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‘Kill People and Break Things’: The Very Best of the First GOP Presidential Debate

Here’s the best the GOP had to offer on national security, reproductive rights, economics, race and immigration.

By Miranda Katz, Jailyn Gladney , Asha Thanki and Stephen Quillen



Donald Trump speaks as Jeb Bush listens during the first Republican presidential debate on Thursday, Aug. 6, 2015.

The first official Republican debate was, at least, good television, chock full of shouting matches, bald-faced lies, and ad hominem attacks. Spanning two hours, it addressed everything from national security to reproductive rights and economics (with a fifteen-second token

question on race in America). Below, a roundup of the most outrageous, inaccurate, and simply hilarious statements from the ten candidates, by topic.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Ranging from Donald Trump's pledge to "bomb the hell out" of Iraqi oil fields, to Scott Walker's (more tempered) promise to fight ISIS like he fought 100,000 pro-worker activists, the flock of Republican presidential hopefuls have, over the months, discovered surprisingly inventive ways to direct their national security ideals. There was some hope that Rand Paul, who has occasionally expressed sensible views on civil liberties and national security, might challenge the GOP consensus, but as John Nichols points out, "when it counts," Paul has proven to be far from the rogue libertarian people think he is.

Last night's much anticipated Republican debate—which quickly devolved into excruciating levels of paranoia and xenophobia—did not lack the ferocity we've come to expect from the Grand Old Party. There were snide remarks from Donald Trump, petty insults between candidates, and (per usual) tacit calls for waterboarding, torture, and aggression. There was even an amusing mid-debate spat between Gov. Chris Christie and Sen. Rand Paul ("I think you fundamentally misunderstand the bill of rights"), Paul told Christie. More cringe-worthy moments below:

1. "The military is not a social experiment. The purpose of the military is to kill people and break things," Mike Huckabee on transgender rights and the military.
2. "The thing that is probably most important is having a brain." —Dr. Ben Carson on whether his foreign policy blunders indicate he's not ready to be president.
3. "What we do in order to get the information that we need is our business." —Dr. Ben Carson on whether he would bring back waterboarding.
4. "We will not defeat radical Islamic terrorism so long as we have a president unwilling to utter the words: 'Radical. Islamic. Terrorism.'" —Ted Cruz on his approach to defeating ISIS.
5. "To honor the people that died [in Iraq], we need to—we need to—stop the—Iran agreement, for sure, because the Iranian mullahs have their blood on their hands..." —Jeb Bush
6. "When someone points a gun at your head and loads it, by God, you ought to take that seriously." —Mike Huckabee on the Iran deal
7. "You probe with bayonets. When you find mush, you push," Scott Walker on how to deal with Putin's aggression.
8. "When you have people that are cutting Christians' heads off... when you have places on the border [that are like medieval times], we don't have time for tone." —Donald Trump on his divisive rhetoric.
9. "Yes, I do." —Chris Christie on whether he believes Rand Paul could really be blamed in the event of a terrorist attack.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

When Chris Christie shared a tad too much about his sex life earlier this week (he’s used birth control—“and not just the rhythm method, okay?”), he planted some false hope that in their first debate, the GOP candidates would dare to veer, even slightly, from their ever-more conservative party line on reproductive rights. Alas, the remarks from the ten wombless men were pretty much par for the course. It was as apparent as ever that the candidates are uniformly and staunchly anti-choice (Jeb Bush appears a relative moderate—for his belief that abortion should be legal only in cases of rape, incest, or the threat to a woman’s life).

This past month has been a feeding frenzy for anti-choice hysteria, following the release of several secretly recorded, deliberately edited, and ultimately unrevealing videos by the highly suspect “Center for Medical Progress” that claimed to expose Planned Parenthood for selling fetal body parts and advocated defunding the organization. Planned Parenthood was doing no such thing; furthermore, thanks to the decades-old Hyde Amendment, government funds can’t go toward abortion, so defunding Planned Parenthood would only serve to take away millions of women’s access to birth control, STI and cervical cancer screening, and health counseling. Yet the Republican Senate, led by many of the party’s presidential candidates, managed to set aside all logic and empathy in an attempt to pass a bill defunding Planned Parenthood. The bill failed on Monday, but that did not deter the candidates from sharing their spectacularly misguided opinions during Thursday’s debate. Below, their choicest remarks on women and reproductive rights:

1. “Only Rosie O’Donnell.” —Donald Trump on when it’s acceptable to call women trumps, slobs, and disgusting animals
2. “Honestly Megyn, if you don’t like it, I’m sorry. I’ve been very nice to you, although I could probably maybe not be, based on the way you have treated me.” —Donald Trump showing his respect to his host
3. “Hillary Clinton...has a radical position in terms of support for Planned Parenthood.” —Scott Walker
4. “I’ve got a position that’s in line with everyday America.” —Scott Walker on his support for a total ban on abortions, including cases that threaten the mother’s life
5. “We clearly know that that baby inside the mother’s womb is a person at the moment of conception.” —Mike Huckabee
6. “It’s time that we...protect children instead of rip up their body parts and sell them like they’re parts to a Buick..” —Mike Huckabee
7. “I created a culture of life in our state.... We were the first state to do a Choose Life license plate.” —Jeb Bush
8. “I am pro life, and if you look at the question, I was in business, they asked me a question as to pro life or choice, and I said, if you let it run, that I hate the concept of abortion, I hate the concept of abortion, and then since then I’ve very much evolved, and what happened is friends of mine years ago were going to have a child and it was going to be aborted and it wasn’t aborted and that child today is a total superstar, a great great child, and I saw that, and I saw other instances, and I am very proud to say that I am pro life.” —Trump, syntax king of the debate
9. “The [second] thing I intend to do is instruct the Department of Justice to open an investigation into these videos and prosecute Planned Parenthood.” —Ted Cruz, on his priorities upon taking office

