

What Christian Voters Really Think About Thursday Night's Debate

Following Thursday night's debate, *Charisma Caucus* held an informal focus group discussion with American Family Radio's Bryan Fischer and a group of Christian voters who are likely to attend the Iowa Republican Caucus on Feb. 1.

The following is a transcript of that conversation, which took place in a group conversation on Facebook.

How many of you actually watched the first debate, and if so, what was your impression?

Adam Vandall—Didn't watch it.

Tom Nichols—Nope.

Anita Morrill—The undercard? Did not watch it. I watched both of them last time, and it was just too much.

Adam Vandall—Why would I want to watch the JV squad?

Eric Durbin—Didn't watch.

Bryan Fischer—I didn't see first debate.

Jacob Hall—Watched first 45 minutes ... Carly was auditioning for VP by attacking Hillary. Santorum IMO won the debate and was solid. Huckabee connected a few times but wasn't as sharp as I expected.

How would you grade each of the "top three" (Trump, Cruz and Rubio)?

Adam Vandall—Cruz A-, Trump B, Rubio B-

Eric Durbin—Trump B+, Rubio B, Cruz C

Bryan Fischer—Trump A-, Cruz A, Rubio B+

Anita Morrill—Rubio A-, Trump B+, Cruz B-

Tom Nichols—Cruz A, Rubio A, Trump B+

Jacob Hall—Cruz B+, Trump C, Rubio C

What letter grade would you give the other four (Carson, Bush, Christie and Kasich)?

Eric Durbin—The other three D, Kasich F

Tom Nichols—Carson D, Bush D, Christie D, Kasich F

Adam Vandall—I'd give Carson and Christie a C-, Bush a D, Kasich F

Bryan Fischer—Carson C, Bush C, Christie B, Kasich C-

Anita Morrill—Kasich F, Carson D, Bush C- (for trying, not for content), Christie C

Jacob Hall—Bush B-, Christie B-, Carson D+, Kasich F

Who won Trump vs. Cruz?

Adam Vandall—Cruz

Jacob Hall—Cruz

Judd Saul—Trump

Tom Nichols—Cruz

Anita Morrill—Birther thing Cruz won. Trade thing Trump (won).

Eric Durbin—Trump

Judd Saul—He dominated on fiscal issues

Anita Morrill—If I had to pick, I'd say Trump overall.

Judd Saul—Security, foreign policy Cruz

Eric Durbin—Birther thing Trump stumbled but it doesn't go away

Judd Saul—Cruz handled well

Eric Durbin—And he won on fiscal issues

Who won Rubio vs. Cruz?

Jacob Hall—Rubio in that late exchange.

Tom Nichols—Tie

Anita Morrill—Rubio. He was like a dog after a rope someone took away. Kept going back until he grabbed it back.

Eric Durbin—Rubio for calling him out on flip-flops. The press has research material now.

Adam Vandall—Tie. Rubio had to have been on something all night and he lost people, he should have attacked Cruz earlier.

The two candidates who desperately needed a good debate were Ben Carson and Jeb Bush. How did they do?

Tom Nichols—Next. Not well at all.

Judd Saul—Carson did OK like he always does.

Adam Vandall—I think the grades speak for themselves, their toast, Bush has been for a while Carson's fate is newer.

Judd Saul—Jeb sucked.

Eric Durbin—They should have been on the B team.

Anita Morrill—Carson overpromised and underdelivered after the

campaign staff shake up. He said he'd come out swinging and while he did interject himself a bit more, what he said wasn't really anything new. Jeb constantly seems like he's trying to remember what he worked really, really hard to memorize all week, and when he's supposed to jump in and say his lines.

Judd Saul—Lol

The debate was supposed to be about economic issues, taxation and fiscal policy. The first of those questions didn't come until one hour, 40 minutes into the debate. Was that a disservice to voters, or did you appreciate more national security questions?

Judd Saul—Disservice

Eric Durbin—Disservice

Adam Vandall—I enjoyed the questions, but it was probably a disservice since it really wasn't about what it was supposed to be about.

Tom Nichols—Disservice. They've argued foreign policy in every debate.

