

The Japan Times

U.S. conservatives launch broadside against Trump

January 23, 2016

U.S. conservatives shaken by the rise of Donald Trump have called on fellow Republicans to reject his presidential candidacy, triggering a fiery squabble over the party's controversial front-runner just days before the nomination contest kicks off.

"Against Trump," declared the cover of the venerable National Review magazine's issue released Friday. Founded by the late commentator William F. Buckley, the magazine has been a leading voice of the American right for decades.

"Trump is a philosophically unmoored political opportunist who would trash the broad conservative ideological consensus within the GOP in favor of a free-floating populism with strong-man overtones," it said in a biting lead editorial.

The publication followed up with essays by 22 conservative figures who took turns denouncing Trump, who leads all rivals in the race for the Republican presidential nomination.

Calling him "astoundingly ignorant," a "charlatan," a "glib egomaniac" and plain "crazy," the conservatives expressed revulsion at the prospect of a President Trump — and what he might do to the nation and to the Republican brand.

With just over a week to go before the first presidential nominating vote in Iowa, their views also reflected the panic that Trump has set off within a Republican establishment deeply at odds with the celebrity billionaire's angry, populist message.

But the magazine's broadside nonetheless triggered an angry response from the Republican National Committee, which disinvited the National Review from being a partner of the party's candidate debate on Feb. 25.

"Debate partners can't have a predisposition towards or against any candidate," RNC spokesman Sean Spicer said.

Review publisher Jack Fowler appeared to take the move in stride.

"We expected this was coming. Small price to pay for speaking the truth about The Donald," he wrote Friday in a blog post.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who trails Trump considerably in the polls, warned the RNC was wrong to punish such a "cherished conservative mouthpiece" as the Review.

"They're just telling the truth," Bush told Fox News about the criticisms of Trump, whom he has repeatedly said was not conservative and lacking the right temperament to be president.

Contributors to the magazine did not hold back in trashing Trump.

“This is a crisis for conservatism,” said talk show host and author Glenn Beck in one of the essays.

“Trump beguiles us, defies the politically correct media, and bullies anyone who points out that the emperor has no clothes,” wrote David McIntosh, president of the Club for Growth.

Ed Meese, who served in President Ronald Reagan’s administration, upbraided Trump for vilifying rivals with personal attacks.

“Our people need positive, unifying leadership, not negative, destructive political rhetoric,” he said.

In an introduction, Review editors warned that Trump “wobbled all over the lot” politically, at times embracing abortion rights, gun control and a universal health care system.

Having held views so contrary to the Republican platform shows he cannot be trusted to carry the conservative mantle, they said.

The accusers also drilled into Trump’s policy choices, with novelist Mark Helprin offering a comprehensive takedown in a single sentence.

“He doesn’t know the Constitution, history, law, political philosophy, nuclear strategy, diplomacy, defense, economics beyond real estate, or even, despite his low-level-mafioso comportment, how ordinary people live,” Helprin wrote.

Several contributors blasted Trump for his xenophobia, and particularly his call for a ban on Muslims entering the United States.

Trump has “made racial and religious scapegoating so central to his campaign,” warned David Boaz, vice president of the Cato Institute.

Trump shot back in a series of fiery tweets condemning the “failing” publication.

“The late, great William F. Buckley would be ashamed of what had happened to his prize, the dying National Review!” Trump posted on Twitter late Thursday as the magazine was rolled out online.

The feature follows a similar move on the left by prominent actors like Harry Belafonte, intellectuals including Noam Chomsky, and other celebrities who have joined a “Stop Hate Dump Trump” campaign denouncing the real estate mogul as a threat to America.