

Donald Trump sticks to his guns on barring Muslims from entering the US

15/01/2016 19:48 by admin

Washington: Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump stuck to his guns over his controversial proposal to temporarily ban Muslims from entering the US as seven top candidates sparred two weeks before the first nominating contests in Iowa.

The real estate mogul's proposal in the wake of Paris and St. Bernardino terrorist attacks by a Pakistani origin couple has created a firestorm with more than 10 million people talking about the issue, according to Facebook.

Asked in the sixth Republican presidential debate in Charleston, South Carolina Thursday night, if there was anything he had heard that made him want to rethink his position, Trump responded with a flat 'No'.

"We have to stop with political correctness," he said, insisting he would not change his mind on the issue.

Former Florida governor Jeb Bush, son of a former president and brother of another, repeatedly called on Trump to "reconsider," warning that the idea makes it "impossible" to build a coalition with other Arab countries necessary to defeat ISIS.

"All Muslims? Seriously? What kind of signal does that send to the rest of the world?" said Bush who had earlier suggested that Trump was "unhinged" in making such a proposal.

Reminded by a host on the Fox Business Network debate that Trump's poll numbers had gone up by 11 points since he made that proposal and asked whether he considered Trump's supporters also 'unhinged', Bush responded with a sheepish 'no'.

Trump was also asked about South Carolina's Indian-American Governor Nikki Haley acknowledging that she was referring to him when in her response to the State of the Union address she asked Republicans to resist "the siren call of the angriest voices."

"Okay. First of all, Nikki this afternoon said I'm a friend of hers," Trump said. "Actually a close friend. And wherever you are sitting Nikki, I'm a friend. We're friends. That's good."

"But she did say there was anger. And I could say, oh, I'm not angry. I'm very angry because our country is being run horribly and I will gladly accept the mantle of anger. Our military is a disaster."

Others, including Ohio governor John Kasich and New Jersey governor Chris Christie said they were on board with at least temporarily not allowing Syrian refugees into the country in light of the growing threat of ISIS.

"I've said from the beginning, we should take no Syrian refugees of any kind," Christie said.

And coming on the heels of Obama's new executive actions on gun control, several candidates offered impassioned defences of Second Amendment rights to bear arms.

"The guns don't pull the trigger. It's the people that pull the trigger," said Trump.

"I am convinced that if this president could confiscate every gun in America, he would," said senator Marco Rubio.

"That's not a democracy, that's a dictatorship," added Christie.

Trump and Senator Ted Cruz also clashed over Trump's accusations that he's not eligible to be president because he was born in Canada.

He termed Cruz' accusation that the businessman "embodies New York values" - people with "socially liberal" views revolving around "money and media" - as "very insulting."

The candidates also took plenty of shots at Obama. Cruz criticized Obama for not mentioning in his speech the 10 US sailors who were captured by Iran earlier this week.

Bush, meanwhile, said the idea that the country is better off today than before Obama took office is an "alternative universe." And Rubio blasted Obama for presiding over an "arrogant" foreign policy.

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