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The Fix

5th Republican debate transcript, annotated: Who said what and what it meant

By Team Fix December 15 at 11:33 PM

Nine Republican candidates participated in Tuesday's 2016 presidential debate in Las Vegas: Donald Trump, Ben Carson, Sen. Marco Rubio (Fla.), former Florida governor Jeb Bush, former tech executive Carly Fiorina, Sen. Ted Cruz (Tex.), Ohio Gov. John Kasich, New Jersey governor Chris Christie, and Sen. Rand Paul (Ky.).

The complete transcript of the debate is below. Washington Post reporters and readers using Genius have annotated it, and will continue to do so following the debate.

To see an annotation, click or tap the highlighted part of the transcript; if you would like to leave your own annotations, make sure you have a [Genius account](#). Post staff annotations will appear by default; others are in a menu that you can see in the upper right when you click or tap on an annotation.

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The debate began with CNN's Wolf Blitzer introducing each candidate and explaining the rules.

BLITZER: These nine Republicans are positioned on stage based on their ranking in the recent polls, so let's begin right now. I'd like to invite each candidate to introduce himself or herself to our audience. You'll have one minute.

First to you, Senator Paul.

PAUL: The question is, how do we keep America safe from terrorism? Trump says we ought to close that Internet thing. The question really is, what does he mean by that? Like they do in North Korea? Like they do in China?

Rubio says we should collect all Americans' records all of the time. The Constitution says otherwise. I think they're both wrong. I think we defeat terrorism by showing them that we do not fear them. I think if we ban certain religions, if we censor the Internet, I think that at that point the terrorists will have won. Regime change hasn't won. Toppling secular dictators in the Middle East has only led to chaos and the rise of radical Islam. I think if we want to defeat terrorism, I think if we truly are sincere about defeating terrorism, we need to quit arming the allies of ISIS. If we want to defeat terrorism, the boots on the ground -- the boots on the ground need to be Arab boots on the ground.

America stands for. Today is the Bill of Rights' anniversary. I hope we will remember that and cherish that in the fight on terrorism.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

(APPLAUSE)

Governor Kasich?

KASICH: Thank you, Wolf. Just last weekend, just last week, a friend asked one of my daughters, "Do you like politics?" And my daughter said, "No, I don't. And the reason I don't like it is because there's too much fighting, too much yelling. It's so loud, I don't like it." You know, I turned to my friend and I said, "You know, she's really on to something."

And when we think about our country and the big issues that we face in this country; creating jobs, making sure people can keep their jobs, the need for rising wages, whether our children when they graduate from college can find a job, protecting the homeland, destroying ISIS, rebuilding defense. These are all the things that we need to focus on but we'll never get there if we're divided. We'll never get there if republicans and democrats just fight with one another.

Frankly, we are republicans and they're democrats but before all of that, we're Americans. And I believe we need to unify in so many ways to rebuild our country, to strengthen our country, to rebuild our defense, and for America to secure its place in the world; for us, for our children, and for the next generation.

Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Governor Christie?

CHRISTIE: Thank you Wolf.

America has been betrayed. We've been betrayed by the leadership that Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton have provided to this country over the last number of years. Think about just what's happened today. The second largest school district in America in Los Angeles closed based on a threat. Think about the effect that, that's going to have on those children when they go back to school tomorrow wondering filled with anxiety to whether they're really going to be safe.

Think about the mothers who will take those children tomorrow morning to the bus stop wondering whether their children will arrive back on that bus safe and sound. Think about the fathers of Los Angeles, who tomorrow will head off to work and wonder about the safety of their wives and their children.

to protect the safety and security of the American people. I will tell you this, I'm a former federal prosecutor, I've fought terrorists and won and when we get back in the White House we will fight terrorists and win again and America will be safe.

(APPLAUSE) BLITZER: Ms. Fiorina?

FIORINA: Like all of you I'm angry. I'm angry at what's happening to our nation. Citizens, it's time to take our country back.

Bombastic insults won't take it back. Political rhetoric that promises a lot and delivers little, won't take it back. All of our problems can be solved. All of our wounds can be healed by a tested leader who is willing to fight for the character of our nation.

I have been tested. I have beaten breast cancer. I have buried a child. I started as a secretary. I fought my way to the top of corporate America while being called every B word in the book. I fought my way into this election and on to this debate stage while all the political insiders and the pundits told, "it couldn't be done."

I've been told, "no,": all my life. And all my life, I've refused to accept no as an answer. Citizens, it is time to take our country back from the political class, from the media, from the liberal elite. It can be done, it must be done, join me and we will get it done.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Governor Bush?

BUSH: Our freedom is under attack. Our economy is under water. The leading democrat is under investigation. And America is under the gun to lead the free world to protect our civilized way of life.

Serious times require strong leadership, that's what at stake right now. Regarding national security, we need to restore the defense cuts of Barack Obama to rebuild our military, to destroy ISIS before it destroys us. Regarding economic security, we need to take power and money away from Washington D.C. and empower American families so that they can rise up again.

Look, America still is an exceptional country. We love to lead and we love to win. And we do it, when we take on any challenge and when we take - we support our friends.

As president, I will keep you and our country safe, secure, and free.

Thank you.

BLITZER: Senator Rubio?

RUBIO: Thank you Wolf.

It's really amazing to be back in Las Vegas. I spent six years as a child growing not far from where we stand tonight. I use to sit on the porch of our home and listen to my grandfather tell stories as he smoked one of three daily cigars.

One of the things my grandfather instilled in me, was that I was really blessed because I was a citizen of the greatest country in the history of our mankind. But there have always been people in American politics that wanted America to be more like the rest of the world. And In 2008, one of them was elected president of this country and the result has been a disaster.

Today you have millions of Americans that feel left out and out of place in their own country, struggling to live paycheck to paycheck, called bigots because they hold on to traditional values.

And around the world, America's influence has declined while this president has destroyed our military, our allies no longer trust us, and our adversaries no longer respect us. And that is why this election is so important.

That is why I'm running for president. And that's why I'm going to ask you for your vote tonight. If you elect me president, we will have a president that believes America is the greatest country in the world and we will have a president that acts like it.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Senator Cruz.

CRUZ: Thank you, Wolf.

America is at war. Our enemy is not violent extremism. It is not some unnamed malevolent force. It is radical Islamic terrorist. We have a president who is unwilling to utter its name. The men and women on this stage, every one of us, is better prepared to keep this nation safe than is Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton.

We need a president who understands the first obligation of the commander-in-chief is to keep America safe. If I am elected president, we will hunt down and kill the terrorists. We will utterly destroy ISIS.

We will stop the terrorist attacks before they occur because we will not be prisoners to political correctness. Rather, we will speak the truth. Border security is national security and we will not be admitting jihadists as refugees.

We will keep America safe.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Dr. Carson.

CARSON: Thank you, Wolf.

Please join me for a moment of silence and remembrance of the San Bernardino victims. Thank you. You know, our country since its inception has been at war, every 15 or 20 years. But the war that we are fighting now against radical Islamist jihadists is one that we must win. Our very existence is dependent upon that.

You know, as a pediatric neurosurgeon, I frequently faced life and death situations, and had to come up with the right diagnosis, the right plan, and execute that plan frequently with other colleagues.

Right now, the United States of America is the patient. And the patient is in critical condition and will not be cured by political correctness and will not be cured by timidity.

And I am asking the Congress, which represents the people, to declare a war on ISIS so that we can begin the process of excising that cancer and begin the healing process, and bring peace, prosperity, and safety back to America.

(APPLAUSE)

TRUMP: Thank you.

I began this journey six months ago. My total focus was on building up our military, building up our strength, building up our borders, making sure that China, Japan, Mexico, both at the border and in trade, no longer takes advantage of our country.

Certainly would never have made that horrible, disgusting, absolutely incompetent deal with Iran where they get \$150 billion. They're a terrorist nation. But I began it talking about other things.

And those things are things that I'm very good at and maybe that's why I'm center stage. People saw it. People liked it. People respected it.

A month ago things changed. Radical Islamic terrorism came into effect even more so than it has been in the past. People like what I say. People respect what I say. And we've opened up a very big discussion that needed to be opened up.

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you.

Since you last debated, Americans have witnessed terror attacks in Paris and San Bernardino. The FBI director says the country now faces the greatest terror threat since 9/11. You all have different approaches to keeping the country safe. And that will be the focus of tonight's debate.

BLITZER: Mr. Trump, as you mentioned in your opening statement, part of your strategy is to focus in on America's borders. To keep the country safe, you say you want to temporarily ban non-American Muslims from coming to the United States; ban refugees fleeing ISIS from coming here; deport 11 million people; and wall off America's southern border. Is the best way to make America great again to isolate it from much of the rest of the world?

TRUMP: We are not talking about isolation. We're talking about security. We're not talking about religion. We're talking about security. Our country is out of control. People are pouring across the southern border. I will build a wall. It will be a great wall. People will not come in unless they come in legally. Drugs will not pour through that wall.

As far as other people like in the migration, where they're going, tens of thousands of people having cell phones with ISIS flags on them? I don't think so, Wolf. They're not coming to this country. And if I'm president and if Obama has brought some to this country, they are leaving. They're going. They're gone.

BLITZER: Governor Bush, you called Mr. Trump "unhinged" when he proposed banning non-American Muslims from the United States. Why is that unhinged?

BUSH: Well, first of all, we need to destroy ISIS in the caliphate. That's -- that should be our objective. The refugee issue will be solved if we destroy ISIS there, which means we need to have a no-fly zone, safe zones there for refugees and to build a military force.

We need to embed our forces -- our troops inside the Iraqi military. We need to arm directly the Kurds. And all of that has to be done in concert with the Arab nations. And if we're going to ban all Muslims, how are we going to get them to be part of a coalition to destroy ISIS?

The Kurds are the greatest fighting force and our strongest allies. They're Muslim. Look, this is not a serious proposal. In fact, it will push the Muslim world, the Arab world away from us at a time when we need to reengage with them to be able to create a strategy to destroy ISIS.

So Donald, you know, is great at -- at the one-liners, but he's a chaos candidate. And he'd be a chaos president. He would not be the commander in chief we need to keep our country safe.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Mr. Trump?

TRUMP: Jeb doesn't really believe I'm unhinged. He said that very simply because he has failed in this campaign. It's been a total disaster. Nobody cares. And frankly, I'm the most solid person up here. I built a tremendous company and all I want to do is make America great again.

I don't want our country to be taken away from us, and that's what's happening. The policies that we've suffered under other presidents have been a disaster for our country. We want to make America great again. And Jeb, in all fairness, he doesn't believe that.

