



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 22, 2015

Walker, Santorum, Perry Court Southern GOP Leadership Conference

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, former Pennsylvania U.S. Senator Rick Santorum, and former Texas Governor Rick Perry led off the first day of the three-day Southern Republican Leadership Conference (SRLC) yesterday, held in Oklahoma City. The SRLC signals the launching of the 2016 race for the Republican presidential nomination.

Other presidential hopefuls slated to speak at the conference include Senator Lindsey Graham (S.C.); Governor Chris Christie (N.J.); Senator Marco Rubio (Fla.); Governor Bobby Jindal (La.), Senator Ted Cruz (Texas); former Governor Jim Gilmore (Va.); business executive Carly Fiorina (Calif.); and Dr. Ben Carson of Maryland.

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Not attending the event were Senator Rand Paul (Ky.); former Governor Jeb Bush (Fla.); and former Governor Mike Huckabee (Ark.). Huckabee's wife, Janet, is expected to speak for him, however.

First up was Governor Scott Walker, introduced by Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin, who touted his achievements, including turning Wisconsin's \$3.6-billion deficit into a \$100-million surplus, \$2 billion in tax relief, and the creation of over 100,000 new jobs during his tenure. Of course, Walker is best known for his fight to reform the collective bargaining of the pension and health insurance plans for state employees, which led to the unsuccessful recall election, raising him to national political prominence.

"We're going to talk about freedom," Walker said, in speaking of his probable campaign. He noted that he had won three elections in four years in a state that has not gone Republican for president since Reagan did it in 1984, thus demonstrating his national electability. As he rattled off his political views, he drew repeated cheers from the partisan audience.

His list of victories in a blue state includes merit pay for teachers, increased scores in the classroom, the defunding of Planned Parenthood, the sponsoring of pro-life legislation, the making of Wisconsin the 25th right-to-work state, and a new tough photo I.D. law which makes it "easy to vote, but hard to cheat."

Looking to the upcoming presidential campaign, Walker said that success should be measured by how many are no longer dependent upon the government, and he vowed to work to repeal ObamaCare if elected.

Pivoting to foreign policy, Walker staked out a clear pro-Israel position, arguing that "radical Islamic terrorism" is a threat to all Americans, and promising (though offering no specifics), "We're going to do something to stop it."





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Rick Santorum then took the podium, and began with his views on foreign policy, decrying the “degradation of American status around the world.” He noted that since Obama has been president, the United States has stronger ties with Iran and Cuba, but worse relations with Israel. He charged that “ISIS was created by Barack Obama,” blaming the present turmoil in Iraq on Obama’s taking the troops out of that country “too soon.” Santorum told the SRLC crowd that what we have is “not a war on terror,” but rather a war on “radical Islam,” insisting, “We have to name the enemy in order to defeat them. The only way we can stop them, is to take them on and take their land.” He explained that this would not necessarily mean the direct involvement of U.S. troops, because “I know we are war-weary; I know that I am.” He suggested giving “more support” to the Kurds and the Jordanians, who have already been fighting the radical jihadists.

But Santorum pledged that he were elected, he would “bomb [the jihadists] back into the 7th century where they belong.”

With such strong comments, it is not surprising that the former senator from Pennsylvania contended that national security issues should be “front and center,” pointing out that the only election in which Republicans won a majority of the popular vote since 1988 was in 2004, when national security was the main issue.

After staking out his foreign policy positions, Santorum turned his attention to domestic issues, telling the audience, “Middle America is hollowing out,” and promising not only tax cuts, but the abolishing of the IRS “as we know it” if he were elected. A Santorum campaign and presidency will be focused on workers, he told the crowd, arguing that it is “baloney” that everyone needs to go to college. He declared that the education system needs to be run by parents, and “not elite bureaucrats and Congress.” In this regard, he regretted his vote for President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind,” and promised that he would say no to Common Core. He then discussed immigration, lamenting that while the Democrats care only about the votes of immigrants, corporate America is most interested in keeping down labor costs by hiring immigrants.

Former Texas Governor Rick Perry delivered the liveliest speech of the day. The longest-serving governor in Texas history, Perry noted that in 2010, one-third of all new jobs created in the country were in Texas.

Perry said that Americans have lost faith in their leaders in Washington, with one in every five American homes on food stamps. “We can do better,” he insisted. With an allusion to Ronald Reagan’s 1980 election, he noted that our present condition feels like 1979, when Jimmy Carter was president.

Veering quickly into “red meat” issues, Perry said that only the “delusional thinking of the Left” would hold that criminals will obey our gun laws. “The best defense against crime,” he contended, “is an armed citizen.” He declared that we must stop over-regulation, and cut taxes both on individuals and on corporations. To Perry, a huge flaw in ObamaCare is that it moves people from full- to part-time work. He promised to repeal all job-killing legislation, specifically citing the Dodd-Frank law passed in the aftermath of the 2008 financial meltdown. According to Perry, Dodd-Frank “did not end ‘too big to fail’ — it just codified it.” Attacking what he called crony capitalism, Perry asked, “Since when did capitalism eliminate risks for the biggest banks?” while increasing it for the smaller banks and businesses.

Perry called for the federal government to get out of the field of education, contending that he trusted the citizens of each state over the “bureaucrats in D.C.” Specifically, he asserted that it is simply



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common sense that Common Core should not be forced on any state.

When Perry turned to a discussion of foreign policy, he said that America faces “a global struggle against radical Islamic terror.” In light of this, he defended Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state, and called for the rebuilding of America’s military. He also insisted that the U.S. border must be secured, adding that he had told President Obama that if he will not secure the southern border, “Texas will.”

The conference will conclude on Saturday with the first test of the appeal of the various candidates: the SRLC’s straw poll.

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