

Christian Voters: Rand Paul Had The Best Night

Tuesday night, at the conclusion of the Republican presidential debates televised on CNN, a group of Christian voters from a wide array of denominations and backgrounds took part in a discussion about the debate. They agreed to have that discussion made public as a service to other Christians who are contemplating their own votes in 2016.

All of the voters are registered Republicans, or lean Republican and intend to participate in the presidential nomination process. They were:

- Aaron Cronk (Madrid, Iowa)—a stay-at-home father and U.S. Navy veteran who is a member of Madrid Evangelical Free Church. He is a county chair for Ted Cruz.
- Eric Durbin (Stuart, Iowa)—a software developer who attends services at All Saints Catholic Church in Stuart. He is undecided as to who he will support for the Republican nomination, but says has decided on those for whom he will not vote.
- Bryan Fischer (Tupelo, Miss.)—host of the daily two-hour talk program “Focal Point” on American Family Radio who attends Hope Church in Tupelo. Has supported Ted Cruz “since Day One.”
- Jacob Hall (Sioux Center, Iowa)—a sports journalist who writes for the weekly newspaper in his community and who attends Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center. Currently supporting Rick Santorum.
- Jane Jensen (Clarinda, Iowa)—travels the country as a cardiac catheterization lab technician, and attends evangelical churches wherever she happens to be located at the

time. Currently leans toward Ted Cruz, but also has an undisclosed “close second” she is also watching.

- Michael Leotta (Columbia, Mo.)– an insurance analyst in support of enterprise fire claims for State Farm Insurance who attends Christian Chapel Church in Columbia, and who is a “virtual member” and supporter of Denver Bible Church for many years. Currently supporting Ted Cruz.

- Tom Nichols (rural Garner, Iowa)–works for a large family farm operation, and attends an independent Baptist church. Currently leans toward Ted Cruz, but has voted third-party in every presidential election since 1996.

- Tim Overlin (Des Moines, Iowa)–executive director of Personhood Iowa who attends First Federated Church in Des Moines. Works on the staff of Keep the Promise, a pro-Ted Cruz Super PAC.

- Adam Vandall (Newton, Iowa)–self-employed small business owner of Computer Pro in Newton who attends a home Bible study group. He is a county chair for Ted Cruz.

The panelists were asked 10 questions, and a couple of follow-ups, regarding the debates. The following is a complete transcript of that conversation, which took place in a social media chat.

1. CNN spent much of the 30 minutes prior to the start of the “undercard debate” bashing Donald Trump. Fair or unfair?

- Tom Nichols–Part of the territory.

- Jacob Hall–Depends on if it was factual or not.

- Bryan Fischer–Just helps Trump. Reminds everybody he is the top dog.

- Aaron Cronk–Agree with all of the above re: CNN attacking Trump.

- Michael Leotta—I don't think it was unfair, as it is their job. It's all about ratings. Trump gives them ratings by attacking everyone. They return the favor.
- Bryan Fischer—Donald Trump going for the Dale Carnegie award in post-debate interview.
- Jacob Hall—Here's where I'm at on Trump. If you're going to support him, you already do. There's nothing he can say or do IMHO to gain voters. And most Trump supporters were likely not watching the precoverage of CNN before the undercard debate.
- Jane Jensen—What Jacob said
- Adam Vandall—Trump is the frontrunner he's open game whether he's on the stage or not. So yes it is fair.

2. The debate format: two debates with unequal numbers of candidates based on arbitrary polling results. Like or dislike?

- Jacob Hall—Strongly dislike.
- Aaron Cronk—Strongly dislike.
- Michael Leotta—Dislike, as the kiddie table debate was much more engaging and manageable. Main debate still way too saturated.
- Bryan Fischer—I don't see any other way to do it. Fairest way to do it.
- Eric Durbin—Dislike the polling number criteria, designed to mitigate Iowas importance
- Adam Vandall—Dislike should have been split evenly
- Jane Jensen—Dislike that there are even two at this point. Should be down to 5-6 candidates at this point.