BUSH: Look, he mentioned me. I can bring -- I can talk. This is -- this is the problem. Banning all Muslims will make it harder for us to do exactly what we need to do, which is to destroy ISIS. We need a strategy. We need to get the lawyers off the back of the warfighters. Right now under President Obama, we've created this -- this standard that is so high that it's impossible to be successful in fighting ISIS.

We need to engage with the Arab world to make this happen. It is not a serious proposal to say that -- to the people that you're asking for their support that they can't even come to the country to even engage in a dialogue with us. That's not a serious proposal. We need a serious leader to deal with this. And I believe I'm that guy.

BLITZER: Senator Rubio -- I'm going to go to Senator Rubio and get his thoughts.

You have said banning Muslims is unconstitutional. But according to a recent ABC News-Washington Post poll, a majority of Republicans support Mr. Trump's idea. Why are they wrong?

RUBIO: Well, I understand why they feel that way, because this president hasn't kept us safe. The problem is we had an attack in San Bernardino. And we were paying attention to the most important issue we have faced in a decade since 9/11, and then all the talk was about this proposal, which isn't going to happen.

But this is what's important to do is we must deal frontally with this threat of radical Islamists, especially from ISIS. This is the most sophisticated terror group that has ever threatened the world or the United States of America. They are actively recruiting Americans. The attacker in San Bernardino was an American citizen, born and raised in this country. He was a health inspector; had a newborn child and left all that behind to kill 14 people.

We also understand that this is a group that's growing in its governance of territory. It's not just Iraq and Syria. They are now a predominant group in Libya. They are beginning to pop up in Afghanistan. They are increasingly involved now in attacks in Yemen. They have Jordan in their sights.

This group needs to be confronted with serious proposals. And this is a very significant threat we face. And the president has left us unsafe. He spoke the other night to the American people to reassure us. I wish he hadn't spoken at all. He made things worse. Because what he basically said was we are going to keep doing what we're doing now, and what we are doing now is not working.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Hugh Hewitt, you have a question.

HEWITT: Senator Cruz, you've said you disagree with Mr. Trump's policy. I don't want a cage match; you've tweeted you don't want a cage match. But Republican primary voters deserve to know, with the kind of specificity and responsiveness you delivered in your nine Supreme Court arguments, how you disagree with Mr. Trump. Would you spell that out with us?

CRUZ: Well, listen, Hugh, everyone understands why Donald has suggested what he has. We're looking at a president who's engaged in this double-speak where he doesn't call radical Islamic terrorism by its name. Indeed, he gives a speech after the San Bernardino attack where his approach is to try to go after the constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens rather than to keep us safe.

And even worse, President Obama and Hillary Clinton are proposing bringing tens of thousands of Syrian refugees to this country when the head of the FBI has told Congress they cannot vet those refugees.

at the actual threat, which is radical Islamic terrorism, and what my legislation would do is suspend all refugees for three years from countries where ISIS or Al Qaida control substantial territory.

HEWITT: So you're saying you disagree because he's too broad and you have a narrower focus? Why do you disagree with him?

CRUZ: Well, you know, I'm reminded of what FDR's grandfather said. He said, "All horse-thieves are Democrats, but not all Democrats are horse-thieves."

(LAUGHTER)

In this instance, there are millions of peaceful Muslims across the world, in countries like India, where there is not the problems we are seeing in nations that are controlled -- have territory controlled by Al Qaida or ISIS, and we should direct at the problem, focus on the problem, and defeat radical Islamic terrorism. It's not a war on a faith; it's a war on a political and theocratic ideology that seeks to murder us.

HEWITT: Carly Fiorina... (APPLAUSE)

... this is the Christmas dinner debate. This will be the debate that Americans talk about at Christmas. And thus far, in the first 10 minutes, we haven't heard a lot about Ronald Reagan's city on a hill. We've heard a lot about keeping Americans out or keeping Americans safe and everyone else out. Is this what you want the party to stand for?

FIORINA: What I think we need to stand for are solutions. I offer myself as a leader to the people of this country because I think they're looking for solutions, not lawyers arguing over laws or entertainers throwing out sound bites that draw media attention. We need to solve the problem.

To solve the problem, we need to do something here at home and something over there in their caliphate. We need to deny them territory.

But here at home, we need to do two fundamental things. Number one, we need to recognize that technology has moved on. The Patriot Act was signed in 2001, roughly. The iPhone was invented in 2007. The iPad was invented in 2011. Snapchat and Twitter, all the rest of it, have been around just for several years. Technology has moved on, and the terrorists have moved on with it.

Let me tell you a story. Soon after 9/11, I got a phone call from the NSA. They needed help. I gave them help. I stopped a truckload of equipment. I had it turned around. It was escorted by the NSA into headquarters. We need the private sector's help, because government is not innovating. Technology is running ahead by leaps and bound. The private sector will help, just as I helped after 9/11. But they must be engaged, and they must be asked. I will ask them. I know them.

BLITZER: Governor Christie, Americans are clearly more afraid today than at any time since 9/11. As you mentioned in your opening statement, today in Los Angeles, 650 schoolchildren didn't go to -- 650,000 schoolchildren didn't go to school because of an e-mail threat, this two weeks after an attack killed 14 people in San Bernardino. Is this the new normal? And if so, what steps would you take as president of the United States to ensure that fear does not paralyze America?

CHRISTIE: Wolf, unfortunately, it's the new normal under Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. The fact is that if you listen to Hillary Clinton the other day, what she said to the American people was, as regards to ISIS, my strategy would be just about the same as the president's.

Just about the same as the president's? We have people across this country who are scared to death. Because I could tell you this, as a former federal prosecutor, if a center for the developmentally disabled in San Bernardino, California, is now a target for terrorists, that means everywhere in America is a target for these terrorists.

Now, I spent seven years of my life in the immediate aftermath of September 11th doing this work, working with the Patriot Act, working with our law enforcement, working with the surveillance community to make sure that we keep America safe.

What we need to do, Wolf, is restore those tools that have been taken away by the president and others, restore those tools to the NSA and to our entire surveillance and law enforcement community.

We need a president who is going to understand what actionable intelligence looks like and act on it. And we need a president and a cabinet who understands that the first and most important priority of the president of the United States is to protect the safety and security of Americans.

As someone who has done it, I will make sure it gets done again.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you.

Governor Kasich, one of the killers in San Bernardino was an American who was not on anyone's watch list. How are you going to find that radicalized person and stop another such attack?

KASICH: Well, first of all, Wolf, I said last February that we needed to have people on the ground, troops on the ground in a coalition similar to what we had in the first Gulf War.

I remember when the Egyptian ambassador to the United States stood in the Rose Garden and pledged Arab commitment to removing Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. Before we came out here tonight, I am told that the Saudis have organized 34 countries who want to join in the battle against terrorism.

First and foremost, we need to go and destroy ISIS. And we need to do this with our Arab friends and our friends in Europe.

And when I see they have a climate conference over in Paris, they should have been talking about destroying ISIS because they are involved in virtually every country, you know, across this world.

(APPLAUSE)

Now, you destroy ISIS in a coalition. You get joint intelligence with our European friends. And then here at home, there are things called the Joint Terrorism Task Force, headed by the FBI, and made up of local law enforcement, including state police.

They need the tools. And the tools involve encryption where we cannot hear what they're even planning. And when we see red flags, a father, a mother, a neighbor who says we have got a problem here, then we have to give law enforcement the ability to listen so they can disrupt these terrorist attacks before they occur.

We can do this, but we've got to get moving. Pay me now or pay me a lot more later. This is the direction we need to go.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you.

Dana Bash, you have the next question.

BASH: A crucial question is how to balance surveillance with privacy and keeping Americans safe.

Senator Cruz, you voted for a bill that President Obama signed into law just this past June that made it harder for the government to access Americans' phone records. In light of the San Bernardino attack, was your vote a mistake?

CRUZ: Well, Dana, the premise of your question is not accurate. I'm very proud to have joined with conservatives in both the Senate and the House to reform how we target bad guys.

And what the USA Freedom Act did is it did two things. Number one, it ended the federal government's bulk collection of phone metadata of millions of law-abiding citizens.

But number two in the second half of it that is critical. It strengthened the tools of national security and law enforcement to go after terrorists. It gave us greater tools and we are seeing those tools work right now in San Bernardino.

And in particular, what it did is the prior program only covered a relatively narrow slice of phone calls. When you had a terrorist, you could only search a relatively narrow slice of numbers, primarily land lines.

The USA Freedom Act expands that so now we have cell phones, now we have Internet phones, now we have the phones

that terrorists are likely to use and the focus of law enforcement is on targeting the bad guys.

You know what the Obama administration keeps getting wrong is whenever anything bad happens they focus on law-abiding citizens instead of focusing on the bad guys.

We need to focus on radical Islamic terrorists and we need to stop them before they carry out acts of terror.

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Thank you.

Senator Rubio, Senator Cruz is right there was bipartisan support for that. But you voted against it. So, is Senator Cruz wrong?

RUBIO: He is and so are those that voted for it. There were some that voted for it because they wanted to keep it alive and they were afraid the whole program would expire.

Here's the world we live in. This is a radical jihadist group that is increasingly sophisticated in its ability, for example, to radicalize American citizens, in its inability to exploit loopholes in our legal immigration system, in its ability to capture and hold territory in the Middle East, as I outlined earlier, in multiple countries.

This is not just the most capable, it is the most sophisticated terror threat we have ever faced. We are now at a time when we need more tools, not less tools. And that tool we lost, the metadata program, was a valuable tool that we no longer have at our disposal.

BASH: Senator Cruz?

CRUZ: Well, you know, I would note that Marco knows what he's saying isn't true. You know, Mark Levin wrote a column last week that says that the attack ads his Super PAC is running that are saying the same thing, that they are knowingly false and they are, in fact, Alinsky-like attacks like Barack Obama.

And the reason is simple. What he knows is that the old program covered 20 percent to 30 percent of phone numbers to search for terrorists. The new program covers nearly 100 percent. That gives us greater ability to stop acts of terrorism, and he knows that that's the case.

RUBIO: Dana, may I interject here?

BASH: Senator -- Senator -- Senator Rubio, please respond.

RUBIO: Let me be very careful when answering this, because I don't think national television in front of 15 million people is the place to discuss classified information. So let me just be very clear. There is nothing that we are allowed to do under this bill that we could not do before.

This bill did, however, take away a valuable tool that allowed the National Security Agency and other law -- and other intelligence agencies to quickly and rapidly access phone records and match them up with other phone records to see who terrorists have been calling. Because I promise you, the next time there is attack on -- an attack on this country, the first thing people are going to want to know is, why didn't we know about it and why didn't we stop it? And the answer better not be because we didn't have access to records or information that would have allowed us to identify these killers before they attacked.

