

Trump Supporters Stand by Their Man

In the five weeks since Donald Trump became a Republican presidential candidate, he has insulted Mexican immigrants, rival White House contenders and Arizona Senator John McCain, his party's 2008 presidential nominee.

That's just the way his staunchest supporters like it.

Pundits say the real estate mogul, 69, may have overplayed his hand this weekend when he said McCain was not a war hero despite enduring four years of torture in a Hanoi prison as a Navy fighter pilot during the Vietnam War.

The feud appears not to have bothered some voters who have made Trump a surprise front-runner among the 16 candidates vying for the Republican Party nomination in the November 2016 election.

Only two of 17 Trump supporters interviewed by Reuters said they would switch their support to another candidate. The rest said they were standing by him.

"I thought it was funny, and I'm a veteran," said Daniel Elliston, 59, of Draper, Utah.

They are staying loyal to Trump even as business partners abandon him and a Reuters/Ipsos tracking poll shows his nearest rival, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, closing the gap among Republicans.

The tracking poll on Tuesday found Trump winning the support of 17 percent of Republicans, effectively tied for the lead with Bush at 18 percent. Trump led Bush by eight percentage points a week ago.

Business partners like NBC, Univision[] and Macy's[] severed

ties after he described Mexican immigrants as “rapists” in his announcement speech. Republican candidates like former Texas Governor Rick Perry and Florida Senator Marco Rubio said he was unfit to serve as commander in chief after criticizing McCain’s war record.

Over-the-Top Persona

Over a decades-long career as a real-estate developer and reality television star, Trump has assumed an over-the-top persona to help market his golf courses and hotels. His brash speaking style has generated mixed results since he entered the presidential race on June 16.

Trump draws his strongest support from voters without a college degree and those who earn less than \$50,000 a year, according to Reuters/Ipsos polling.

Supporters say Trump’s shoot-from-the-hip rhetoric is his most appealing quality, a refreshing contrast to what they see as the overly cautious speaking style of other politicians.

“He has a backbone, where many of our politicians do not,” said Baton Rouge, Louisiana, retiree Diane Rose, 68.

Backers said they liked Trump’s record of success in business and the fact that he has no experience in politics. Many said Trump’s self-declared \$10 billion personal fortune is a sign that he cannot be bought, unlike other politicians who have to appeal to wealthy donors.

“The candidates, most of them say stuff so they can get donations,” said Ray Bittner, 68, a Vietnam War veteran from Mountain Home, Idaho.

Tapping Into Unease

Trump also appears to have tapped into a deep-seated uneasiness with immigration among many Republican voters. While his blunt comments were widely condemned by Hispanic

groups, Democrats and the Mexican government, many of those interviewed by Reuters said they agreed with his assessment that many immigrants are criminal.

Trump's association with the "birther" movement of conspiracy theorists who question President Barack Obama's citizenship and Christian faith also is a plus for some.

"I wish Donald Trump would have taken this to the hilt," said Ardith Forrest, 76, a retiree from Morris, Georgia.

Few Republican Party figures have challenged Trump for his comments on immigrants or Obama's citizenship, but his feud with McCain has brought widespread condemnation from party officials and other candidates.

Several Trump supporters said they were uncomfortable with those comments, or thought they had been mischaracterized by the news media. But most who disagreed said it did not affect their opinion of him.

Becky Pillsbury, 63, who runs a veterans charity in Huntsville, Alabama, is one of the few who said she no longer supported Trump after he said McCain did not do enough to help veterans.

"He was totally off base and wrong," she said.

Disabled veteran Joan Simms of Severna Park, Maryland, said Trump needs to speak more cautiously in the future.

"He's so used to being outspoken," said Simms, 71. "A person has a right to speak his feelings, but I think he needs to maybe think more."

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