



GOP Candidates Suck Up to Hatemongers

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Ted Cruz, Bobby Jindal, and Mike Huckabee fete a man who thinks the Bible says we should execute gays.

Sometimes I think Republicans get a bad rap from mainstream journalists, who tend to be more sympathetic to liberals and Democrats. The problem may be particularly acute when it comes to social conservatives, whose views seem especially unpopular among journalists.

But right now three conservative Republican presidential candidates are mostly getting a free pass from the media on their appalling judgment over the weekend.

Ted Cruz, Bobby Jindal, and Mike Huckabee spoke at a conference in Des Moines called “Freedom 2015: National Religious Liberties Conference,” a two-day event that began last Friday. Now, that doesn’t sound so bad. In fact, my colleagues at the Cato Institute and I have recently defended the rights of Hobby Lobby, the Little Sisters of the Poor, and the bakers and photographers who don’t want to participate in same-sex weddings.

But this conference was about something far different from liberty, although you wouldn’t know that from bland media coverage like this CBS News article. So it’s a good thing that The Daily Beast and Rachel Maddow of MSNBC picked up the story, with video from People for the American Way’s RightWingWatch.

The conference was organized by Kevin P. Swanson, a minister in Colorado and host of the Generations Radio Show. Swanson is part of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the far-right fundamentalist Christian Reconstructionism movement, which author Walter Olson wrote about at length in 1998. Swanson gave the conference’s opening and closing talks and interviewed Cruz, Jindal, and Huckabee. And in his closing keynote address, Swanson ranted at length about topics that would hardly be characterized as religious liberty:

YES! Leviticus 20:13 calls for the death penalty for homosexuals. YES! Romans Chapter 1, Verse 32, the Apostle Paul does say that homosexuals are worthy of death. His words, not mine! And I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And I am not ashamed of the truth of the word of God. And I am willing to go to jail for standing on the truth of the word of God.

To be sure, he did say that “civil leaders” should not apply the death penalty today, not until the culture has changed and gays have been put on notice that they must repent or be put to death. Thanks for small favors, I suppose. But it’s also worth noting that at least two other speakers at the conference likewise have advocated the death penalty for gay people.

And as Maddow notes, this is not just something that the conference host has said in the past, though he had said it plenty of times, as a Google search would have revealed. This is what he said in the keynote address at the conference attended by three candidates for president.

That wasn’t the full extent of the crazy at the conference. As the gay website Towleroad reported:

Swanson has also said that the government should put gay people to death, warned that the Girl Scouts and the movie “Frozen” turn girls into lesbians and blamed natural disasters on gay people and women who wear pants. Swanson has also said that churches accepting gay couples will lead to the persecution, imprisonment and murder of Christians, and wished for the good ole days when country singer Kacey Musgraves would have been hanged for her pro-gay lyrics.

Jake Tapper asked Cruz about his attendance at the conference, and Cruz responded that he did not “know what this gentleman has said” but that religious liberty is a very important issue. Would Cruz accept that answer from a presidential candidate who spoke at a conference where the host and keynoter yelled “God damn America” or said that Christians should be executed? I doubt it. He should be asked about his participation again, as should Jindal and Huckabee.

And American conservatives should be asked if they find all this acceptable. Can you actually support presidential candidates who stand on such a stage, answering questions from such a person?

If the three Democratic presidential candidates accepted the invitation of, and answered the questions of, an equally extreme leftist, a person who advocated the execution of peaceful people he disliked, conservatives everywhere would be outraged. I hope they start holding their own candidates to the same standard.

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