

Donald Trump Pledges to Support the Republican Nominee. But Should He?

Today was a historic day in political history, perhaps in world history: Donald Trump lost a deal.

The Donald called a press conference today to say that he had signed a pledge forced upon him by the Republican Party promising that:

[I]f I do not win the 2016 Republican nomination for President of the United States I will endorse the 2016 Republican presidential nominee, regardless of who it is.

I further pledge that I will not seek to run as an independent or write-in candidate, nor will I seek or accept the nomination for president of any other party.

"I will be totally pledging my allegiance to the Republican Party and the conservative principles for which it stands," Trump said, putting the best face on the situation.

"We will go out, and we will fight hard, and we will win—we will win," he said. "And most importantly, we will make our country great again, because that's what it's all about."

"I see no circumstances under which I would tear up that pledge," he quasi-reassured. He had previously demanded an "assurance that I would be treated fairly" by the Republican Party during the primary process.

Jeb Bush had also turned up the heat, saying on morning television Thursday morning that Trump should sign the pledge. Asked if he would support Donald Trump if he lost the

nomination to flamboyant developer, Bush replied, "Of course."
(Of course he would. Why would you ask?)

Here's the back story to this deal: The Republican Party has been looking for a way to contain the Trump "problem" ever since he skyrocketed to the top of the polls. Unlike other non-Establishment candidates in races past—Herman Cain or Michele Bachmann, for instance—his lead has only grown. A series of "gotcha" questions at the *Fox News* debate in Cleveland—including a pledge to support the Republican presidential nominee—failed to deflate his rising prominence. So, state GOP officials in Virginia and North Carolina—including former Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli—supported a measure that would force Republican presidential hopefuls to promise they would not make a third party run or be forced off the state primary ballots.

Trump needs to be on those ballots to win the nomination. And he now believes he has a credible chance at becoming the 2016 Republican presidential nominee. So, Trump signed on the dotted line.

But should he have? I can think of a few serious reservations I, and other Christian conservatives, would have with such a deal:

1. What if the unthinkable happens: The Republican presidential candidate supports abortion or gay "marriage"?

Although it is unlikely in the extreme, what if a pro-abortion or pro-gay "marriage" presidential candidate somehow wins the nomination? Only one of the 17 candidates—former New York Governor George Pataki—is openly pro-choice on abortion. Several candidates have said the gay "marriage" issue is "over"—and more than a few are privately relieved the Supreme Court ruled the way it did. Even on this issue, any Republican in the field is preferable to any Democrat running. But signing a blind pledge puts the signatory in the position of

voting for a candidate whose views may violate Scripture.

2. What if the Republican candidate is a complete failure?

A far greater likelihood is that the Republican candidate may turn out to be completely unpalatable to the general electorate. America is fairly evenly divided politically, which allows even poor candidates—John Kerry in 2004, Bob Dole in 1996—to run competitive campaigns. But what if the Republican nominee stumbles so badly that the fall is irreparable, and he refuses to step aside? The Republican Party candidate did this very thing in the 2010 Colorado governor's race. Wouldn't a patriotic candidate have a *moral duty* to run against him?

3. What future oaths will GOP officials require?

Although the political process is open to all, political parties are private entities that can enact their own rules. What if, after making this pledge to support the eventual nominee a necessity, other states demand candidates sign a pledge to support *all future* Republican presidential candidates? What if they demand that all candidates sign a pledge of prior loyalty, saying they have *never* supported anything other than Republican candidates – criteria obviously intended to eliminate Trump? Don't laugh; the Radical Republicans demanded precisely this impossible standard of the Southern states following the Civil War; it was called the "ironclad oath."

4. What if Trump loses through dirty tricks?

What if, in a more mundane display of political shenanigans, Trump delegates are simply not seated at the convention, or denied the ability to vote? Such a move, while unlikely, is not unprecedented. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower won the 1952 presidential nomination after some dubious tricks kicking out whole delegations that favored his opponent, Ohio Sen. Robert Taft. Awfully shady things happened with the Iowa caucus vote

in 2012, when the Republican Establishment's favored candidate, Mitt Romney, actually lost to Rick Santorum. The same year, when pro-life activist Randall Terry ran a symbolic campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination against Barack Obama, the Democratic Party simply stripped him of his delegates and justified the move later. While it would be difficult to envision such a scenario in the 2016 GOP, well, difficult is not the same as impossible.

5. What if an 11th-hour moral failure or scandal emerges?

What if, after having secured the nomination, the Republican candidate is revealed to have had some disqualifying moral lapse—something criminal, for instance—or news of a fresh scandal breaks? What sways the electorate is often less-than-weighty policy issues. I always tell audiences: Imagine if Dick Cheney had accidentally shot his hunting partner *before* the 2004 election?

Trump obviously believed the benefits of getting on the ballot outweighed the negatives of signing a pledge not to run third party. And carefully read, it may provide a pathway to an independent presidential run, anyway.

The dirty secret is, this pledge isn't as tough as it seems.

Reading this carefully, Trump merely promises to “endorse” the Republican nominee and “not seek to run as an independent or write-in candidate” or “accept the nomination for president of any other party.”

Under those terms, Trump could drop out of the race, release a web-based press release saying he endorses whomever the GOP nominates, then allow a “Draft Trump” movement to place his name on all 50 state ballots as an independent candidate. After all, this outside entity of political “volunteers” chose him; he did not “seek to run as an independent.”

As long as he did not personally accept the nomination of any

third party, he could run for president as an independent and still be within the terms of the agreement drafted by the best and brightest at the Republican Party.

Maybe Trump got the last laugh after all.