(CROSSTALK)

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Senator Paul, Senator Paul, I know this is -- this has been a very big issue for you. You hear many of your colleagues are calling for increased surveillance by law enforcement. You call that hogwash. Why is that hogwash?

PAUL: You know, I think Marco gets it completely wrong. We are not any safer through the bulk collection of all Americans' records. In fact, I think we're less safe. We get so distracted by all of the information, we're not spending enough time getting specific immigration -- specific information on terrorists.

The other thing is, is the one thing that might have stopped San Bernardino, that might have stopped 9/11 would have been stricter controls on those who came here. And Marco has opposed at every point increased security -- border security for those who come to our country.

On his Gang of Eight bill, he would have liberalized immigration, but he did not -- and he steadfastly opposed any new border security requirements for refugees or students.

Last week, I introduced another bill saying we need more security, we need more scrutiny. Once again, Marco opposed this. So Marco can't have it both ways. He thinks he wants to be this, "Oh, I'm great and strong on national defense." But he's the weakest of all the candidates on immigration. He is the one for an open border that is leaving us defenseless. If we want to defend the country, we have to defend against who's coming in, and Marco is -- has more of an allegiance to Chuck Schumer and to the liberals than he does to conservative policy.

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Senator Rubio?

RUBIO: I want to thank Rand for another 30 seconds, because, number one, what he's pointing to is a bill last week that --

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amendment that he voted for that only 10 people voted for. You know why? Because it's not focused on terrorists. It would
have banned anyone from coming here. Someone from Taiwan would not have been able to come here as a tourist.

Number two, this program, this metadata program is actually more strict than what a regular law enforcement agency has now. If a regular law enforcement agency wants your phone records, all they have to do is issue a subpoena. But now the intelligence agency is not able to quickly gather records and look at them to see who these terrorists are calling. And the terrorists that attacked us in San Bernardino was an American citizen, born and raised in this country. And I bet you we wish we would have had access to five years of his records so we could see who he was working with...

(CROSSTALK)

BASH: Governor Christie, Governor Christie...

(CROSSTALK)

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Governor Christie, I'll come to you in a minute. Go ahead, Senator Paul.

PAUL: If I was mentioned in the question, can I respond? BASH: Go ahead, please.

PAUL: Marco still misunderstands the immigration issue. What I put forward was an amendment that would have temporarily halted immigration from high-risk terrorist countries, but would have started it up, but I wanted them to go through Global Entry, which is a program where we do background checks.

The thing is, is that every terrorist attack we've had since 9/11 has been legal immigration. Marco wants to expand that. I want more rules, more scrutiny, and to defend the country, you have to defend the border.

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Senator, we're going to talk about immigration in a while. But, Governor Christie, just listening to this...

RUBIO: Do I get another 30 seconds? He mentioned me.

BASH: Listening to this, you talked -- you heard Senator Paul, Senator Cruz talk about how important it is to protect Americans' privacy, even in a time of grave danger. Why -- what's wrong with that?

CHRISTIE: Listen, I want to talk to the audience at home for a second. If your eyes are glazing over like mine, this is what it's like to be on the floor of the United States Senate. I mean, endless debates about how many angels on the head of a pin from people who've never had to make a consequential decision in an executive position.

The fact is, for seven years, I had to make these decisions after 9/11, make a decision about how to proceed forward with an investigation or how to pull back, whether you use certain actionable intelligence or whether not to. And yet they continue to debate about this bill and in the subcommittee and what -- nobody in America cares about that.

CHRISTIE: What they care about is, are we going to have a president who actually knows what they're doing to make these decisions? And for the seven years afterwards, New Jersey was threatened like no other region in this country and what we did was we took action within the constitution to make sure that law enforcement had all the information they needed.

We prosecuted two of the biggest terrorism cases in the world and stopped Fort Dix from being attacked by six American radicalized Muslims from a Mosque in New Jersey because we worked with the Muslim American community to get intelligence and we used the Patriot Act to get other intelligence to make sure we did those cases. This is the difference between actually been a federal prosecutor, actually doing something, and not just spending your life as one of hundred debating it.

Let's talk about how we do this, not about which bill, which one these guys like more. The American people don't care about that.

BLITZER: Thank you.

Dr. Carson, you're in favor of monitoring mosques and schools where there is anti-America sentiment, what do you consider anti- America?

CARSON: First of all, let me just complain a little bit. This is the first time I've spoken and several people have had multiple questions so please try to pay attention to that. Now, as far as monitoring is concerned, what my point is, we need to make sure that any place - I don't care whether it's a mosque, a school, a supermarket, a theater, you know it doesn't matter. If there are a lot of people getting there and engaging in radicalizing activities then we need to be suspicious of it.

We have to get rid of all this PC stuff. And people are worried about if somebody's going to say that I'm Islamophobic or what have you. This is craziness because we are at war. That's why I asked congress, go ahead and declare the war .

We need to be on a war footing. We need to understand that our nation is in grave danger. You know, what the Muslim Brotherhood said in the explanatory memorandum that was discovered during the Holy Land Foundation Trial was that, "they will take advantage of our PC attitude to get us. :"

We have to be better than this. We have to be smarter than they are.

BLITZER: Dr. Carson, who was right in that little debate that we just heard between Senator Rubio and Senator Paul?

CARSON: I think you have to ask them about that. I don't want to get in between them. Let them fight.

BLITZER: Hold on a sec, we have a lot more to come and everybody's going to have their full opportunity.

Governor Bush, six days after 9/11 your brother visited a mosque and said quote, "Islam is peace." The conversation tonight is about banning Muslims and surveillance of mosques, are President Bush's words still relevant in today's Republican party?

BUSH: They are relevant if we want to destroy ISIS. If we want to destroy radical Islamic terrorism, we can't disassociate ourselves from peace loving Muslims. If we expect to do this on our own, we will fail but if we do it in unison with people who are also at risk and threatened by Islamic Radical terrorism, we'll be far more successful.

Look, the FBI has the tools necessary to uncover un-American activities in our country. It goes on, we shouldn't even be talking about it, to be honest with you out in the public. Of course they have those capabilities and we should make sure that we give the FBI, the NSA, our intelligence communities, all the resources they need to keep us safe.

But the main thing we should be focused on is the strategy to destroy ISIS. And I laid out a plan that the Reagan Library before the tragedy of Paris, and before San Bernardino to do just that. It requires leadership, it's not filing an amendment and call it a success.

It is developing a strategy, leading the world, funding it to make sure that we have a military that's second to none, and doing the job and making sure that we destroy ISIS there. That's how you keep America safe.

BLITZER: Ms. Fiorina, as you pointed out you were a CEO in Silicon Valley on 9/11. Companies there, they say they won't help the FBI now crack encrypted communication from ISIS, should they be forced to.

FIORINA: You know, listening to this conversation, let me just say, we have a lot of argument about laws but none of it solves the problem. Let's examine what happened, why did we miss the Tsarnaev brothers, why did we miss the San Bernardino couple? It wasn't because we had stopped collecting metadata it was because, I think, as someone who comes from the technology world, we were using the wrong algorithms.

This is a place where the private sector could be helpful because the government is woefully behind the technology curve. But secondly, the bureaucratic processes that have been in place since 9/11 are woefully inadequate as well. What do we now know? That DHS vets people by going into databases of known or suspected terrorists.

FIORINA: And yet, we also know that ISIS is recruiting who are not in those databases. So of course, we're going to miss them. And then we now learn that DHS says, "No, we can't check their social media."

For heaven's sakes, every parent in America is checking social media and every employer is as well, but our government can't do it. The bureaucratic procedures are so far behind. Our government has become incompetent, unresponsive, corrupt.

It is why we need a different kind of leadership in the White House that understands how to get bureaucracies competent again.

BLITZER: But my question was: Should these Silicon Valley companies be forced to cooperate with the FBI?

FIORINA: They do not need to be forced. They need to be asked to bring the best and brightest, the most recent technology to the table. I was asked as a CEO. I complied happily. And they will as well. But they have not been asked. That's why it cost billions of dollars to build an Obama website that failed because the private sector wasn't asked.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Mr. Trump, you recently suggested closing that Internet up, those were your words, as a way to stop ISIS from recruiting online. Are you referring to closing down actual portions of the Internet? Some say that would put the U.S. in line with China and North Korea.

TRUMP: Well, look, this is so easy to answer. ISIS is recruiting through the Internet. ISIS is using the Internet better than we are using the Internet, and it was our idea. What I wanted to do is I wanted to get our brilliant people from Silicon Valley and other places and figure out a way that ISIS cannot do what they're doing.

You talk freedom of speech. You talk freedom of anything you want. I don't want them using our Internet to take our young, impressionable youth and watching the media talking about how they're masterminds -- these are masterminds. They shouldn't be using the word "mastermind." These are thugs. These are terrible people in ISIS, not masterminds. And we have to change it from every standpoint. But we should be using our brilliant people, our most brilliant minds to figure a way that ISIS cannot use the Internet. And then on second, we should be able to penetrate the Internet and find out exactly where ISIS is and everything about ISIS. And we can do that if we use our good people.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Let me follow up, Mr. Trump.

So, are you open to closing parts of the Internet?

TRUMP: I would certainly be open to closing areas where we are at war with somebody. I sure as hell don't want to let people that want to kill us and kill our nation use our Internet. Yes, sir, I am.

BLITZER: Thank you.

Governor Kasich, is shutting down any part of the Internet a good idea?

KASICH: No, I don't think it is. And I want to go back to two other issues. One is the metadata. We know we have to hold

this data for a longer period of time. And, you know, in a lot of ways, Chris is right. Look, what a president has to do is take a position. We don't want to err on the side of having less. We want to err on the side of having more. That's good for our families.

In addition to that, Wolf, there is a big problem. It's called encryption. And the people in San Bernardino were communicating with people who the FBI had been watching. But because their phone was encrypted, because the intelligence officials could not see who they were talking to, it was lost.

We have to solve the encryption problem. It is not easy. A president of the United States, again, has to bring people together, have a position. We need to be able to penetrate these people when they are involved in these plots and these plans. And we have to give the local authorities the ability to penetrate to disrupt. That's what we need to do. Encryption is a major problem, and Congress has got to deal with this and so does the president to keep us safe.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you, Governor.

The fight against radical Islamic terrorists and ISIS has been called the war of our time. So let's talk about how each of you, as commander in chief, would fight this war and win it.

Senator Cruz, you have said you would, quote, "carpet bomb ISIS into oblivion," testing whether, quote, "sand can glow in the dark." Does that mean leveling the ISIS capital of Raqqa in Syria where there are hundreds of thousands of civilians?