- Aaron Cronk—Splitting evenly would have been better, but still not good.
- Eric Durbin—It should have been down to 5 or 6 after the straw poll
- Jacob Hall—I think rotating them so they all are on stage with each other would've been best
- Tom Nichols—Agree that it should have been 5 or 6 total.
- Eric Durbin—It was designed to go to convention. That's why the field is flooded

FOLLOW UP: How would you winnow the field down to five or six candidates?

- Tom Nichols—A straw poll.
- Jacob Hall—The field was at 7 or 8 during Iowa Caucus last time
- Eric Durbin—Though Trump would have dominated a straw poll. With purchasing power
- Jane Jensen—Take the averages of national polls between now and next debate. Top 5-6. Period.
- Jacob Hall—Nat'l polls are meaningless
- Michael Leotta—Paid professional polling data of likely, not simply registered voters in early voting states.
- Aaron Cronk—Agreed. Nat'l polls are meaningless.
- Tom Nichols—Agree with Jacob.
- Eric Durbin—National poll criteria leaves no chance of a Santorum or Huckabee upset

- Jane Jensen—Has to be national, somehow
- Aaron Cronk—Perhaps polls in the early states?
- Jacob Hall—i don't think there's a good way to change it
- Michael Leotta—Cage fight?
- Tom Nichols—There is no chance for Santorum or Huckabee anyway, so that's a moot point.
- Jacob Hall—I think states should get to pick criteria; the states that host the debates.
- Bryan Fischer—I think you have to use national polls since this is for the presidency.

3. Very quickly, let's talk about the first debate: did anyone earn the opportunity to "move" up in the January debate?

- Aaron Cronk—Haven't watched it yet. No comment.
- Tom Nichols—Didn't bother to watch. I could care less.
- Jane Jensen—Nope
- Jacob Hall—Rewinding it to that point now... based on what I heard on Sirius radio I thought Santorum did well in the back-and-forth with Graham about Syria. That's the only portion I heard ... if Carly, Carson, Kasich are on the main stage I find no reason not to include Huckabee and Santorum ... and maybe Graham.
- Adam Vandall—I didn't see all of it but from what I did see no.
- Eric Durbin—Carly and Kasich earned the opportunity to move down. If take Santorum or Huckabee anyday over either if them
- Aaron Cronk—Agree with Jacob, but really the main stage

should be smaller not bigger... so move Carly, Carson, and Kasich down to kiddie table.

- Eric Durbin—And Jeb
- Michael Leotta—Huckabee had a strong showing with solid answers, however, for many reasons, it's far too little, too late. Both Huck and Santorum would make great cabinet members in a Cruz administration.
- Eric Durbin—I think Cruz peaked early. There's still time. Especially if the audio tapes are damning
- Jane Jensen—Still time for whom, Eric?
- Eric Durbin—Someone will fill the void if he crashes
- Bryan Fischer—I didn't watch the early debate. I like Santorum and Huckabee, but no one on that early platform has a chance.
- Tom Nichols—I disagree with Eric on this one.
- Jane Jensen—Cruz won't crash.
- Eric Durbin—Cruz is in my would never vote for list and I ruled him out early on.
- Aaron Cronk—I'm sure we've all noticed that Eric.
- Eric Durbin—I'm sure ☐
- Jane Jensen—Will you vote for him if he wins nomination?
- Jacob Hall—Why do none of the candidates have facial hair?
- Eric Durbin—Probably not
- Michael Leotta—Jacob makes a valid point
- Aaron Cronk—Eric, I applaud your willingness to stick with your principles.

- Jacob Hall—when is the last time a president had facial hair?
Lincoln?
- Bob Eschliman—To answer Jacob's question: William Howard Taft.
- Jacob Hall—I knew you'd know Bob!

