

Here's the First Option for Conservatives if Donald Trump Wins

The results of the March 22 Republican presidential primary elections should focus the mind of every movement conservative leader and activist on the very real possibility that Donald Trump will hold a near-majority, or perhaps even an outright majority, of delegates when the Republican National Convention convenes in Cleveland on July 18.

As things stand now, Trump has 739 delegates, Sen. Ted Cruz has 465, Marco Rubio—who has suspended his campaign—has 166, Gov. John Kasich has 143, and the other candidates who have suspended their campaigns hold the remaining 15, with 6 uncommitted. (These numbers can and will shift due to varying state rules on how delegates must vote if their pledged candidate suspends his campaign.)

While the math of delegate accumulation does not make a Trump outright victory inevitable, the math is on his side.

And contrary to the conventional wisdom, Trump has yet to hit a ceiling of support, making his victory all the more likely.

Trump won every county in Florida except Rubio's home turf of Miami-Dade County. Despite the unprecedented efforts on behalf of favorite son Gov. John Kasich by the Republican Party of Ohio, Trump also won the Appalachian periphery of Ohio where one might look for populist Republicans and Reagan Democrats.

Furthermore, Sen. Cruz's attempt to form an alliance with the establishment to stop Trump has not produced the votes he needs to win a pre-convention majority.

While the Western primaries should be good for Sen. Ted Cruz,

it appears that he is not picking-up the public boost from elected officials and establishment political figures that would indicate a real honest "unity movement" that brings conservative-leaning elements of the Republican establishment together with movement conservatives to actually deliver delegates to Cruz.

What I see on the part of Sen. Cruz's erstwhile establishment Republican allies is not an effort to deliver the nomination to him, but an effort to create a chaotic situation in which no outsider has a majority, thereby delivering to the Washington Cartel's powerbrokers and insiders the ability to choose the nominee at the Convention.

What's more, the apparent end of the Republican debates has deprived Cruz of almost all of the traditional means to change the dynamics of the campaign.

On the other hand, Trump's increasing level of acceptance among Republican elected officials, and conservative leaders, puts him in a position of growing strength going into the upcoming primaries.

This was especially true in the make-or-break state of Arizona.

While Ted Cruz was endorsed by the highly respected Congressman Trent Franks and Arizona House Majority Leader Steve Montenegro and Arizona House Majority Whip David Livingston, as well as a dozen or more state legislators, these endorsements were for the most part the usual suspects from the cultural conservative wing of the Republican Party.

Much as we wish it to be different, Sen. Cruz has shown little growth beyond his anticipated cultural conservative base and that anticipated base has underperformed in state after state.

Trump, on the other hand, has relentlessly pursued his immigration and “make America great again” message. Trump’s support in Arizona grew rapidly on the strength of the endorsements of Sheriff Joe Arpaio and former Governor Jan Brewer, as well as Jeff DeWit, State Treasurer of Arizona, Bob Corbin, former Arizona Attorney General, Carol Springer, former State Treasurer of Arizona, and former Arizona State Senators Lori Klein, Robert Blendu and Thayer Verschoor.

Trump won Arizona handily with a near-majority of 47 percent and his current cache of over 700 delegates pretty much seals the math against any other candidate approaching a majority of 1,237 delegates going into the Republican National Convention.

If that indeed happens, then conservatives will have to face the reality of working with Donald Trump or opposing him at the GOP Convention.

So what should conservatives do if Donald Trump is the Republican nominee?

We see four convention and post-convention scenarios and today review the one that has received the most media attention; forming a Third Party and running a culturally conservative candidate against Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

Scenario No. 1: Oppose Trump and mount a Third Party campaign on behalf of a cultural conservative candidate.

In 1975, Ronald Reagan was approached by a number of leading conservatives, including ConservativeHQ Chairman Richard A. Viguerie, who wanted to launch a Third Party campaign with Reagan as the candidate.

As Mr. Viguerie recounted in his book *TAKEOVER*, Reagan heard them out and then told them they were nuts because most of America’s conservative voters were Republicans and he did not believe enough of them were likely to abandon the GOP to allow

him to win a general election.

A lot has changed in the 40 years since Ronald Reagan came to that conclusion.

Today, when Republican primary voters were asked in an exit poll if they felt betrayed by their Party leaders, in New Hampshire 47 percent of voters answered yes; in South Carolina it was 52 percent; in Florida 60 percent of Republicans felt betrayed; in Ohio 54 percent; North Carolina 57 percent; Illinois 50 percent, and in Missouri the number of Republicans who felt betrayed by their Party leaders was 58 percent.