CRUZ: What it means is using overwhelming air power to utterly and completely destroy ISIS. To put things in perspective, in the first Persian Gulf War, we launched roughly 1,100 air attacks a day. We carpet bombed them for 36 days, saturation bombing, after which our troops went in and in a day and a half mopped up what was left of the Iraqi army.

Right now, Obama is launching between 15 and 30 air attacks a day. It is photo op foreign policy. We need to use overwhelming air power. We need to be arming the Kurds. We need to be fighting and killing ISIS where they are.

And let me go back to the earlier discussion a minute ago. It's not a lack of competence that is preventing the Obama administration from stopping these attacks. It is political correctness. We didn't monitor the Facebook posting of the female San Bernardino terrorist because the Obama DHS thought it would be inappropriate. She made a public call to jihad, and they didn't target it.

The Tsarnaev brothers, the elder brother made a public call to jihad and the Obama administration didn't target it. Nidal Hasan communicated with Anwar al-Awlaki, a known radical cleric, asked about waging jihad against his fellow soldiers. The problem is because of political correctness, the Obama administration, like a lot of folks here, want to search everyone's cell phones and e-mails and not focus on the bad guys. And political correctness is killing people.

BLITZER: Thank you. To be clear, Senator Cruz, would you carpet bomb Raqqa, the ISIS capital, where there are a lot of civilians, yes or no?

CRUZ: You would carpet bomb where ISIS is, not a city, but the location of the troops. You use air power directed -- and you have embedded special forces to direction the air power. But the object isn't to level a city. The object is to kill the ISIS terrorists.

To make it -- listen, ISIS is gaining strength because the perception is that they're winning. And President Obama fuels that perception. That will change when militants across the globe see that when you join ISIS that you are giving up your life, you are signing your death warrant, and we need a president who is focused on defeating every single ISIS terrorist and protecting the homeland, which should be the first priority.

BLITZER: Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Rubio, you've been critical of Senator Cruz's strategy. You say his voting record doesn't match his rhetoric. Why?

RUBIO: Well, let me begin by saying that we have to understand who ISIS is. ISIS is a radical Sunni group. They cannot just be defeated through air strikes. Air strikes are a key component of defeating them, but they must be defeated on the ground by a ground force. And that ground force must be primarily made up of Sunni Arabs themselves, Sunni Arabs that reject them ideologically and confront them militarily.

We will have to embed additional American special operators alongside them to help them with training, to help them conduct special missions, and to help improve the air strikes. The air strikes are important, but we need to have an air force capable of it. And because of the budget cuts we are facing in this country, we are going to be left with the oldest and the smallest Air Force we have ever had. We have to reverse those cuts, in addition to the cuts to our Navy and in addition to the cuts to our Army, as well.

And beyond that, I would say we must win the information war against ISIS. Every war we have ever been involved in has had a propaganda informational aspect to it. ISIS is winning the propaganda war. They are recruiting people, including Americans, to join them, with the promise that they are joining this great apocalyptic movement that is going to defeat the West. We have to show what life is really like in ISIS territory, and we have to show them why ISIS is not invincible, by going out and conducting these attacks and publicizing them to those who they recruit.

BLITZER: Because I asked the question, Senator, because you said this. You said he, referring to Senator Cruz, voted against the Defense Authorization Act every year that it came up, and I assume that if he voted against it, he would veto it as president. That's the bill that funds our troops.

RUBIO: That is accurate. Three times he voted against the Defense Authorization Act, which is a bill that funds the troops. It also, by the way, funds the Iron Dome and other important programs. And I have to assume that if you vote against it in the Senate, you would also veto it as president.

5th Republican debate transcript, annotated: Who said what and ... <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/15/w...>
He has also supported, by the way, a budget that is called the containment budget. And it is a budget that would radically reduce the amount of money we spend on our military. You can't carpet bomb ISIS if you don't have planes and bombs to attack them with. And if we continue those cuts that we're doing now, not to mention additional cuts, we are going to be left with the oldest and the smallest Air Force this country has ever had, and that leaves us less safe.

BLITZER: Senator Cruz?

CRUZ: Well, you know, Marco has continued these attacks, and he knows they're not true. Yes, it is true that I voted against the National Defense Authorization Act, because when I campaigned in Texas I told voters in Texas that I would oppose the federal government having the authority to detain U.S. citizens permanently with no due process. I have repeatedly supported an effort to take that out of that bill, and I honored that campaign commitment.

CRUZ: But more broadly, you know, the notion Marco is suggesting, that somehow -- he also has tossed more than a few insults this direction -- let's be absolutely clear. ISIS and radical Islamic terrorism will face no more determined foe than I will be.

We will utterly destroy them by targeting the bad guys. And one of the problems with Marco's foreign policy is he has far too often supported Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama undermining governments in the Middle East that have helped radical Islamic terrorists.

We need to focus on killing the bad guys, not getting stuck in Middle Eastern civil wars that don't keep America safe.

BLITZER: Senator Rubio.

RUBIO: Yes, let me -- three points of distinction. The first is, if you're an American citizen and you decide to join up with ISIS, we're not going to read you your Miranda rights. You're going to be treated as an enemy combatant, a member of an army attacking this country.

(APPLAUSE)

Number two, we do need our defense capabilities. It is a fact that the cuts we are facing today and the cuts that Senator Cruz would have supported would leave us with an even smaller Air Force and a smaller Navy than the one we are going to be left with.

And the final point that I would make is Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama's strategy is to lead from behind. It sounds like what he is outlining is not to lead at all. We cannot continue to outsource foreign policy. We must lead. We are the most powerful nation in the world. We need to begin to act like it, again.

(APPLAUSE)

PAUL: Wolf...

BLITZER: We're going to have much more on this. But I want to move now back to Mr. Trump.

PAUL: Wolf, this legislation...

BLITZER: Hold on. Hold on. Hold on. PAUL: This legislation on indefinite detention...

BLITZER: We have a lot...

PAUL: ... I think deserves a little more attention.

BLITZER: We have a lot to discuss. I want to move to Mr. Trump right now. We have a question on this war against ISIS and how you would fight and win this war. Here's the question from Facebook. Listen to this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOSH JACOB, COLLEGE STUDENT: I'm Josh Jacob from Georgia Tech. Recently Donald Trump mentioned we must kill the families of ISIS members. However, this violates the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants in international law.

So my question is, how would intentionally killing innocent civilians set us apart from ISIS?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BLITZER: Mr. Trump.

TRUMP: We have to be much tougher. We have to be much stronger than we've been. We have people that know what is going on. You take a look at just the attack in California the other day. There were numerous people, including the mother, that knew what was going on.

They saw a pipe bomb sitting all over the floor. They saw ammunition all over the place. They knew exactly what was going on.

When you had the World Trade Center go, people were put into planes that were friends, family, girlfriends, and they were put into planes and they were sent back, for the most part, to Saudi Arabia.

They knew what was going on. They went home and they wanted to watch their boyfriends on television. I would be very,

5th Republican debate transcript, annotated: Who said what and ... <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/15/w...>
very firm with families. Frankly, that will make people think because they may not care much about their lives, but they do
care, believe it or not, about their families' lives.

(APPLAUSE)

BUSH: Donald, this has got...

BLITZER: Governor Bush. Governor Bush.

BUSH: This is another example of the lack of seriousness. Look, this is -- this is troubling because we're at war. They've declared war on us and we need to have a serious strategy to destroy ISIS.

But the idea that that is a solution to this is just -- is just crazy. It makes no sense to suggest this. Look, two months ago Donald Trump said that ISIS was not our fight. Just two months ago he said that Hillary Clinton would be a great negotiator with Iran. And he gets his foreign policy experience from the shows.

That is not a serious kind of candidate. We need someone that thinks this through. That can lead our country to safety and security.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Mr. Trump.

TRUMP: Look, the problem is we need toughness. Honestly, I think Jeb is a very nice person. He's a very nice person. But we need tough people. We need toughness. We need intelligence and we need tough.

Jeb said when they come across the southern border they come as an act of love.

BUSH: You said on September 30th that ISIS was not a factor.

TRUMP: Am I talking or are you talking, Jeb?

BUSH: I'm talking right now. I'm talking.

TRUMP: You can go back. You're not talking. You interrupted me.

BUSH: September 30th you said...

TRUMP: Are you going to apologize, Jeb? No. Am I allowed to finish?

TRUMP: Excuse me, am I allowed to finish?

BLITZER: Go ahead, Mr. Trump.

TRUMP: So...

BUSH: A little of your own medicine there, Donald.

TRUMP: ... again...

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Governor Bush, please.

TRUMP: I know you're trying to build up your energy, Jeb, but it's not working very well.

(LAUGHTER)

BLITZER: One at a time.

TRUMP: Look, look, look. We need a toughness. We need strength. We're not respected, you know, as a nation anymore. We don't have that level of respect that we need. And if we don't get it back fast, we're just going to go weaker, weaker and just disintegrate.

We can't allow that to happen. We need strength. We don't have it. When Jeb comes out and he talks about the border, and I saw it and I was witness to it, and so was everyone else, and I was standing there, "they come across as an act of love," he's saying the same thing right now with radical Islam.

And we can't have that in our country. It just won't work. We need strength.

BLITZER: Governor Bush.

BUSH: Donald, you're not going to be able to insult your way to the presidency. That's not going to happen.

(APPLAUSE)

And I do have the strength. Leadership, leadership is not about attacking people and disparaging people. Leadership is about creating a serious strategy to deal with the threat of our time.

BUSH: And I laid out that strategy before the attacks in Paris and before the attacks in San Bernardino. And it is the way forward. We need to increase our military spending. We need to deal with a no-fly zone in Syria, a safe zone. We need to focus on building a military that is second-to-none...

BLITZER: Thank you.

BUSH: ... so that we can destroy Islamic terrorism.

TRUMP: With Jeb's attitude, we will never be great again, that I can tell you. We will never be great again.

BLITZER: All right. Hugh Hewitt and Dana Bash, Hugh, go ahead with the next question.

HEWITT: Dr. Carson...

(APPLAUSE)

... you mentioned in your opening remarks that you're a pediatric neurologist surgeon...

CARSON: Neurosurgeon.

HEWITT: Neurosurgeon. And people admire and respect and are inspired by your life story, your kindness, your evangelical core support. We're talking about ruthless things tonight -- carpet bombing, toughness, war. And people wonder, could you do that? Could you order air strikes that would kill innocent children by not the scores, but the hundreds and the thousands? Could you wage war as a commander-in-chief?

CARSON: Well, interestingly enough, you should see the eyes of some of those children when I say to them we're going to have to open your head up and take out this tumor. They're not happy about it, believe me. And they don't like me very much at that point. But later on, they love me.

Sometimes you -- I sound like him.