4. It wasn't brought up during the debate, but it's been discussed quite a bit, particularly in Iowa, so let's briefly touch on these alleged audio recordings. What kind of "damning evidence" would it take for you to drop support for Cruz?

- Tom Nichols—Still haven't decided to support him. So I'll wait and see.
- Jacob Hall—I don't support Cruz, but he's my No. 2 ... If he contradicts a firm stance on traditional marriage or life beginning at conception he is dead to me ... he may be regardless if it shows a lack of truth ... I already question his authenticity. It will only cement those concerns.
- Eric Durbin—I have already dropped support as stated. His stating he has wanted to be president since childhood and his grooming for the position is a turn off, in addition to the perceived lack of authenticity.
- Adam Vandall—Any reversal on any of the substantive issues of the day Life, marriage, Radical Islamic Terrorism, Gun rights, immigration. If he is shown to have re-negged on any of these issues I would lose respect for him and most likely all of my personal support.
- Jane Jensen—I know nothing about audio recordings, so can not answer.
- Michael Leotta—Damning evidence would be Cruz renouncing Personhood for unborn children.

- Bryan Fischer—I've seen enough over the course of the last three years to know that Cruz is my guy.
- Jacob Hall—I think it has to do with homosexual marriage. I'd almost bet \$100 on it
- Bob Eschliman—we don't condone gambling, Mr. Hall. ☐
- Jacob Hall—Almost ... almost
- Aaron Cronk—I'm not sure. Certainly, something like a reversal on Personhood or on the fight for religious liberty would be grounds.
- Jacob Hall—Bob, I think it discredits how intelligent everyone thinks Cruz is IF he said something contradictory under the idea that a private fundraiser wasn't being recorded.

5. Moving on to the main debate, who had the best night?

- Aaron Cronk—Rand Paul
- Tom Nichols—Rand
- Eric Durbin—Rand Paul, followed by Trump
- Jacob Hall—I think Trump's kiss-and-make up with Cruz is huge for Cruz.
- Michael Leotta—Rand Paul surprisingly had the best night, as he appears to have returned to his roots. I'd give 2nd to Cruz due to his consistent message and involuntary support tonight from Trump, Jeb, and Rand.
- Aaron Cronk—Cruz had a great night, but mostly because nobody landed punches. Rand had a great night by landing punches.

- Eric Durbin—I think Cruz looked bad running long in questions defying the rules and Rubio dinged him rightfully in immigration
- Adam Vandall—Rand Paul was very good 1st place, I think Cruz maintained his own so he gets 2nd. I don't think anyone else had a good night although I will say maybe Carson gets 3rd because his answers were good he just puts me to sleep.
- Jane Jensen—Paul had a great night.
- Bryan Fischer—Rand Paul easily had the best night. Cruz second.

6. Who had the worst night?

- Adam Vandall—Carly, Jeb and Trump, I think Trumps kiss and make up with Cruz hurts him and helps Cruz and his acceptance of staying with the party, while endearing to the establishment may actually lose him a part of his base.
- Eric Durbin—Jeb
- Aaron Cronk—Jeb
- Michael Leotta—Tie: Fiorina\Carson
- Jacob Hall—Carson.
- Michael Leotta—Kasich is irrelevant
- Tom Nichols—Tie between Kasich and Jeb. Both were awful.
- Aaron Cronk—Rubio had a bad night as well.
- Jane Jensen—Kasich, Jeb, and Fiorina were pretty bad.
- Bryan Fischer—Jeb stumbled, Carson continued to shrink.

7. Christie moved back up this debate from being in the undercard, did he have a debate worthy of being on the big stage?

