kasich, and New Jersey governor Chris Christie.

One of the two debate moderators, Maria Bartiromo, kicked off the event by quoting from President Obama's State of the Union address earlier this week: "We have the strongest, most durable economy in the world." Bartiromo noted that, in that address, the president touted 14 million new jobs and an unemployment rate that had been cut in half. (In our article about the SOTU address two days ago, we cited Bureau of Labor Statistics to demonstrate that Obama's claim, "We're in the middle of the longest streak of private-sector job creation in history," was false and that more jobs had been created under presidents Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. We also noted that Obama's budget is projected to run a deficit of \$6.8 trillion over his eight years, making him the president with the largest budget deficit.)

Citing Obama's assertion in the SOTU that anyone who claims America's economy is in decline is peddling fiction, Bartiromo asked Cruz, "What do you see that he doesn't?"





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Before answering the question, Cruz took Obama to task for failing to mention the 10 American sailors who had been detained by Iran after inadvertently straying into Iranian waters and for Obama “preparing to send \$100 billion or more to the Ayatollah Khamenei.”

Moving on to answer the question, Cruz stated:

The president tried to paint a rosy picture of jobs. And you know, he’s right. If you’re a Washington lobbyist, if you make your money in and around Washington, things are doing great. The millionaires and billionaires are doing great under Obama. But we have the lowest percentage of Americans working today of any year since 1977. Median wages have stagnated. And the Obama-Clinton economy has left behind the working men and women of this country.

Bringing up a statement that has continued to generate considerable controversy, Bartiromo asked Trump about his proposal to temporarily ban Muslims from entering the country: “Is there anything you’ve heard that makes you want to rethink this position?”

Trump received laughs from the audience by not even pretending to think over the question before quickly answering, smugly: “No.”

Trump continued:

Look, we have to stop with political correctness....

We have to find out what’s going on. I said temporarily. I didn’t say permanently. I said temporarily. And I have many great Muslim friends. And some of them, I will say, not all, have called me and said, “Donald, thank you very much; you’re exposing an unbelievable problem and we have to get to the bottom of it.”

Bush jumped in, appearing as the steady voice of reason in contrast with Trump’s tendency to generate statements more for their ability to incite an emotional gut reaction among the masses. Said the former Florida governor:

Donald, Donald ... I hope you reconsider this, because this policy is a policy that makes it impossible to build the coalition necessary to take out ISIS. The Kurds are our strongest allies. They’re Muslim. You’re not going to even allow them to come to our country?

The other Arab countries have a role to play in this. We cannot be the world’s policeman. We can’t do this unilaterally. We have to do this in unison with the Arab world. And sending that signal makes it impossible for us to be serious about taking out ISIS and restoring democracy in Syria.

Bush proposed as a solution to the obvious problem of weeding out the terrorists from refugees fleeing areas under Islamic terrorist control, suggesting that we “tighten up our efforts to deal with the entry visa program.”

While most of the candidates, even when criticizing their rivals, tried to focus their points on the issues rather than the candidates themselves, an exception was Rubio, who several times went straight for the jugular.

Moderator Neil Cavuto set up one of Rubio’s critical statements by noting: “You and Governor Christie have been exchanging some fairly nasty words of late” and referred to a charge made against Christie in one of Rubio’s campaign ads: “One high tax, Common Core, liberal, energy-loving, Obamacare, Medicaid-expanding president is enough.”

Cavuto then asked Rubio: “[Do] you think you went too far on that and do you want to apologize to the



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governor?”

Rubio answered, in part:

Unfortunately, Governor Christie has endorsed many of the ideas that Barack Obama supports, whether it is Common Core or gun control or the appointment of Sonia Sotomayor or the donation he made to Planned Parenthood. Our next president, and our Republican nominee cannot be someone who supports those positions.

Christie, given an opportunity to defend himself against Rubio’s charges, said:

First of all, I didn’t support Sonia Sotomayor. Secondly, I never wrote a check to Planned Parenthood.

Third, if you look at my record as governor of New Jersey, I have vetoed a 50-caliber rifle ban. I have vetoed a reduction this clip size. I vetoed a statewide I.D. system for gun owners and I pardoned, six out-of-state folks who came through our state and were arrested for owning a gun legally in another state so they never have to face charges.

And on Common Core, Common Core has been eliminated in New Jersey....

I like Marco too, and two years ago, he called me a conservative reformer that New Jersey needed. That was before he was running against me. Now that he is, he’s changed his tune.

Of course, Christie’s middle-of-the-road record as a governor, and his fruitless attempt to paint himself as a “conservative,” has made him rather easy pickings for Rubio. Bearing in mind that Rubio was a member of the “Gang of Eight” who crafted the 2013 immigration bill that provided amnesty for illegal aliens (Cruz referred to it as the “Rubio-Schumer amnesty bill”) — and that he is also a strong supporter of the Trans-Pacific Partnership — Rubio’s credentials as a “conservative” are also far from sterling.

Later on in the debate, however, Rubio locked horns with another candidate whose conservatism is more genuine than Christie’s: Cruz. Rubio launched his fusillade against Cruz with rapid-fire jabs that made him seem like a stereotypical angry young man, saying:

Ted Cruz, you used to say you supported doubling the number of green cards, now you say that you’re against it. You used to support a 500 percent increase in the number of guest workers, now you say that you’re against it. You used to support legalizing people that were here illegally, now you say you’re against it. You used to say that you were in favor of birthright citizenship, now you say that you are against it.

And by the way, it’s not just on immigration, you used to support TPA, now you say you’re against it. I saw you on the Senate floor flip your vote on crop insurance because they told you it would help you in Iowa, and last week, we all saw you flip your vote on ethanol in Iowa for the same reason.

That is not consistent conservatism, that is political calculation. When I am president, I will work consistently every single day to keep this country safe, not call [former NSA contractor and whistleblower] Edward Snowden, as you did, a great public servant. Edward Snowden is a traitor. And if I am president and we get our hands on him, he is standing trial for treason.

And one more point, one more point. Every single time that there has been a Defense bill in the Senate, three people team up to vote against it. Bernie Sanders, Rand Paul and Ted Cruz. In fact, the only budget you have ever voted for, Ted, in your entire time in the Senate is a budget from



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Rand Paul that brags about how it cuts defense.

Though Fox Business Network excluded Paul from the debate, the Kentucky senator can at least thank Rubio for making sure he was not forgotten for the evening! And if the worst charge that Rubio could make against Cruz's constitutional conservatism was his votes in sync with Paul, perhaps the Texas senator might take that as a compliment.

Cruz quickly responded by noting: "[Rubio] had no fewer than 11 attacks there. I appreciate your dumping your ... research folder on the debate stage."

Cruz continued:

Let's start with immigration and have a little bit of clarity. Marco stood with Chuck Schumer and Barack Obama on amnesty. I stood with Jeff Sessions and Steve King. Marco stood today, standing on this stage Marco supports legalization and citizenship for 12 million illegals. I opposed and oppose legalization and citizenship.

And by the way, the attack he keeps throwing out on the military budget, Marco knows full well I voted for his amendment to increase military spending to \$697 billion. What he said, and he said it in the last debate, it's simply not true. And as president, I will rebuild the military and keep this country safe.

Cavuto called for an end to the exchange between Cruz and Rubio, noting: "All right, gentlemen, we've got to stop. I know you are very passionate about that."

Passion was an element that was not in short supply during this debate. It is a shame that Paul could not have participated since Cruz was the only one on the platform whose conservatism seemed more than a charade.

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