(APPLAUSE)

You know, later on, you know, they really realize what's going on. And by the same token, you have to be able to look at the big picture and understand that it's actually merciful if you go ahead and finish the job, rather than death by 1,000 pricks.

HEWITT: So you are OK with the deaths of thousands of innocent children and civilian? It's like...

CARSON: You got it. You got it.

HEWITT: That is what war -- can you be as ruthless as Churchill was in prosecuting the war against the Nazis?

CARSON: Ruthless is not necessarily the word I would use, but tough, resolute, understanding what the problems are, and understanding that the job of the president of the United States is to protect the people of this country and to do what is necessary in order to get it done.

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Senator Paul, you said ISIS grew stronger because of the hawks in your party. Do you really think that Republicans have fueled the rise of ISIS?

PAUL: I think that by arming the allies of ISIS, the Islamic rebels against Assad, that we created a safe space or made that space bigger for ISIS to grow. I think those who have wanted regime change have made a mistake. When we toppled Gadhafi in Libya, I think that was a mistake. I think ISIS grew stronger, we had a failed state, and we were more at risk.

I'd like to also go back to, though, another question, which is, is Donald Trump a serious candidate? The reason I ask this is, if you're going to close the Internet, realize, America, what that entails. That entails getting rid of the First amendment, OK? It's no small feat.

If you are going to kill the families of terrorists, realize that there's something called the Geneva Convention we're going to have to pull out of. It would defy every norm that is America. So when you ask yourself, whoever you are, that think you're going to support Donald Trump, think, do you believe in the Constitution? Are you going to change the Constitution?

(APPLAUSE)

TRUMP: So, they can kill us, but we can't kill them? That's what you're saying. And as far as the Internet is concerned, we're not talking about closing the Internet. I'm talking about parts of Syria, parts of Iraq, where ISIS is, spotting it.

Now, you could close it. What I like even better than that is getting our smartest and getting our best to infiltrate their Internet, so that we know exactly where they're going, exactly where they're going to be. I like that better.

(APPLAUSE)

But we have to -- who would be -- I just can't imagine somebody booing. These are people that want to kill us, folks, and you're -- you're objecting to us infiltrating their conversations? I don't think so. I don't think so.

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Senator Paul, Senator Paul, I want to go back to my initial question, which is you saying that ISIS grew stronger because of hawks in your party. And do you think your own party, the people who you're describing, are responsible for the

PAUL: I think that if you believe in regime change, you're mistaken. In 2013, we put 600 tons of weapons -- us, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar -- into the war against Assad. By pushing Assad back, we did create a safe space.

We had people coming to our Foreign Relations Committee and saying, "Oh, we need to arm the allies of Al Qaida." They are still saying this. It is a crazy notion. This is the biggest debate we should be having tonight is is regime change a good idea; has it been a good idea.

There are still people -- the majority on the stage, they want to topple Assad. And then there will be chaos, and I think ISIS will then be in charge of Syria.

BASH: Senator, we're going to talk about regime change in a bit.

But Governor Kasich, would you like to respond to Senator Paul?

KASICH: Yeah, let me -- let me just suggest to everybody, and I hear -- last February, I said we needed to have people on the ground in a coalition with Europe and our allies. This is not going to get done just by working with the Sunnis. And it is not going to get done if we just embed a few people.

We have to go massively, like we did in the first Gulf War where we destroyed Saddam's ability to take Kuwait. We need to have a coalition that will stand for nothing less than the total destruction of ISIS and we have to be the leader. We can't wait for anybody else. I served on the Armed Services Committee for 18 years and we must lead, or the job won't get done, unfortunately, for our country.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you, Governor.

Senator Rubio? Let's continue this conversation. This is a critically important issue.

FIORINA: I hope at some point you're going to ask me my strategy.

BLITZER: We will get to -- we have a lot of time, Ms. Fiorina.

I want to get to Senator Rubio right now. Let's talk about, one of the aspects of your strategy, you say the only way to defeat ISIS is with ground forces made up primarily of Sunni-Arab forces. Those Arab nations, though, as you well know, they've conducted less than five percent of the airstrikes and actually none since August. What makes you think they are willing to fight on the ground if they're not even willing to fight from the air?

RUBIO: Well, they most certainly will have to be worked on to provide more than what they are doing now. There's no doubt about it. And there's one -- one major reason why they have not been willing to be a broader part of the coalition, and that is they have lost complete trust and confidence in this president. This president cut a deal with their moral enemy, the Shia, in Iran. And this is the reason why they no longer trust this president and are willing to work alongside them.

But they have as much invested in this as we do. In fact, more so, for it is the king of Saudi Arabia they want to behead first. It's the king of Jordan that they want to dethrone. It's the -- they want to go into Egypt the way they've already gone into Libya.

And on another point that we need to talk about, Assad is one of the main reasons why ISIS even exists to begin with. Assad is a puppet of Iran. And he has been so brutal toward the Sunni within Syria that he created the space that led to the people of Syria themselves to stand up and try to overthrow him. That led to the chaos which allowed ISIS to come in and take advantage of that situation and grow more powerful.

And the fact that this president led from behind meant there were no alternative groups on the ground to be empowered, leaving ISIS with the prime operating space they needed to become the force they have now become.

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator. Stand by.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Ms. Fiorina, the former defense secretary, Bob Gates, says the chances of getting Sunni-Arab forces on the ground to get the job done, his words, "chances very remote." What's your strategy?

FIORINA: Well, first I'll just point out that talking tough is not the same as being strong. And to wage war, we need a commander in chief who has made tough calls in tough times and stood up to be held accountable over and over, not first-term senators who've never made an executive decision in their life.

One of the things I would immediately do, in addition to defeating them here at home, is bring back the warrior class -- Petraeus, McChrystal, Mattis, Keane, Flynn. Every single one of these generals I know. Every one was retired early because they told President Obama things that he didn't want to hear.

We must have Sunni-Arabs involved in this coalition. We must commit leadership, strength, support and resolve. I'll just add that Margaret Thatcher once said, "If you want something talked about, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman."

(APPLAUSE)

Governor Christie, what's your strategy?

CHRISTIE: Wolf, you sit up here and you listen to this stuff, and you think that so many of these people have had so much to do in this national debate, they talk like they were bystanders. You know, we talk about our military being degraded over time, and yet we've had folks on this stage who've been a part of Congress who have participated in sequester; who participated in the degrading of this military over time.

And that's why I think people get so frustrated with Washington, D.C. now. That's why they're so angry with the -- the electorate is so angry with everybody who is involved in government in Washington, D.C. Because if you listen to the folks up here, you think that they weren't even there; they had nothing to do with this.

CHRISTIE: This is a difference between being a governor and being in a legislature. See, because when something doesn't work in New Jersey, they look at me, say: "Why didn't it get done? Why didn't you do it?" You have to be responsible and accountable.

And so on ISIS, let's be clear, the president needs to be a force that is trusted in the world. On this I agree with Marco. You know, this president is not trusted.

If you're the King of Jordan, if you're a part of the royal family in Saudi Arabia and he's made this deal with Iran which gives them \$150 billion to wage a war and try to extend their empire across the Middle East, why would you want to do it now?

But I will tell you this, when I stand across from King Hussein of Jordan and I say to him, "You have a friend again sir, who will stand with you to fight this fight," he'll change his mind.

BLITZER: Dr. Carson, what is your strategy?

CARSON: First of all, I've been talking about this for over a year. We have to destroy their caliphate because that gives them legitimacy to go ahead with the global Jihad. We have to take their energy because they are -- ISIS is the richest terrorist organization there is. We have to take their oil, shut down all of the mechanisms whereby they can disperse money because they go after disaffected individuals from all over the place, and they're able to pay them. That makes a difference.

As far as the command centers are concerned in Raqqa and to a lesser degree Mosul, cut those off. Do the same kind of thing that we did with Sinjar a few weeks ago, working with our embedded special forces with the Kurds, shut off the supply route, soften them up, then we go in with specials ops followed by our air force to take them over. Those are things that work.

But also, you know, this whole concept of boots on the ground, you know, we've got a phobia about boots on the ground. If our military experts say, we need boots on the ground, we should put boots on the ground and recognize that there will be

boots on the ground and they'll be over here, and they'll be their boots if we don't get out of there now.

BLITZER: Thank you.

Everyone stand by. We're only just beginning. Coming up, which candidates on this stage tonight want to move foreign policy in a dramatically new direction?

We'll be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BLITZER: Welcome back to the CNN-Facebook Republican Presidential Debate here at the Venetian, Las Vegas.

The war against ISIS will pose many new challenges for the next commander-in-chief. The last two presidents pursued a Middle East policy that supported toppling dictators to try to promote democracy.

Senator Cruz, you have said the world would be safer today if Saddam Hussein were still in power in Iraq, Moammar Gadhafi ruled Libya, and Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt. So would it be your policy to preserve dictatorships, rather than promoting democracy in the Middle East?

CRUZ: Wolf, I believe in a America first foreign policy, that far too often President Obama and Hillary Clinton -- and, unfortunately, more than a few Republicans -- have gotten distracted from the central focus of keeping this country safe.

So let's go back to the beginning of the Obama administration, when Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama led NATO in toppling the government in Libya. They did it because they wanted to promote democracy. A number of Republicans supported them. The result of that -- and we were told then that there were these moderate rebels that would take over. Well, the result is, Libya is now a terrorist war zone run by jihadists.

Move over to Egypt. Once again, the Obama administration, encouraged by Republicans, toppled Mubarak who had been a reliable ally of the United States, of Israel, and in its place, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood came in, a terrorist organization.

And we need to learn from history. These same leaders -- Obama, Clinton, and far too many Republicans -- want to topple Assad. Assad is a bad man. Gadhafi was a bad man. Mubarak had a terrible human rights record. But they were assisting us -- at least Gadhafi and Mubarak -- in fighting radical Islamic terrorists.

And if we topple Assad, the result will be ISIS will take over Syria, and it will worsen U.S. national security interests. And the approach, instead of being a Woodrow Wilson democracy promoter...

BLITZER: Thank you.

CRUZ: ... we ought to hunt down our enemies and kill ISIS rather than creating opportunities for ISIS to take control of new countries.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Senator.

(APPLAUSE)

Senator Rubio, you supported the removal of Moammar Gadhafi in Libya. Now that country is in turmoil, as ISIS is clearly growing there. Senator Cruz says you haven't learned your lesson. Do you have any regrets for supporting President Obama's intervention in Libya?

RUBIO: To begin with, Moammar Gadhafi and the revolt against Gadhafi was not started by the United States. It was started by the Libyan people. And the reason why I argued we needed to get involved is because he was going to go one way or the other. And my argument then was proven true, and that is, the longer that civil war took, the more militias would be formed and the more unstable the country would be after the fact.

