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Republican field narrows to five; Democrat race tightens

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Oklahoma Republicans will have a chance to impact the race for president March 1 as they go to the polls to pick among five active GOP candidates.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas; Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida; Gov. John Kasich, R-Ohio; retired physician Ben Carson and New York businessman Donald J. Trump top the list, although several candidates who have suspended their campaigns will appear on the Oklahoma ballot.

Trump won South Carolina on Saturday with Cruz and Rubio virtually tied for second. Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, brother of George W. Bush and son of George H.W. Bush, suspended his campaign Saturday night because of his poor showings in Iowa, New Hampshire and finally South Carolina.

Other candidates who have suspended their campaigns but will appear on the ballot include New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie; former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee; U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina; U.S. Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky; businesswoman Carly Fiorina; and former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum.

Former First Lady Mrs. Hillary Clinton faces U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont in the Democrat primary in Oklahoma. Clinton won the Nevada caucus on Saturday.

Trump got 33 percent of the vote in South Carolina while Rubio got 22 percent and Cruz 21 percent. Trump's win was not by the large margin suggested by polling.

Rubio said it is now a "three-person race" among him, Trump and Cruz.

Cruz won Iowa and Trump won New Hampshire and South Carolina. Cruz was third in New Hampshire and South Carolina. Rubio was third in Iowa but was in the lower tier in New Hampshire.

On March 1 (Super Tuesday or the SEC primary), Democrats and Republicans will vote in Oklahoma, Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Texas, Vermont, Virginia and Wyoming. Republicans will also have a primary in Tennessee and a caucus in Alaska while Democrats have a caucus in American Samoa.

The Republicans squared off in a debate this month in Greenville, South Carolina, prior to that state's presidential primary.

The debate happened just after news that U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia had died in his sleep at age 79. President Obama says he will nominate a successor but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, said that selection should wait until the country elects a new president and he takes office in January.

Trump said if he were president now, he would want to nominate a judge. He wants to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to block any nomination by Obama.

"I really wish the president would think about not nominating somebody," Kasich said. "If you were to nominate somebody, let's have him pick somebody that is gonna have unanimous approval and such widespread approval across the country that this could happen without a lotta recrimination."

Carson said the Republicans should not allow a judge to be appointed at this time.

Rubio said it's been more than 80 years since a lame duck president nominated a Supreme Court justice.

"And we need to put people on the bench that understand that the Constitution is not a living and breathing document. It is to be interpreted as originally meant," Rubio said.

"We are one justice away from a Supreme Court that will strike down every restriction on abortion adopted by the states," Cruz said. "We are one justice away from a Supreme Court that will reverse the Heller decision, one of Justice Scalia's seminal decisions that upheld the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms.

"We are one justice away from a Supreme Court that would undermine the religious liberty of millions of Americans and— and the stakes of this election, for this year, for the Senate, the Senate needs to stand strong and say "We're not gonna give up the U.S. Supreme Court for a generation by allowing Barack Obama to make one more liberal appointee."

On foreign policy, Trump called Obama's deal with Iran "one of the worst deals I've ever seen negotiated in my entire life. It's a disgrace that this country negotiated that deal."

"We have to rebuild our country," Trump said. "But we have – I'm telling you, I'm the only one on the stage that said, 'Do not go into Iraq. Do not attack Iraq.' Nobody else on this stage said that. And I said it loud and strong. And I was in the private sector."

Rubio said America faces three major threats – North Korea and China in the Pacific, the Middle East and rebuilding European alliances (due to threats from Russia).

Rubio voted against Obama's plan to use force against Assad in Syria because it was "unbelievably small" and would damage the situation.

Kasich said he would arm fighters in Ukraine to stand up to Russia and that any attack on a NATO member would be like attacking the United States.

"Everybody now is being threatened by radical Islam," Kasich said. "We have an opportunity to lead. You know, the fact of the matter is, the world is desperate for leadership."

Cruz said the first step is to "rip to shreds" Obama's deal with Iran.

"When it comes to ISIS, we've gotta have a focused objective," Cruz said. "One of the problems of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's foreign policy, and sadly, too many establishment Republicans in Washington, is they focused on issues unrelated to protecting this country. They focused on nation building. They focused on toppling governments to promote democracy, and it ends up undermining our natural security."

In 2008, Trump said in an interview that he was surprised then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi didn't impeach former President George Bush because he "lied" about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which led to the war.

"Iran is taking over Iraq with the second-largest oil reserves in the world," Trump said in the debate. "Obviously it was a mistake. So George Bush made a mistake. We can make mistakes. But that one was a beauty. We shoulda never been in Iraq."

"...They said there were weapons of mass destruction. There were none. And they knew there were none. There were no weapons of mass destruction."

Kasich cited former Secretary of Defense Colin Powell and said Bush thought there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

"In fact, that country was drawn, the borders of that country were drawn after World War I by Westerners that didn't understand what was happening there," Kasich said. "The tragedy of it is that we're still embroiled. And frankly, if there weren't mass – weapons of mass destruction, we should never have gone. I don't believe that the United States should involve itself in civil wars."

