

The Surprising Outcome When Donald Trump Met Black Pastors

Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump met a group of black pastors on Monday, some of them polarizing figures in their own right, despite objections from other African-American clergy and academics who have assailed what they call Trump's racially charged rhetoric.

The billionaire mogul emerged from the more than two-hour meeting saying it went "very well." He said some of the attendees had agreed to endorse him, but the group did not present a formal list of new supporters.

The meeting was held with the Coalition of African American [Pastors], clergy from across the country connected to one another through the South Carolina-based Christian broadcaster, the NOW Television Network.

The group included a former contestant on Trump's reality TV show "The Apprentice" and a New York pastor who has attracted national attention with anti-gay statements and harsh criticism of American leaders, including President Barack Obama and former President George W. Bush.

Jordynn Parks, daughter of network co-founder Pastor Mark Burns, said clergy members in attendance regularly appeared on the network. Trump and other attendees said there were about 100 participants.

PASTORS REACT

Cleveland-based pastor Darrell Scott, who spoke on behalf of the group after the meeting, described it as "very constructive."

"We had meaningful dialogue with Donald Trump," Scott said,

adding many of the pastors planned to return to their homes and pray while deliberating whether to endorse Trump. He said some were meeting Trump for the first time.

Among the meeting's attendees was James Manning, a Harlem-based pastor who came under fire in June for using the billboard outside his church to post anti-gay messages, including one addressed to gay rights supporters that said: "Cursed be thou with cancer, HIV, syphilis, stroke and madness."

Manning once likened Obama, America's first black president, to Adolf Hitler and has frequently said the president is secretly gay. After Monday's meeting, Manning pledged his support for Trump.

"Mr. Trump realizes why black people are going to vote for him," Manning said. "He is truthful – forget about him not being politically correct. He loves America, I believe that he does."

Another member of the group was Omarosa Manigault, who became an ordained minister in 2012 after a decade of appearances on reality TV shows, including the first season of "The Apprentice," where she attracted loyal fans as well as harsh critics.

Manigault, who is now known simply as "Rev. Omarosa," said she had come equipped with questions her parishioners in California wanted her to ask Trump about issues like access to education for members of the black community.

"I walked away with the answers to the questions that my parishioners had," she said. "Everybody in that room had their own individual role and agenda."

CHANGE OF PLANS

Trump's campaign had initially described the meeting as a precursor to a public event set for Monday in which the group would formally endorse him. But over the weekend, the campaign

canceled that event and proceeded only with the private meeting.

After emerging from the meeting at Trump Tower, Trump told reporters: "I've had many endorsements today."

Trump has come under fire for tweeting what critics assail as racially charged statistics about black murder rates and for saying a black protester at one of his political rallies deserved to be "roughed up."

In an open letter published on Friday, 114 black religious leaders and academics criticized the clergy members planning to meet Trump for failing, they said, to challenge him over his controversial statements.

A Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll on Friday showed a 12-point drop in support for Trump, who is seeking his party's nomination for the November 2016 election. He was the favorite of 31 percent of Republicans in a rolling poll in the five days ended on Nov. 27, down from a peak of 43 percent registered on Nov. 22. {eo}

(Reporting by Emily Flitter; Editing by Howard Goller and Peter Cooney)

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