As far as Moammar Gadhafi is concerned, by the way, Moammar Gadhafi is the man that killed those Americans over Lockerbie, Scotland. Moammar Gadhafi is also the man that bombed that cafe in Berlin and killed those Marines. And you want to know why Moammar Gadhafi started cooperating on his nuclear program? Because we got rid of Saddam Hussein. And so he got scared that he would be next, and that's why he started cooperating.

Look, we will have to work around the world with less than ideal governments. The government in Saudi Arabia is not a democracy, but we will have to work with them. The government in Jordan is not perfect, but we will have to work with them. But anti-American dictators like Assad, who help Hezbollah, who helped get those IEDs into Iraq, if they go, I will not shed a tear.

BLITZER: Senator Cruz?

CRUZ: Well, it's more than not shedding a tear. It's actively getting involved to topple a government. And we keep hearing from President Obama and Hillary Clinton and Washington Republicans that they're searching for these mythical moderate rebels. It's like a purple unicorn. They never exist. These moderate rebels end up being jihadists.

And I'll tell you whose view on Assad is the same as mine. It's Prime Minister Netanyahu. Prime Minister Netanyahu has said Israel doesn't have a dog in that fight because Assad is a puppet of Iran, a Shia radical Islamic terrorist, but at the same time, Prime Minister Netanyahu doesn't want to see Syria governed by ISIS. And we need to focus on American interests, not on global aspirations...

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Standby. Everybody standby for a moment. Governor Kasich, go ahead.

KASICH: I don't understand this thing about Assad. He has to go. Assad is aligned with Iran and Russia. The one thing we want to prevent is we want to prevent Iran being able to extend a Shia crescent all across the Middle East. Assad has got to go.

KASICH: And there are moderates there. There are moderates in Syria who we should be supporting. I do not support a civil war. I don't want to be policeman of the world. But we can't back off of this. And let me tell you, at the end, the Saudis have agreed to put together a coalition inside of Syria to stabilize that country.

BLITZER: Thank you.

KASICH: He must go. It will be a blow to Iran and Russia.

BLITZER: We're going to talk about Assad in a moment.

Mr. Trump, are Americans safer with dictators running the world in the Middle East?

TRUMP: In my opinion, we've spent \$4 trillion trying to topple various people that frankly, if they were there and if we could've spent that \$4 trillion in the United States to fix our roads, our bridges, and all of the other problems; our airports and all of the other problems we've had, we would've been a lot better off. I can tell you that right now.

We have done a tremendous disservice, not only to Middle East, we've done a tremendous disservice to humanity. The people that have been killed, the people that have wiped away, and for what? It's not like we had victory.

It's a mess. The Middle East is totally destabilized. A total and complete mess. I wish we had the \$4 trillion or \$5 trillion. I wish it were spent right here in the United States, on our schools, hospitals, roads, airports, and everything else that are all falling apart.

(APPLAUSE)

FIORINA: That is exactly what President Obama said. I'm amazed to hear that from a republican presidential candidate. But let's just start with, who got it wrong? Who really got it wrong?

Hillary Clinton has gotten every foreign policy challenge wrong. Hitting the reset button with Vladimir Putin - recall that she called Bashar Al-Assad a positive reformer and then she opened an embassy and then later she said, over, and over, and over again, "Bashar Al-Assad must go." Although she wasn't prepared to do anything about it. Recall that Hillary Clinton was all for toppling Gadhafi then didn't listen to her own people on the ground. And then of course, when she lied about the terrorist attack in Benghazi, she invited more terrorist attacks.

BLITZER: Thank you.

TRUMP: Well, there's nothing to respond to. Well, people feel differently. I mean, the fact is Benghazi was a disaster because of Libya, everything just fell into place. It could not have been worse.

What do we have now? We have nothing. We've spent \$3 trillion and probably much more - I have no idea what we've spent. Thousands and thousands of lives, we have nothing. Wounded warriors all over the place who I love, we have nothing for it.

And by the way - and Ben said incorrectly - and I'm not saying this as a knock - he's one of finest men. You're not going to find a finer men.

But I've been talking about oil for three years. I've been saying,, "take the oil, take the oil." I didn't say, "just bomb it," I said," take it and use it and distribute it so that the wounded warriors -" People, I've been saying this now for many years.

BLITZER: All right.

TRUMP: Now, all of a sudden everybody's saying, "take the oil." It wasn't so fashionable to take the oil six months ago. I've been saying it for years.

BLITZER: Thank you.

FIORINA: We've mismanaged going into Iraq.

BLITZER: Dr. Carson, is the Middle East...

FIORINA: We've mismanaged going out of Iraq.

BLITZER: Dr. Carson, is the Middle East better off with dictators?

CARSON: No one is ever better off with dictators but there comes a time you know, when you're on an airplane, they always say, "in case of an emergency oxygen masks will drop down. Put yours on first and then administer help to your neighbor." We need oxygen right now.

And we need to start thinking about the needs of the American people before we go and solve everybody else's problems. The fact of the matter is, is that the Middle East has been in turmoil for thousands of years. For us to think that we're going to in there and fix that with a couple of little bombs and a few little decorations is relatively foolish.

FIORINA: We actually...

BLITZER: Governor Bush.

BLITZER: Hold on Governor Bush., here's the question. You said, "getting rid of Saddam Hussein in your words was a pretty good deal." In light of what has happened in Iraq, do you still feel that way?

BUSH: I do. I think the lesson's learned are that we have to have to have a strategy to get and a strategy to get out. Which means, that you create a stable situation.

This president and this is what the focus ought to be, it's not the differences between us, it's Barack Obama does not believe America's leadership in the world is a force for good. He does not believe that our strength is a place where security can take place. He leads from behind. He creates an environment that now we're creating the most unstable situation we've had since the World War II era.

The focus ought to be on the single fact that Hillary Clinton wants to double down on a failed foreign policy and we need to be united to defeat that because we're going to be in a place that is far less secure than it is today. Don't you all agree?

BLITZER: Senator Paul, was getting rid of Saddam Hussein a pretty good deal?

PAUL: These are the fundamental questions of our time, these foreign policy questions, whether or not regime change is a good idea or a bad idea. I don't think because I think the regime change was a bad idea it means that Hussein was necessarily a good idea.

There is often variations of evil on both sides of the war. What we have to decide is whether or not regime change is a good idea. It's what the neoconservatives have wanted. It's what the vast majority of those on the stage want.

They still want regime change. They want it in Syria. They wanted it in Iraq. They want it in Libya. It has not worked.

Out of regime change you get chaos. From the chaos you have seen repeatedly the rise of radical Islam. So we get this profession of, oh, my goodness, they want to do something about terrorism and yet they're the problem because they allow terrorism to arise out of that chaos.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you.

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Hugh Hewitt, go ahead.

(CROSSTALK)

CRUZ: The question of whether we should toppling dictatorships is asking the wrong question. We should be defeating our enemies. So the problem with defeating...

BLITZER: Senator, Senator, we're going to get to you. Wait your turn. We have two hours of debate. We'll have plenty of time. Let Hugh ask his question.

CRUZ: Well, but let me explain, the focus should be...

BLITZER: Senator, please.

CRUZ: ... on defeating our enemies. So, for example...

BLITZER: Senator... CRUZ: ... a regime we should change is Iran...

BLITZER: You'll have plenty of opportunity.

Hugh, go ahead.

CRUZ: ... because Iran has declared war on us. But we shouldn't be toppling regimes...

(CROSSTALK)

CRUZ: ... that are fighting radical Islamic terrorists that are helping...

BLITZER: These are the rules all of you agreed to.

Hugh, go ahead with your question.

HEWITT: Mr. Trump, we are talking about the most important thing, that's why it's heated. And it's, you are OK with Mr. Assad staying in power, but you are also in favor of winning.

If he stays in power, Iran is winning, Hezbollah is winning. Iran is winning in Yemen. They are winning everywhere. If they are winning how can we be winning?

TRUMP: I think Assad is a bad guy, a very bad guy, all right? Lots of people killed. I think we are backing people we have no idea who they are. The rebels, we call them the rebels, the patriotic rebels. We have no idea. A lot of people think, Hugh, that they are ISIS.

Russia is fighting now ISIS. And Iran is fighting ISIS.

We have to do one thing at a time. We can't go -- and I watched Lindsey Graham, he said, I have been here for 10 years fighting. Well, he will be there with that thinking for another 50 years. He won't be able to solve the problem.

We have to get rid of ISIS first. After we get rid of ISIS, we'll start thinking about it. But we can't be fighting Assad. And when you're fighting Assad, you are fighting Russia, you're fighting -- you're fighting a lot of different groups.

But we can't be fighting everybody at one time.

HEWITT: Governor Christie, is he right? Because if we step back, Iran goes nuclear. Is Donald Trump right?

CHRISTIE: Well, I think we have to focus, Hugh, on exactly what the priorities are. And to me, what I've always said is that the president has set up an awful situation through his deal with Iran, because what his deal with Iran has done is empower them and enrich them. And that's the way ISIS has been created and formed here. ISIS is created and formed because of the abuse that Assad and his Iranian sponsors have rained down on the Sunnis in Syria.

And so when we empower Iran, this is why this president -- and when Hillary Clinton says her theory against ISIS will be just about the same as the president, then get ready for more unrest and more murder and more violence in the Middle East.

We need to focus our attention on Iran, because if you miss Iran, you are not going to get ISIS. The two are inextricably connected because one causes the other.

HEWITT: Senator Paul, let me ask you, you heard Governor Kasich say Assad must go. Do you agree?

PAUL: No, I think it's a huge mistake. I think regime change in Syria, and this is what -- I've been saying this for several years now. In 2013 when we first went in, I said, you are going to give arms to the allies of al Qaida, to radical jihadists? That's crazy.

But the other thing I said is the great irony is you will be back fighting against your own weapons. Had Assad been bombed when he used chemical weapons two years ago, ISIS would be in charge of all of Syria now.

We have to have a more realistic foreign policy and not a utopian one where we say, oh, we're going to spread freedom and democracy, and everybody in the Middle East is going to love us. They are not going to love us.

(APPLAUSE)

(CROSSTALK)

KASICH: The foreign policy, you have to know how to pick and choose. There's no way, if Saddam had not had weapons of mass destruction, I would have gone, because I don't believe that the U.S. should be involved directly in civil wars.

I opposed the U.S. involvement in Lebanon. We ended up having to withdraw our marines after our barracks were blown up.

There is a difference between Iraq, where you have Sunni, Shia, and Kurds put together after the First World War by the Western powers. It doesn't work. It needs to break up into three parts.

