

Christians Weigh in on Saturday's Primary Vote in South Carolina

There's no better way to get a sense of how a primary election will pan out than to ask the people who are closest to it.

Tom Hanson, a conservative freelance journalist from Greenville in Upstate South Carolina who runs the website , said he is backing Ted Cruz in Saturday's primary. His wife of 26 years, Tina, has decided to back Marco Rubio.

"We like them both, and we also like Dr. Ben Carson," he said. "We decided early. Like our friends in Iowa and New Hampshire, we South Carolinians get to meet the candidates in relatively small, face-to-face encounters. I don't need to rely much on media accounts of the candidates. I decide based on their message and how they interact with me."

He said his wife hasn't been able to meet candidates face-to-face because she is often at home, caring for their 22-year-old son, Tom Jr., who has autism.

Gretchen Bagwell is a homeschool mom who used to serve in public relations at a private school. She lives in Atlanta and attends First Baptist Church there but was born and raised in neighboring South Carolina. She said she plans to vote for Ted Cruz during the Super Tuesday I/SEC Primary on March 1.

She said she is about "95 percent" committed to the Texas senator.

Hanson, who is a Southern Baptist, attends The Church at Cherrydale in Greenville, South Carolina. He said evangelical voters are "extremely important" in the Palmetto State, saying he felt they play the single more important role in electing a

candidate in the state.

"The important issues are the future of the Supreme Court, especially with the passing of Justice Antonin Scalia; the threat of Muslim immigration—which helps explain the popularity of Donald Trump—and religious freedom issues such as the freedom to oppose same-sex marriage and the freedom to pray," he said.

Bagwell agreed the evangelical vote in her home state is "huge." She said she believes that gives Cruz an edge over the rest of the field, although she believes his win in Iowa was "as much about pure conservatism as it was about evangelical Christianity."

Hanson noted the tone of the debate in South Carolina, so far, has become "definitely nasty," but he doesn't believe it's limited to the Palmetto State, as some media outlets have portrayed it. He said he's largely ignored it.

"I have already made my decision, and will not be influenced by negative comments about my favorite candidates," he said. "It is so sad to hear Republicans sniping at one another. If the Democrats don't defeat us, we will defeat ourselves."

Setting aside their personal preferences, Hanson and Bagwell said they believe Donald Trump will win South Carolina with Cruz in second and Rubio in third.

"I think it will be neck and neck with Cruz," she said. "I think Rubio will come in very strongly due to endorsements from Hailey and Gowdy. I also believe Ben Cason will fare well, but be a distant fourth."

Bagwell said that in Georgia, where there aren't as many evangelical voters, Trump has a substantial following. But she repeated an oft-cited political saying: "As South Carolina decides, so goes the Deep South."

"I would just want to remind people that they are voting for *far* more than just president," she added. "Scalia's death was devastating, but let's face it, he was 79. Many of the other justices are also older and likely to step down or pass away in the next four or eight years. I know it's cliché at this point, but this election truly is our country's turning point."