But those huge percentages of Republican voters don't come anywhere near to accounting for a majority of the General Election electorate, nor is it clear that any credible conservative candidate, such as Ted Cruz, would come to a conclusion different from Ronald Reagan's 1975 analysis.

Setting aside the obvious challenge of funding a competitive campaign in an environment where the Democratic and Republican Party opponents would likely spend a combined total of over \$2 billion, as they did in 2012, when Obama spent \$ billion and Romney spent \$ billion, the numbers just don't add up for a candidate whose sole base is movement and especially cultural conservatives.

In 2012 about 117 million Americans voted in the presidential election, in 2008 about 125 million voted.

In 2008, white, born-again, evangelical Christians represented 26 percent of the total vote for president, according to the exit polls. In 2012, white, born-again, evangelical Christians represented 26 percent of the total vote for president, again according to the exit polls.

After four years of Obama's disastrous anti-religious policies, we saw no change at all in the percentage of the electorate accounted for by evangelical Christians; no net

gain, certainly no surge, and no record evangelical turnout, despite the vast effort expended on contacting and turning out faith-first voters.

What's more, when you zoom in a bit, according to Joel C. Rosenberg, you find that 21 percent of self-identified, white, born-again, evangelical Christians voted for President Obama in 2012. That means more than 6 million self-described "evangelicals" voted for Obama.

It should also be noted that, despite his war on the Catholic Church, 50 percent of the Catholic vote went for Obama in 2012. This was down from the 54 percent that Obama won in 2008.

Apropos of today's political environment; 42 percent of the evangelical votes in heavily evangelical North Carolina went to Donald Trump, in Ohio, 39 percent of evangelicals voted for Trump.

The chief political correspondent for *CBN News*, David Brody, commented on what he calls Trump's "staying power" with evangelicals. In examining the March 15 "Super Tuesday II" results in Missouri—where Trump and Cruz battled to a virtual tie—Brody compared the votes of "cultural Christians" and "church-going die-hards."

"Trump's evangelical appeal is NOT just with casual cultural Christians," the Christian journalist concluded. "Yes, it's his main portion; but by winning 31 percent of the 'church-going die-hards,' he [Trump] makes Missouri a competitive state rather than a simple Cruz victory."

"You see, Cruz has to pull a better number than 57 percent among the devoutly faithful crowd," Brody observed. "It's a solid number, but Trump beats Cruz solidly with the cultural Christian crowd ... so the only way for Cruz to win evangelical-heavy states is to run up the number among the 'more religious crowd.' He's really not doing that, and that's made a HUGE

difference.”

The final issue to be dealt with in this scenario is the myth of the 17 million (or 10 or 5 million) missing Christian voters.

The argument is made every election that, if only we had a cultural conservative candidate, millions of hitherto absent Christian voters would show up and sweep a cultural conservative into the White House, but history has proven the idea that there are millions of “missing” Christian voters to be a myth.

Putting principled cultural conservative Rick Santorum on the primary ballot didn’t draw them to the polls in 2012, running Baptist minister Mike Huckabee didn’t draw them to the polls in 2008 or 2016, neither did putting high profile TV evangelist Pat Robertson on the ballot in 1988.

The reality is the millions of “missing” Christian voters are not missing.

After 36 years, millions of dollars spent on Christian voter guides, hours spent leafleting churches and intense telephone, mail and social media campaigns it is time to recognize that these voters are not “missing,” they are simply Christians *who do not vote*.

Counting on such people to power a Third Party campaign to victory is not merely the triumph of hope over experience, it is a fool’s errand that would have disastrous consequences for the preservation of constitutional liberty.

The bottom line?

Setting aside the fundraising challenge of competing in a \$2 billion campaign, the numbers prove that there are simply not enough committed cultural conservative voters to guarantee defeat of Trump in the Republican Primaries, let alone defeat

Trump and Hillary Clinton in a general election campaign.

A Third Party presidential campaign led by cultural conservatives would most assuredly put Hillary Clinton in the White House, destroy the already shaky right-of-center coalition and seriously up the tempo of the Left's war on constitutional government, religious liberty and traditional values.

Tomorrow's scenario: The "Benedict Option." Should movement conservatives let the Republican establishment deal on its own with the Trump phenomenon it created and sit out the 2016 election?

George Rasley is editor of ConservativeHQ, a member of American MENSA, and a veteran of over 300 political campaigns, including every Republican presidential campaign from 1976 to 2008. He served as lead advance representative for Governor Sarah Palin in 2008 and has served as a staff member, consultant or advance representative for some of America's most recognized conservative Republican political figures, including President Ronald Reagan and Jack Kemp. He served in policy and communications positions on the House and Senate staff and during the George H.W. Bush administration he served on the White House staff of Vice President Dan Quayle.