KASICH: And for the Russians, frankly, it's time that we punched the Russians in the nose. They've gotten away with too much in this world and we need to stand up against them, not just there, but also in Eastern Europe where they threaten some of our most precious allies.

BLITZER: Let's continue with Russia right now. We have another question from Facebook. Listen and watch.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

QUESTION: My name is Ashley Tofil. Ms. Fiorina, in November, you said that you would not talk to Vladimir Putin after you were elected because you would be communicating from a position of weakness. Do you believe that it is feasible to not communicate with another world leader? And do you think that that also is a sign of weakness?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BLITZER: Ms. Fiorina, as you know, U.S. and Russian warplanes are flying all over Syria right now. With so many lives on the line, is this a good time for the United States not to talk to Putin?

FIORINA: I didn't say I would cut off all communication with Putin. What I said was as president of the United States, now is not the time to talk with him. Reagan walked away at Reykjavik. There is a time and a place for everything. There is a time and a place for talk. And there is a time and a place for action.

I know Vladimir Putin. He respects strength. He lied to our president's face; didn't both to tell him about warplanes and troops going into Syria. We need to speak to him from a position of strength. So as commander in chief, I will not speak to him until we've set up that no-fly zone; until we've gathered our Sunni-Arab allies and begun to deny ISIS territory; until I've called the supreme leader of Iran and told him new deal -- new deal. We the United States of America are going to cut off the money flow, which we can do; which we don't need anyone's permission or collaboration to do.

And I will not speak to him personally until we've rebuilt the 6th Fleet a little bit right under his nose; rebuilt the missile defense program in Poland right under his nose; and conducted a few military exercises in the Baltic states.

And let us remember one other thing. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are responsible for the growth of ISIS because they

these people up here. It's Hillary Clinton.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you, Ms. Fiorina.

Governor Christie, if the U.S. imposed a no-fly zone over Syria and a Russian plane encroached, invaded that no-fly zone, would you be prepared to shoot down that Russian plane and risk war with Russia?

CHRISTIE: Not only would I be prepared to do it, I would do it. A no-fly zone means a no-fly zone, Wolf. That's what it means.

(APPLAUSE)

See, maybe -- maybe because I'm from New Jersey, I just have this kind of plain language hangup. But I would make very clear -- I would not talk to Vladimir Putin. In fact, I would talk to Vladimir Putin a lot. But I'd say to him, "Listen, Mr. President, there's a no-fly zone in Syria; you fly in, it applies to you." And yes, we would shoot down the planes of Russian pilots if in fact they were stupid enough to think that this president was the same feckless weakling that the president we have in the Oval Office is right now.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Senator Paul -- Senator Paul, I want you to respond to what we just heard from Governor Christie. If there was a no-fly zone, you say that potentially could lead to World War III. Why?

PAUL: Well, I think if you're in favor of World War III, you have your candidate. You know, here's...

(APPLAUSE)

... the thing. My goodness, what we want in a leader is someone with judgment, not someone who is so reckless as to stand on the stage and say, "Yes, I'm jumping up and down; I'm going to shoot down Russian planes." Russia already flies in that airspace. It may not be something we're in love with the fact that they're there, but they were invited by Iraq and by Syria to fly in that airspace.

And so if we announce we're going to have a no-fly zone, and others have said this. Hillary Clinton is also for it. It is a recipe for disaster. It's a recipe for World War III. We need to confront Russia from a position of strength, but we don't need to confront Russia from a point of recklessness that would lead to war.

This is something -- this type of judgment, you know, it's having that kind of judgment; who you would appoint and how

I mean, I think when we think about the judgment of someone who might want World War III, we might think about someone who might shut down a bridge because they don't like their friends; they don't want to -- you know, they want to (inaudible) a Democrat.

So I think we need to be very careful.

BLITZER: Governor Christie?

CHRISTIE: Well, Wolf, I'll tell you what reckless is. What reckless is is calling Assad a reformer. What reckless is allowing Russia to come into Crimea and Ukraine. What reckless is is inviting Russia into Syria to team with Iran. That is reckless. And the reckless people are the folks in the White House right now. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are the reckless people.

CHRISTIE: And if you think that a no-fly zone is a reckless policy, you're welcome to your opinion. But how is it working so far? As we have 250,000 Syrians murdered, slaughtered; millions running around the world, running for their lives. It's not working. We need to try something else. And that is not reckless.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: All right, let's go back -- Hugh and Dana?

HEWITT: Governor Bush, a commander-in-chief question. You've said that Mr. Trump is not qualified to be president because he's not qualified to deal with Vladimir Putin. Why are you better qualified to deal with Vladimir Putin than Mr. Trump?

BUSH: Because I -- first of all, I know what I don't know. I know what I don't know. I would seek out, as I have, the best advice that exists. I won't get my information from the shows. I don't know if that's Saturday morning or Sunday morning. I don't know which one.

(LAUGHTER)

I will seek out the best advice, and I will create a strategy and I will persuade the American people what the role of America should be. I've laid out a policy of rebuilding our military.

All of the talk that we're seeing here -- most of which I agree on, frankly -- requires a much stronger military. We now have a lack of readiness that is quite scary. We have planes that were -- that Harry Truman inaugurated, the B-52. We have -- the Navy has been gutted and decimated. The readiness of the Marines is way down.

If we're serious about America's leadership in the world, then we need to make sure that we have the back of the armed forces. The Armed Forces Radio is here listening to this today. I hope they know that if I'm president, I'll be a commander-in-chief, not an agitator-in-chief or a divider-in-chief, that I will lead this country in a way that will create greater security and greater safety.

HEWITT: Mr. Trump?

TRUMP: I think it's very sad that CNN leads Jeb Bush, Governor Bush, down a road by starting off virtually all the questions, "Mr. Trump this, Mister" -- I think it's very sad. And, frankly, I watched -- I think it's very sad. And, frankly, I watched the first debate, and the first long number of questions were, "Mr. Trump said this, Mr. Trump said that. Mr. Trump" -- these poor guys -- although, I must tell you, Santorum, good guy. Governor Huckabee, good guy. They were very nice, and I respect them greatly. But I thought it was very unfair that virtually the entire early portion of the debate was Trump this, Trump that, in order to get ratings, I guess. In order to get ratings, I guess.

HEWITT: But, Mr. Trump, it's not CNN -- I was on CNN last night...

TRUMP: I just think it's very -- excuse me.

HEWITT: ... watching...

TRUMP: Excuse me. I think it's very unprofessional.

HEWITT: But it wasn't -- it wasn't CNN. It was me. I watched you last night for 16 minutes. It's not CNN.

(APPLAUSE)

TRUMP: Well, I think it's very unprofessional.

HEWITT: It's not CNN. It's America's watching you.

TRUMP: OK, fine.

HEWITT: It's America's watching.

(CROSSTALK)

BUSH: So I was -- I was -- I was mentioned, so I can bring up something, I think, right? Look, the simple fact is, if you think this is tough you're not being treated fairly...

TRUMP: This isn't tough and easy. I wish it...

BUSH: ... imagine what it's going to be like dealing with Putin or dealing with President Xi.

TRUMP: I wish it was always this easy as you, Jeb.

BUSH: Or dealing with the Islamic terrorism that exists.

TRUMP: Oh, yeah.

BUSH: This is a tough business to run for president.

TRUMP: Oh, I know. You're a tough guy, Jeb. I know.

BUSH: And it's -- and we need...

(LAUGHTER)

... to have a leader that is...

(CROSSTALK) TRUMP: You're tough.

BUSH: You're never going to be president of the United States by insulting your way to the presidency.

TRUMP: Well, let's see. I'm at 42, and you're at 3. So, so far, I'm doing better.

BUSH: Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter.

TRUMP: So far, I'm doing better. You know, you started off over here, Jeb. You're moving over further and further. Pretty soon you're going to be off the end...

(CROSSTALK)

FIORINA: This doesn't do a thing to solve the problems.

(CROSSTALK)

FIORINA: It doesn't do a thing to solve the problems.

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: One at a time. Hugh, go ahead.

KASICH: It sounds more and more what my daughter said that I said in the beginning, all the fighting and arguing is not advancing us.

FIORINA: It will not solve the problem.

KASICH: It is not the way we're going to strengthen our country. We will strengthen our country when we come together.

(APPLAUSE)

And, look, you've got Rand Paul, you've got Ted Cruz, you've got Marco, you've got a lot of people on this stage that have studied these issues. You know what a leader does? A leader has a sound program, has a good policy, and then brings people together to solve problems.

(APPLAUSE)

Guess what? Both in Congress in balancing the budget and in Ohio fixing the economy -- and, by the way, we talk about the fence. The first thing we better get going is strengthening our economy, because if we don't have a strong economy, we can't pay for all of this. And the world wants us to be able to function from strength, believe it or not. Get our economy going, get these people together in a room. We can fix this, ladies and gentlemen.

(CROSSTALK)

KASICH: We don't have to fight all the time. It can be done, and we will be great...

HEWITT: Governor -- thank you, Governor.

KASICH: ... when we join together. Thank you, Hugh.

HEWITT: Dr. Carson, commander-in-chief question again. You've been the head of neurosurgery for a big hospital. You're on a lot of boards of a lot of companies. You've traveled the world. You're going traveling again next week. But does that prepare you to command troops from Djibouti to Japan, troops from Afghanistan to Iraq to be in charge of the men and women watching on Armed Services Network tonight?

CARSON: Well, you know, there's a false narrative that only the political class has the wisdom and the ability to be commander-in- chief. But if you go back and you study the design of our country, it was really designed for the citizen statesman.

And we need to be talking about where does your experience come from? You know, and I've had a lot of experience building things, organizing things, you know, a national scholarship program.

One of the things that you'll notice if you look through my life is that I don't do a lot of talking. I do a lot of doing. And really, it says more about a person than how much they talk. And then some people say you're weak because, you know, you're not loud and you're not boisterous and you're not rude. But the fact of the matter is, look and see what I've done. And that speaks volumes about strength.

BASH: Thank you, Dr. Carson. We've been talking tonight about programs and policy proposals that you all have to keep Americans safe and it's a big discussion on the campaign trail. Also about border security and immigration. So let's talk about immigration.

Senator Rubio. You co-authored a bill with Democrats two years ago that allowed a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Do you still support that path to citizenship, which means giving those immigrants rights, like the right to vote?

RUBIO: Yeah. Immigration is not an issue that I read about in the newspaper or watch a documentary on PBS or CNN. It's an issues I've lived around my whole life. My family are immigrants. My wife's family are immigrants. All of my neighbors are immigrants.

I see every aspect of this problem. The good, the bad, and the ugly. And here's what we learned in 2013. The American people don't trust the Federal Government to enforce our immigration laws, and we will not be able to do anything on immigration until we first prove to the American people that illegal immigration is under control. And we can do that. We know what it takes to do that.