"I thank God all the time that it was George W. Bush in the White House on 9/11 and not Al Gore," said Rubio. "And you can look back in hindsight and say a couple things, but he kept us safe. And not only did he keep us safe, but he – no matter what you wanna say about weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein was in violation of U.N. resolutions, in open violation and the world wouldn't do anything about it. And George W. Bush, enforced what the international community, refused to do, and again he kept us safe."

Carson said he was not enthusiastic about the War in Iraq. When you remove a dictator, you need a plan to replace him or chaos will result, he said.

Without specifics, Trump said he would "save Social Security."

"I'm goin' to bring jobs back from China," Trump said. "I'm gonna bring jobs back from Mexico and from Japan where they're all – every country throughout the world – now Vietnam, that's the new one. They are taking our jobs. They're takin' our wealth. They're takin' our base. And you and I have had this discussion. We're going to make our economy strong again. I'm lowering taxes."

Trump said he thinks America has driven \$5 trillion in assets offshore. "We're gonna bring that money back," he said.

Cruz has advocated tax reform, including a flat tax that would eliminate the IRS.

"My tax plan, (for a) typical family of four," Cruz said. "First \$36,000 you earn you pay nothing in taxes. No income taxes. No payroll taxes. No nothing. Above 10 percent, everyone pays the same simple flat 10-percent income rate. It's flat and fair. You can fill out your taxes on a postcard and we abolish the IRS."

Cruz said his plan is not a "value-added tax." He would abolish the corporate income tax and do away with the Obamacare taxes. The death tax would be eliminated. The Non-Partisan Tax Foundation estimated that the Cruz simple flat tax would produce 4.9 million new jobs, would increase capital investment by 44 percent and would lift everyone's incomes by double digits.

"That's how you turn the country around," Cruz said. "Not just hoping and praying for it, but implementing policies that work."

Rubio wants to triple child tax credits. "This is their money," Rubio said. "This is the money of parents. You don't earn the tax credit unless you're working. That's your money. It doesn't belong to the government. And here's what I don't understand.

If a business takes their money and they invest it in a piece of equipment, they get to write it off their taxes. But if a parent takes money that they have earned through work, and invests it in their children, they don't? This makes no sense. Parenting is the most important job any of us will ever have. Family formation is the most important institution in society."

In Ohio, Kasich passed a Medicaid reform bill that increased costs dramatically.

"Our Medicaid programs are coming in below cost estimates and our Medicaid program in the second year grew at 2.5 percent," Kasich said. " And, when we expand Medicaid and we treat the mentally ill, and they don't live under a bridge or live in a prison, where they cost \$22,500 a year."

"My tax plan has been praised by Cato, by Wall Street Journal," Carson said. "Forbes said it is the best, the most pro-growth tax plan. And it's based on real fairness for everybody.

"It starts at 150 percent poverty level. But even the people below that have to pay something, because everybody has to have skin in the game. And— millions of people can't, you know, talk about what other people have to say and have no skin in the game. And it deals with the corporate tax rate. It makes it the same as everybody else. Everybody pays exactly the same."

Trump said he wants to control the southern border and build a wall, paid for by Mexico.

Rubio defines amnesty as "the forgiveness of a wrongdoing without consequence."

"I've never supported that. I do not support that. I think there has to be consequences for violating our immigration laws," Rubio said. "What I think is clear about this system to begin with is we're not gonna be able to make progress on illegal immigration until first illegal immigration is brought under control."

"You know, in a Republican primary everyone talks tough on immigration," Cruz said.

"Everyone is against illegal immigration in a Republican primary. But as voters, we've been burned over and over again by people that give us a great campaign speech and they don't walk the walk."

Kasich wants to seal the border and institute a guest worker program.

"If they have not committed a crime since they've been here, make 'em pay a fine and some back taxes and give 'em a pass to legalization, never to citizenship," Kasich said.

Carson said the answer to financial problems is stopping over-regulation.

"We've got all these government regulators and all they're doing is running around looking for people to fine," Carson said. "And we've got 645 different federal agencies and sub-agencies. Way, way too many. And they don't have anything else to do.

"I think what we really need to do is start trimming the regulatory agencies rather than going after the people who are trying to increase the viability, economic viability, of our society. Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't some people out there who are doing bad things. But I'm not sure that the way to solve that problem is by increasing all the regulatory burden."

Trump said he would impose his will on companies trying to leave the country to save taxes by building a consensus with Congress to stop them.

"I'll give you an example, because I don't like the idea of using executive orders like our president," Trump said. "It is a disaster, what he's doing. I would build consensus. But consensus means you have to work hard. You have to cajole. You have to get them into the Oval Office and get them all together and you have to make deals."

Trump supports eminent domain, including the action by the government to force private property owners to sell against their will to benefit private companies.

"These people always hit me with eminent domain," Trump said. "And frankly, I'm not in love with eminent domain, but eminent domain is something that you need very strongly."

Cruz called Trump "an amazing entertainer" but criticized his flip-flops on policies.

"For most of his life, his policies have been very, very liberal," Cruz said. "For most of his life, he has described himself as very pro-choice, and— as a supporter of partial-birth abortion. Right now today as a candidate, he supports federal taxpayer funding for Planned Parenthood. I disagree with him on that. That's a matter of principle."

Trump called Cruz and Jeb Bush "liars."

Cruz said it was remarkable that Trump defended Carson after called him "pathological" and comparing him to a child molester.

"I just quoted his book," Trump said.