

Why Are Some Iowa Christians Backing Trump? Here Are Their Answers

This election cycle—particularly in the Republican presidential nomination process—has defied conventional wisdom at nearly every turn, and this phenomenon is best exemplified in the candidacy of billionaire Donald Trump.

For the vast majority of political experts, both the rise and staying power of Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump has been almost impossible to explain. His tough—albeit coarse—talk about immigration, foreign trade, the economy and political corruption has drawn a broad coalition of support from disgruntled Republican establishment voters, grass-roots conservatives and Tea Party members, and disaffected blue-collar Democrats.

For many Christian theologians, however, there's another group in Trump's corner that has them scratching their heads.

Christian conservatives—particularly in Iowa, where they make up the largest voting bloc every four years in the first-in-the-nation Republican Caucus—have become another strong component of the Trump Coalition. Iowa evangelicals who were willing to talk about their support for the candidate have a surprisingly pragmatic view of the Republican front-runner.

Jeff Moorman is a politically engaged Christian from Ankeny, Iowa, where he attends Prairie Ridge Church, an evangelical congregation with historical ties to the Reformed Church in America. He said there are several quality Republican candidates in the field, but that Trump is the only one he feels confident will make positive changes in the important issues American faces.

“He displays leadership and confidence that America needs right now,” he said. “Candidates talk about restoring religious freedom, but I trust Trump has the ability to change course, which he has during the election so far.”

Moorman rated his top issues, in order, as:

- boosting the economy and addressing the national debt,
- a strong military and Commander-in-Chief, and
- securing the borders and dealing with illegal immigration.

An experienced caucus voter, Moorman is fully engaged with the Trump campaign, volunteering 15 to 20 hours a week by walking in parades, working at rallies, and working get-out-the-vote efforts via email or over the phone. He also created two social media groups to promote Trump’s candidacy in Iowa.

“I will do anything it takes to help ensure Trump wins Iowa, gets the nomination, and wins the General Election,” he said.

Daniel Earll, who with his wife Karen is planning to enter the mission field next year, attends Church of the Open Bible in Boone, Iowa. In the past he’s supported former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who has already dropped out of the race this time around, but said he’s become more engaged in the process this cycle because of Donald Trump.

“At first I thought it was a publicity stunt, and I was planning to back Ted Cruz, but after listening to Trump speak, I decided that I really appreciated his passion, his lack of political correctness and his business acuity,” he said. “The more I listened, the more I liked what I heard. I quickly realized that he is exactly what America needs to get back on track.”

Earll said he has a Trump yard sign up, and has volunteered with the campaign. He said his top issues this cycle were:

- fixing the economy,
- national defense and security and

- veterans' care.

Jacqi Penne lives in Sioux City, but attends Presbyterian United Church of Christ about 25 miles away in her hometown of Le Mars, in the heart of Iowa's "Bible belt" in the western part of the state. She said she will be a first-time caucus voter specifically because of Trump.

"The minute I found out he was running, I flipped out," she said. "My husband and I have loved him forever, and had said for several years that we thought he would make a great president if he ever decided to run."

She said her top issues are:

- securing the borders and dealing with illegal immigration,
- dealing with ISIS and Christian persecution and
- breaking the corruption in Washington, D.C.

Penne said she's put up yard signs—attaching several to her fence when some of those placed in her yard were stolen—and her family wears Trump T-shirts and his signature "Make America Great Again" hats. Her 9-year-old daughter has picked up her enthusiasm, and she recently "converted" a few of her less-enthusiastic neighbors during a rally in Sioux City.

Penne declares Trump is "God's trumpet."

"He's pointing out the corruption that exists in our political system," she said. "He speaks the truth, and sometimes the truth hurts. I agree with him about what the problems are, and when they try to prove him wrong, he's always proven right."

Early admits he has concerns about Trump's moral failings, and isn't convinced he's a Christian. He said he does have concerns but isn't going to the caucus to vote for the next pastor of the United States. He said that out of all the candidates, in both parties, Trump has the knowledge and ability to get the deal done.

"We, as a nation, need someone who can reverse the train wreck that our economy has become," he said. "We need someone who can get a handle on the immigration issue, which directly impacts our economy and national security. We need someone who will honor our veterans and re-establish our national defense."

Moorman said that when he's addressing Christians who have concerns about Trump's morals, he asks them to explain what those issues are. He said he doesn't personally see any issues, and refuses to question another man's walk with God.

"I admit he rarely attends church or uses religion on the campaign trail to pander to a demographic for votes," he said. "He is who he is and voters find that refreshing."

Moorman noted that while Trump is on his third marriage, he has accepted responsibility for his personal failings. Moorman also noted the candidate has a strong relationship with his current wife. He also pointed out Trump's five children—particularly his four adult children—all exhibit strong morals.

"I believe he is a very moral person and values his family and yes his third," Moorman said. "He does not feel comfortable discussing his religion, especially in public. I think that is true for many Americans. What I needed to know about Trump as a Christian is the following: Does he believe in Jesus Christ and accept Him as his Lord and Savior? Will he promote and protect religious freedoms for all Americans? Beyond that, his walk with God is between him and God, and no man should judge him."

Earll said Christians should take a different tack with Trump: pray.

"Pray for him, and pray for our nation," he said. "I am also encouraged by the rumor that Trump would pick Cruz as his vice president. He's a solid, legit evangelical Christian."

In the unlikely event that Trump drops out before the Iowa Republican Caucus to be held in two months' time on Feb. 1, Earll said he would go back to his original expectation and vote for Cruz. Moorman said he would have a more difficult time deciding, since his original second choice, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, dropped out last month.

"I have been evaluating all the candidates and can't say I have a second choice," he said. "I went to the election seeking a candidate who has strong experience as a governor or business person and who is a leader who can unite all Americans and can make positive changes."