

NATIONAL REVIEW

Republicans after Iowa

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The conventional wisdom hasn't been right about much this political season, but it is probably accurate when it says that there were three tickets out of Monday's Iowa caucuses on the Republican side. Other candidates will limp on for a while, driven by a combination of ego and Super PAC money, but, for all intents and purposes, this now looks like a three-way race: Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio.

We can expect much of the commentary between now and New Hampshire next Tuesday to focus on the nuts and bolts of the campaigns, why some candidates over- or under-performed expectations, and what it likely means for next time. But elections are ultimately about policies. So, with the field effectively narrowed, it is worth looking at where the candidates stand on the key issues.

Taxes and Spending: All three Republican candidates have proposed significant tax cuts. That shouldn't be surprising. As Grover Norquist once put it, Republicans were put on earth to cut taxes. Trump offers the biggest cut, a phenomenal \$10 trillion reduction over ten years. Rubio's is smaller and probably more realistic, a net reduction of \$2.4 trillion. Cruz offers the most detailed proposal for tax reform, applying a flat tax on individual income and doing away with most deductions. However, some have criticized Cruz's plan for essentially incorporating a VAT. His plan would amount to a \$768 billion net cut.

The candidates have not been so forthcoming, however, when it comes to spending cuts. As Cruz himself said at a debate in November, "It's easy for everyone to say, 'Cut spending.' It's much harder and riskier to put out, chapter and verse, specifically the programs you would cut to stop bankrupting our kids and grandkids." Both Rubio and Cruz have been open to entitlement reform. Both, for instance, support introducing Paul Ryan-style premium support for Medicare and returning Medicaid to the states as a block grant. On Social Security, Rubio would raise the retirement age and reduce the growth of benefits for higher-income people, while increasing benefits for the poorest retirees. Cruz would also increase the retirement age and change benefit indexation, but, in addition, he would allow younger workers to save a portion of their payroll

taxes in personal accounts. Trump opposes any substantial changes to Medicare, Medicaid, or Social Security. All three candidates would repeal Obamacare, although Trump would replace it with some sort of vaguely defined universal coverage.

Defense and Foreign Policy: All three candidates promise to spend more money on defense and be more assertive when it comes to foreign policy. But so far, Rubio has been the most outspoken candidate on these issues, generally doing his best Lindsey Graham imitation. Indeed, it's hard to find a region of the world where he doesn't want to intervene. Libya? He was for it. Syria? Overthrow Assad and send ground troops to fight ISIS. Iran? Tear up the nuclear deal and support regime change. China? Be more confrontational in the South China Sea. And soon. Cruz has tried to walk a fine line between bellicose rhetoric (carpet bombing, making the sand glow) and more cautious action. He opposed intervention in Libya, for instance, and he has been skeptical of regime change in Syria. He has shied away from using large numbers of ground troops to fight ISIS. Trump has been the least specific, beyond his standard calls for being tougher with other countries, and he has offered a somewhat surprisingly narrower definition of a "national interest" that would merit U.S. intervention, which would not include democracy promotion or humanitarian intervention.

Immigration: Opposition to illegal immigration has been, of course, Trump's signature issue. He promises to deport all undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S., and to build a wall, and make Mexico pay for it. Beyond that, however, his position gets a little murkier. He has suggested, for example, that after deporting current illegals, he would somehow allow "the good ones" to return. At times he has seemed to embrace Jeff Sessions-style opposition to further legal immigration. At others he has spoken of having "a big, beautiful door" in his wall, and of the need to welcome skilled immigrants. Meanwhile Cruz and Rubio have managed to make their positions pretty hard to decipher. Rubio, of course, was the architect of the Gang of Eight legislation that would have not only legalized current illegals, but contained a "path to citizenship." Now he opposes anything close to his old bill, taking a "build the wall first" approach. Still, he hedges on whether he would deport young people covered by the DREAM Act and otherwise reverse President Obama's immigration actions. Cruz may or may not have favored legalization (though not citizenship) for illegals, depending on whom you believe. He did support increased legal immigration in the past, especially for skilled workers. He now is a firm opponent of legalization, calls for slowing legal immigration, and is a near-Trumpian advocate for building a wall. On the other hand, he opposes Trump-like mass deportations, sort of putting him in the Mitt Romney "self-deportation" camp.

Trade: On trade, Trump is the Republican party's preeminent protectionist, opposing nearly all trade deals and calling for enormous tariffs (up to 45 percent in some cases) on imported goods. Cruz has generally supported free trade, but last year he switched his position to oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the related fast-track authority, saying he didn't believe they should be voted on until the next administration is in place. In a similar vein, Rubio had

supported previous free-trade deals and had expressed support for the TPP, but his spokesman recently said that Rubio is now undecided on whether to support the legislation.

Social Issues: Ted Cruz made his evangelical faith and conservative stance on social issues one of the hallmarks of his Iowa campaign, and evangelical voters were key to his victory. Rubio also wore his religion on his sleeve in Iowa, especially over the last few weeks. On abortion, either of them would be the most hard-line candidate that the Republicans have nominated since *Roe v. Wade* was decided. Neither Cruz nor Rubio, for instance, favors a rape or incest exception to a ban on abortion. Their positions on gay marriage, however, are slightly more nuanced. Both are opposed to gay marriage, obviously, but both would also leave the decision to states. As Cruz explained, “People of New York may well resolve the marriage question differently than the people of Florida or Texas or Ohio. . . . That’s why we have 50 states — to allow a diversity of views. And so that is a core commitment.”

Although Trump courted evangelicals in Iowa, and even secured the endorsement of Jerry Falwell Jr., he is clearly not in the same league as Cruz or Rubio on social issues. He has reversed his previous support for abortion rights and now calls himself “pro-life,” but has ducked specifics on the issue, although he has said he supports exceptions for rape, incest, and the life of the mother. On gay marriage he has said he would consider appointing Supreme Court justices who would overturn *Obergefell v. Hodges*, but otherwise he has taken a federalist position similar to Cruz’s and Rubio’s. “I would have much preferred that they ruled at a state level and let the states make those rulings themselves,” he told Fox News.

Out of this mix of positions and non-positions, there will almost certainly be something for everyone to like — and to complain about. But no one can deny there are choices. The New Hampshire primary is just six days away.

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