

What Do South Carolina Supporters of Donald Trump Think of Ted Cruz?

Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump filled a hotel ballroom with over 2,000 people for a rally on Wednesday, attracting die-hard supporters as he has in other cities, but was dogged by a rival who is also very popular in South Carolina: Ted Cruz.

A dozen people interviewed by Reuters said the Texas senator offered a strong alternative to the loud-mouthed New York businessman, though more than half still planned to vote for Trump.

"If he doesn't drop out of the race, I'm definitely going to vote for him," Daniel Barrett, 48, said of Trump. When asked why he added the caveat about Trump staying in the race, Barrett said: "He might be rallying the troops for someone else, for Cruz."

Barrett said his ideal presidential ticket would be Trump, with Cruz as his running mate. "I like Donald Trump's bold, straightforward America theme," he said. "But Cruz, I think, is very articulate. He's solid on the issues."

South Carolina's primary election, in which Republicans and Democrats will each choose a nominee from their party to compete in the November 2016 presidential election, is set to be the third state contest, after Iowa's caucus and New Hampshire's primary in early February. Winning in South Carolina offers a candidate crucial momentum going into a slate of state elections held on a single day in early March, known as Super Tuesday.

Cruz won straw polls in several key South Carolina counties

earlier this year, and a Reuters/Ipsos poll this month found that he is the most popular second choice among Trump supporters.

If Trump were to leave the race, 24 percent of Trump supporters said they would vote for Cruz, compared with 15 percent for retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson and 11 percent for Florida Senator Marco Rubio. The poll, which included 373 Trump supporters, had a credibility interval of 6 percentage points.

On Wednesday, Trump brought up Cruz's call for a wall along the border, saying it was clear Cruz was trying to copy him. He also told the audience that his popularity amounted to a new movement, but that if he did not win the presidency, it would all be for naught.

"If I don't win, I will consider it a total and complete waste of time," he said.

Cathy Borreggine, 65, and Kerri Bruns, 47, both said they planned to vote for Trump, but that they also liked Cruz.

"I just hope he tones it down a little bit," Borreggine said of Trump. "He has to work with everybody in Congress."

Also in the race for the Republican nomination are Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, Governors Chris Christie of New Jersey and John Kasich of Ohio, former Governors Jeb Bush of Florida, Jim Gilmore of Virginia, and Mike Huckabee of Arkansas, former Hewlett-Packard Chief Executive Officer Carly Fiorina and former Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania.

For more on the 2016 presidential race, see the Reuters blog, "Tales from the Trail."

(Editing by Dan Grebler)

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