ECONOMICS

At the adults' table, economics barely made it onto the menu.

We knew a bit about where the candidates stood before this debate. Senator Marco Rubio had presented a tax reform plan that cuts, as *The Nation* noted, “almost every tax paid by the wealthy: on capital gains, on dividends, on carried interest and estate taxes.” Chris Christie has declared himself tired of hearing about raising the minimum wage, and Scott Walker agreed that wage hikes were lame. Jeb Bush's policy positions—phasing out Medicare and repealing the Affordable Care Act—were criticized by Hillary Clinton at last week's National Urban League conference. And businessman Donald Trump hadn't offered any coherent policy plans beyond threats of new tariffs.

The Nation suggested some questions the candidates should field on poverty—a topic area that, from 2008 to 2012, went totally ignored through at least five consecutive presidential or vice presidential debates. But the massive inequality plaguing this country was basically a ghost during this debate, too.

Here are some of the highlights of the “economics” portion of the debate:

1. “They called me Veto Corleone, because I vetoed 2,500 line-items in the budget.” —Jeb Bush
2. “If you think it's bad now, you should've seen it when I got there.” —Chris Christie in response to the economic mess within New Jersey.
3. “Everybody has a right to their God-given purpose.” —John Kasich, on expanding Medicaid and aiding the working poor
4. “News flash: The Republican Party has been fighting against the single-payer system for a decade” —Ted Cruz to Donald Trump, in an attempt to insinuate that Trump is too liberal for the GOP
5. “We need a significantly changed taxation system. The one that I've advocated is based on tithing because I think God's a pretty fair guy.” —Ben Carson, on his proposed proportional tax
6. “Economic growth is the key to everything.... Lift everybody, unite everybody, and build a strong United States again.” —John Kasich
7. “I think we need to lift our spirits and have high lofty expectations.” —Jeb Bush, in response to “how on earth, *specifically*” he would pull off a 4% economic growth rate
8. “Whose fault is it that the system is screwed up?... It's always that the government figures they can do this off the backs of people, many of whom are poor.” —Mike Huckabee
9. “The lying and stealing has already occurred. The trust fund is filled with IOUs.” —Chris Christie
10. “I said, be at my wedding and she [Hillary Clinton] came to my wedding. She had no choice because I gave.” —Trump, on his reward for donations to the Clinton Foundation
11. “The donor class feeds the political class, that does the dance the donor class wants.” —Mike Huckabee, on Wall Street's influence in Washington
12. “I have never gone bankrupt, by the way.” —Donald Trump
13. “These are not the nice sweet little people that you think.” —Trump on lenders when confronted with the fact that Trump Resorts had gone bankrupt

RACE AND IMMIGRATION

As predicted, Republican candidates obstinately avoided engaging race. In last night's debate, moderators raised one question about police brutality, which Scott Walker barely answered

before cutting straight to a commercial. Towards the end, Ben Carson was asked how he might begin to heal America's racial divides and responded right along the same party line. Outside of these two questions, the closest Republicans got to talking about race was through the lens of immigration.

For the most part, we knew where the candidates stood on the topic of immigration before they stepped on stage. Last night, their responses fell right in line with our expectations: There was the usual false assertion that all immigrants are Mexican, calls for an impenetrable wall along the US-Mexico border and several references to Donald Trump's racist characterization of immigrants. However, more than anything, the candidates relied heavily upon hyperbole to galvanize their increasingly paranoid and xenophobic base:

1. "Money's going out and the drugs are coming in." —Trump
2. "And I don't mind having a big beautiful door in that wall so that people can come into this country legally. But we need, Jeb, to build a wall, we need to keep illegals out." —Trump
3. "We need to control our border. It is our responsibility to pick and choose who comes in." —Jeb Bush on securing the US-Mexico border
4. "I also believe we need a fence. The problem is if El Chapo builds a tunnel under the fence, we have to be able to deal with that too." —Marco Rubio on illegal immigration
5. "There are far too many [politicians] in the Washington Cartel that support amnesty." —Ted Cruz on political leaders in Washington
6. "We are the United States of America, not the divided states of America." —Ben Carson on the racial divide in America
7. "The fair tax transforms the process by which we fund social security and medicare because the money paid at consumption is paid by everybody—including illegals, prostitutes, pimps, drug dealers, all the people who are freeloading off the system." —Mike Huckabee on restructuring Social Security and Medicare