

GOP Worried Trump or Carson Could Hand Presidency to Clinton

Republican Party leaders are expressing growing concerns as the Iowa caucuses approach in February that the nomination of leading candidates Ben Carson and Donald Trump could virtually ensure Hillary Clinton wins the presidency.

As Carson and Trump have surged in the polls, the party establishment is experiencing “growing anxiety bordering on panic” about how to defeat them and prevent a nomination that would help ensure Clinton wins in November and increases the odds that the Senate falls into Democratic hands, Philip Rucker and Robert Costa wrote in *The Washington Post*.

“The party establishment is paralyzed,” Rucker and Costa wrote. “Big money is still on the sidelines. No consensus alternative to the outsiders has emerged from the pack of governors and senators running, and there is disagreement about how to prosecute the case against them. Recent focus groups of Trump supporters in Iowa and New Hampshire commissioned by rival campaigns revealed no silver bullet.

“In normal times, the way forward would be obvious. The wannabes would launch concerted campaigns, including television attack ads, against the front-runners. But even if the other candidates had a sense of what might work this year, it is unclear whether it would ultimately accrue to their benefit. Trump’s counterpunches have been withering, while Carson’s appeal to the base is spiritual, not merely political. If someone was able to do significant damage to them, there’s no telling to whom their supporters would turn, if anyone.”

The consternation comes as Carson and Trump are nearly tied in

the polls. A *USA Today* poll found Carson and Trump are nearly tied with Carson at 24.4 percent and Trump at 24.8 percent support. In comparison, Marco Rubio was at 11.8 percent, Ted Cruz at 9.6 percent, Jeb Bush at 6 percent, John Kasich at 3 percent, Rand Paul at 3 percent, Carly Fiorina at 3 percent, Mike Huckabee at 2.4 percent and Chris Christie at 2.2 percent, Bobby Jindal at 0.8 percent and Rick Santorum at 0.8 percent.

At the same time, a new McClatchy-Marist poll found Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders would beat Trump by 12 percentage points, 53 to 41, in the November election.

For months, GOP leaders had assumed interest in Trump and Carson would fade over time, but that hasn't happened.

"People usually start off in the same way: Pollyanna-ish," Thomas H. Kean Sr., a former New Jersey governor, told *The Washington Post*. "They assure me that Trump and Carson will eventually fade. Then we'll talk some more, and I give them a reality check. I'll say, 'The guy in the grocery store likes Trump. So does the guy who cuts my hair. They're probably going to stick with him. Who knows if this ends?' "

In the meantime, some Republicans are talking about drafting 2012 nominee Mitt Romney to run again. Romney has insisted he won't run.

"I'm not a happy camper," says Peter A. Wish, a Florida doctor whom several candidates have contacted. "Hopefully, somebody will emerge who will be able to do the job," but, he added, "I'm very worried that the Republican-base voter is more motivated by anger, distrust of D.C. and politicians and will throw away the opportunity to nominate a candidate with proven experience that can win."