Anita Morrill—Disservice, for sure. Foreign policy is the strong suit of the Republican candidates. Everyone knows each one of them is either tough, tougher or toughest on the bad guys. Domestic policy/economy, on the other hand, is where they are perceived as weaker, and where they're losing badly to the other side. They really should have taken the chance to clearly explain a conservative viewpoint on those issues.

Bryan Fischer—I was happy with the wide-ranging nature of the questions. A narrow focus on economic issues would have been boring after about 30 minutes.

Anita Morrill—Here's the other thing: I think you could have easily tied economics, fiscal policy, taxes, etc. into National Defense, or vice versa. That wasn't done, either.

Jacob Hall—I believe Cruz's first question was about jobs and he talked about Iran. Could be wrong. I don't think debates should have a certain "format" or "topic of discussion" area ... just see where things go.

The next debate is in just a few days, right here in Iowa. If the Iowa GOP and the RNC asked for your advice, what would it be?

Anita Morrill—NO KASICH

Judd Saul—Let Mark Levin moderate

Adam Vandall—Evenly split the number of candidates in the top tier and undercard debates.

Eric Durbin—No Kasich, no Bush

Anita Morrill—Put them all on one stage, one debate. Have only like 4 questions, and go down the line, asking every candidate the same question. Then let them go back and forth on that issue/question for a few minutes.

Tom Nichols—National debt was not discussed. Life, marriage/family was not discussed. Get Jebe, and Kasich off the stage, they are giant sucking sounds.

Adam Vandall—and I agree with Tom

Jacob Hall—Put everyone on that stage or only 5 on that stage so the numbers are even. Get some social conservative questions asked. ... Put a time limit on the moderators for asking questions just as they put a time limit for answers.

Bryan Fischer—Let them actually debate each other with a set format and a timekeeper who means business. Role of the moderator just to make sure format is followed. Doesn't ask questions himself.

Are each of you firmly decided about who you will vote for?

Did tonight's debate influence you in any way?

Tom Nichols—No. I'm still undecided. As of tonight, I will vote for Alan Keyes.

Eric Durbin—No change, still know who I won't vote for. Will decide in 2 weeks

Anita Morrill—I'm quite firmly decided on who I will NOT vote for: Jeb, Christie, and Trump. And that includes in the General election. Slightly more favorable opinion of Rubio, mainly because he can clearly explain things, and that would be helpful in a general election and D-R debates, but I'm really not planning to vote for him, either.

Adam Vandall—Yes for Ted Cruz, It made me think that He will barring a major implosion at the next debate win the Iowa Caucuses and most likely South Carolina.

Bryan Fischer— I'm a Cruz guy, have been since day one.

Judd Saul—Cruz

Jacob Hall—I will still vote for Rick Santorum. But if Ted Cruz showed the fight against Trump he showed tonight 3 or 4 months ago, I'd likely be with Cruz ... That said, Cruz showed me tonight enough to get my support in November. Couldn't say that going into it.

Tom Nichols —I will NEVER vote for Santorum

Last question: in the General Election, which of these candidates could beat the Democrat nominee (regardless of whether it's Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders)?

Adam Vandall—Cruz and probably Rubio, I don't believe any one else has a shot

Anita Morrill —Rubio or Cruz could. If nothing else, they're younger and better looking than Hillary or Bernie. Both have

decent enough campaigns and ads to play ball. Way too many people on both sides afraid of or strongly dislike Trump.

Tom Nichols –Cruz, or Rubio can beat the Democrat candidate. The rest of them will cause most of the conservative base to stay home or vote third party like me.

Eric Durbin –Not sure Christie could win, who has more scandals being investigated. I think Trump puts NY, Ohio and the rest in contention, Rand wiped the floor with her on the I would have fired you comment. Kasich, Carson, Bush all lose. Cruz or Rubio go to court.

Jacob Hall—I believe Cruz could dismantle the Democrat... I believe Trump could do it. ... I believe Santorum could as well because I do believe he'd turn out the Christian vote and present a consistent conservative message. ... other than that, I don't have much hope.

Bryan Fischer— I think Cruz would handily defeat Hillary or Bernie.