- Tom Nichols–NO
- Eric Durbin–No, it was all the same
- Aaron Cronk–No.
- Eric Durbin–9/11
- Tim Overlin–No. Same answers as always.
- Jane Jensen–No
- Tom Nichols–Because 9/11!!!
- Michael Leotta–Not this time. More of the same, “living in the past” what I did post 9/11 I can do again.
- Bryan Fischer–He showed he belonged on the stage. But he’s not going to get the nomination. The base is not ready to nominate an establishment guy.
- Jacob Hall–No, but he wasn’t the worst candidate on that stage
- Eric Durbin–Agreed, Jeb has no place up there
- Adam Vandall–He deserved to be there but I don’t think he swayed any more voters to him tonight.

8. Cruz vs. Rubio – who won?

- Tim Overlin–Cruz
- Jane Jensen–Cruz
- Eric Durbin–Rubio, because Cruz flat out lied

- Tom Nichols–Cruz. I thought Rubio got hurt a lot.
- Aaron Cronk–Cruz, but with significant help from Rand.
- Adam Vandall–Clearly Cruz got the upper hand on Rubio although Rand was his point guard with multiple assists
- Jacob Hall–I don't think either was open and honest ... but Cruz was better in that exchange
- Bryan Fischer–Cruz hands down. Dented Rubio's wagon on amnesty.
- Tom Nichols–BTW, Cruz's answers looked better with the assist from Rand.
- Michael Leotta–Cruz, by calling out the dishonesty of the Rubio camp frivolous attacks.
- Eric Durbin–Except the immigration attacks weren't frivolous

FOLLOW UP: Do you think Rubio's campaign is crafting an ad right now with the video of Cruz from the Senate committee hearings on his amendment to the Gang of Eight bill?

- Eric Durbin–He should be. I just saw a nasty one on Cruz and Rubio from Jeb
- Tom Nichols–Probably, and probably it will hurt him in some people's eyes.
- Eric Durbin–Or his NPR or Times interview
- Michael Leotta–I'd not be surprised by any ad Rubio's Super PAC would put out in attempt to discredit Cruz
- Adam Vandall–If not they should be they would be stupid not to.
- Jacob Hall–What amendment?

- Eric Durbin—The one he called for legal status for 11 million illegals and claimed it was a poison pill.
- Aaron Cronk—I agree with Tom. Rubio has been putting attack ads against Cruz for some time now. Eric, I know won't vote for Cruz, but is it possible that it WAS a poison pill?
- Eric Durbin—Not with 2 separate interviews and a press release calling for the same thing. Coupled with his authorship of Bush's amnesty policy, doubtful
- Aaron Cronk—Fair enough.
- Bryan Fischer—Rubio is fatally vulnerable on amnesty. Has to find a way to neutralize Cruz on that issue.

9. Trump vs. Bush — who won?

- Eric Durbin—Trump
- Aaron Cronk—Trump
- Tom Nichols—Trump
- Jane Jensen—Trump
- Michael Leotta—Jeb won because he actually made valid points this time
- Adam Vandall—Trump beat Bush although he didn't win the night.
- Aaron Cronk—Bush looked petulant, whiny, and just plain wrong.
- Jacob Hall—Trump
- Tom Nichols—Bush sounded like a petulant child.
- Jacob Hall—Side note: According to Jim Koch, Santorum took

2nd place overall tonight in the Pottawattamie County [*note: second-largest GOP county in Iowa—ed*] GOP Debate Watch Straw Poll, finishing under Trump. Rubio and Rand tied for 3rd.

10. Give Wolf, Dana, and Hugh a letter grade – how did they each do tonight?

- Tom Nichols—C-
- Eric Durbin—Together or individual?
- Bob Eschliman—Individually
- Eric Durbin—Wolf A, the others a C
- Tim Overlin—B-, C, C
- Michael Leotta—Woof = B- Dana = D- Thomas Hayden Church = C
- Jacob Hall—Wolf... B Dana... C Hugh... C- (didn't like his exchange with Carson)
- Aaron Cronk—Wolf = C Dana = D+ Hugh = C-
- Adam Vandall—Wolf B Dana B Hugh B+
- Bob Eschliman—Well, that's all I've got, gang. I appreciate you all taking part.