It takes at least 20,000 more additional border agents. It takes completing those 700 miles of fencing. It takes a mandatory e-verify system and a mandatory entry/exit tracking system to prevent overstays. After we have done that, the second thing we have to do is reform and modernize the legal immigration system. And after we have done those two things, I think the American people are gonna be reasonable with what do you do with someone who has been in this country for 10 or 12 years who hasn't otherwise violated our laws -- because if they're a criminal they can't stay. They'll have to undergo a background check, pay a fine, start paying taxes. And ultimately, they'll given a work permit and that's all they're gonna be allowed to have for at least 10 years. But you can't get to that third step until you have done the other two things, and that was the lesson we learned in 2013. There is no trust that the Federal Government will enforce the law. They will not support you until you see it done first.

BASH: Senator, you haven't answered the question. You described a very long path but does that path end at citizenship?

RUBIO: But I've answered that question repeatedly. I am personally open -- after all that has happened and after ten years in that probationary status where all they have is a permit, I personally am open to allowing people to apply for a green card.

That may not be a majority position in my party, but that's down the road. You can't even begin that process until you prove to people -- not just pass a law that says you're gonna bring illegal immigration under control. You're gonna have to do it and prove to people that it's working.

5th Republican debate transcript, annotated: Who said what and ... <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/15/w...>
And that was the lesson of 2013. And it's more true today, than it was then. After a migratory crisis on the border with minors coming over that you're seeing start up again now, after all these executive orders the President has issued. More than ever we need to...

BASH: Thank you, senator.

RUBIO: ... prove to people that illegal immigration is under control.

BASH: Thank you, senator. Senator Cruz.

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Senator Cruz, on the campaign trail, Senator Rubio has said that his immigration plan is not that different from yours. Is that true?

CRUZ: Well, he -- he has attempted to muddy the waters, but I think that anyone who watched the battle that we had. You know, there was a time for choosing as Reagan put it. Where there was a battle over amnesty and some chose, like Senator Rubio to stand with Barack Obama and Chuck Schumer and support a massive amnesty plan.

Others chose to stand with Jeff Sessions and Steve King and the American people and secure the border.

And let me mention, this issue is actually directly connected to what we've been talking about. Because the front line with ISIS isn't just in Iraq and Syria, it's in Kennedy Airport and the Rio Grande. Border security is national security. And, you know, one of the most troubling aspects of the Rubio-Schumer Gang of Eight Bill was that it gave President Obama blanket authority to admit refugees, including Syrian refugees without mandating any background checks whatsoever. Now we've seen what happened in San Bernardino. When you are letting people in, when the FBI can't vet them, it puts American citizens at risk. And I tell you, if I'm elected president, we will secure the border. We will triple the border patrol. We will build a wall that works and I'll get Donald Trump to pay for it.

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Senator Rubio, please.

RUBIO: Yeah, a couple points. In 2013 we had never faced a crisis like the Syrian refugee crisis now. Up until that point, a refugee meant someone fleeing oppression, fleeing Communism like it is in my community.

As far as Ted's record, I'm always puzzled by his attack on this issue. Ted, you support legalizing people who are in this country illegally. Ted Cruz supported a 500-percent increase in the number of H-1 visas, the guest workers that are allowed into this country, and Ted supports doubling the number of green cards.

So I think what's important for us to understand and there is a way forward on this issue that we can bring our country

together on. And while I'm president I will do it. And it will begin by bringing illegal immigration under control and proving to the American people.

BASH: Senator Cruz?

CRUZ: Look, I understand Marco wants to raise confusion, it is not accurate what he just said that I supported legalization. Indeed, I led the fight against his legalization and amnesty. And you know, there was one commentator that put it this way that, for Marco to suggest our record's the same is like suggesting "the fireman and the arsonist because they are both at the scene of the fire."

He was fighting to grant amnesty and not to secure the border, I was fighting to secure the border. And this also goes to trust, listening on to campaign trails. Candidates all the time make promises. You know, Marco said, "he learned that the American people didn't trust the federal government."

BASH: Senator Cruz?

RUBIO: No, no, give him time.

CRUZ: In Florida promising to...

(CROSSTALK)

RUBIO: Ted, do you...

CRUZ: go in the fight against amnesty...

RUBIO: Did Ted Cruz fight to support legalizing people that are in this country illegally?

CRUZ: He campaigned promising to lead the fight against amnesty.

FIORINA: Ladies and gentleman, this is why the American people are standing up.

BASH: Senator Cruz, can you answer that question please?

RUBIO: Does Ted Cruz rule out ever legalizing people that are in this country now?

BASH: Senator Cruz?

CRUZ: I have never supported a legalization...

CRUZ : I have never supported legalization, and I do not intend to support legalization. Let me tell you how you do this, what you do is you enforce the law...

(CROSSTALK)

FIORINA: This is why the nation is fed up...

BASH: One at a time please.

CRUZ: What you do is enforcement the law...

FIORINA: We have been talking about this...

BASH: Ms. Fiorina, please wait your turn, we're going to get to you.

FIORINA: Sorry, but you haven't gotten to me. This is why...

CRUZ: What you do...

BASH: Senator Cruz go ahead.

FIORINA: the people are fed up with the political class.

CRUZ: What you do is you enforce the law. I've laid out a very, very detailed immigration plan on my website, tedcruz.org. It's 11 pages of existing federal law and in particular the question of what to do with people who are here now? You enforce the law.

That means you stop the Obama administration's policy of releasing criminal illegal aliens. Do you know how many aliens Bill Clinton deported? 12 million. Do you know how many illegal aliens, George W. Bush deported? 10 million.

We can enforce the laws and if we secure the border, that solves the problem. And as president I will solve this problem and secure the border.

BASH: Mr. Trump, you like to say that you restarted this conversation in the campaign. TRUMP: I believe I did.

BASH: So who do you side with? Who do you side with in this, Senator Rubio or Senator Cruz?

TRUMP: I have a very hardline position, we have a country or we don't have a country. People that have come into our

I want a strong border. I do want a wall. Walls do work, you just have to speak to the folks in Israel. Walls work if they're properly constructed. I know how to build, believe me, I know how to build.

I feel a very, very strong bind, and really I'm bound to this country, we either have a border or we don't. People can come into the country, we welcome people to come but they have to come in legally.

BASH: Thank you.

Governor Bush?

BUSH: Yes.

BASH: Listening to this, do you think this is the tone -- this immigration debate that republicans need to take to win back Hispanics into our party especially states like where we are in Nevada that has a pretty Hispanic community?

BUSH: No it isn't but it is an important subject to talk about for sure. And I think people have good ideas on this. Clearly, we need to secure the border. Coming here legally needs to be a lot easier than coming here illegally.

If you don't have that, you don't have the rule of law. We now have a national security consideration, public health issues, we have an epidemic of heroine overdoses in all places in this country because of the ease of bringing heroine in. We have to secure the border.

It is a serious undertaking and yes, we do need more fencing and we do need to use technology, and we do need more border control. And we need to have better cooperation by the way with local law enforcement. There are 800,000 cops on the beat, they ought to be trained to be the eyes and ears for law enforcement for the threat against terror as well as for immigration.

This is a serious challenge and if we can get it right, yes, we'll start winning votes again. The real problem isn't anybody on this stage, the real problem is Barack Obama has had six years to advocate a position to fix this and he's done nothing. The congress has funded these programs of building more fencing and doing all this and he hasn't done it.

He wants to maintain it as a wedge issue and so does Hillary Clinton. Republicans need to fix it and when we do, we'll be better off.

BLITZER: Governor, thank you very much.

BLITZER: So, Dr. Carson, you recently visited a refugee camp in Jordan and you deemed it your words, "really quite nice." Saying the people there didn't want to come to the United States. Do you think these camps are a long-term solution of the

CARSON: Well, it was very interesting having an opportunity to talk to the Syrians themselves. And I asked them: What do you want? What is your supreme desire? Their supreme desire was to be settled back in their own country. I said, "What can Americans and other countries do?" They said, "Support the efforts of those who are trying to provide safety for us, including the Jordanians."

Of course, they had a brand new hospital, for instance, that was unstaffed because there wasn't enough money to do it. But here's what's really neat. If you go into Hasakah province in northeast Syria, that's an area that's as big as Lebanon. It's controlled by the Kurds, the Christians and the moderate Sunnis. And there are airstrips and hotels. You could settle a lot of people there.

All we would have to do is be willing to provide them with some weaponry, some defensive weaponry. And we seem to be afraid to give the Kurds weaponry. We like to send it for some strange reason through Baghdad, and then they only get a tenth of it.

And if we would support them, we'd have a perfect ideal there. We don't need to set this up as we either take a bunch of refugees who will be infiltrated with terrorists, I guarantee you. For them not to be would be terrorist malpractice. And we need to -- to choose the right choice, not these false choices.

BLITZER: Senator Paul, you oppose letting in Syrian refugees at this time into the United States. The U.S. has already accepted 2,000 Syrian refugees, including 13 living here in Las Vegas right now. Would you send them back? What would you do with these people?

PAUL: You know, I think we need to set the record straight on this, because I think Marco misspoke about the bill. On the Gang of Eight bill, there was no provisions really for extra scrutiny or safety for refugees. At the time the bill came up, two Iraqi refugees came to my home town, Bowling Green, Kentucky. Their fingerprints were on a bomb from Iraq. They were in the database, but we didn't pick them up.

We relocated them here, put them in government housing, got them on food stamps. And we began providing for them, but we didn't have adequate security. On the Gang of Eight bill, on Marco's bill, we had an opportunity. There was a conservative consensus for an amendment I put forward called Trust, But Verify that would have strengthened border security on both refugees, students and those coming here. And Marco sided and I guess was more sympathetic to Chuck Schumer and to the president than he was to conservative principles.

But this goes directly to national defense. And if he wants to run as a national -- national defense conservative, he's got to explain why he hasn't stepped up to support border security.

BLITZER: Senator Rubio?

RUBIO: Well, he's just admitted -- as he's just admitted, the reason why those refugees were allowed in was because they messed up in how they used the actual database. They should have know. They didn't because they didn't run the actual law as it exists now. It didn't work well.

As far as the refugees are concerned, it's not that America doesn't want to accept refugees, Wolf. It's that we may not be able to, because this is an issue we have to be 100 percent right on. If we allow 9,999 Syrian refugees into the United States, and all of them are good people, but we allow one person in who's an ISIS killer -- we just get one person wrong, we've got a serious problem.

And there is not a single person in the national defense apparatus of this country that can guarantee you are going to be 100 percent right. And that's why as president, I'll take this very seriously.

BLITZER: Senator Paul, you didn't answer the question about the 2,000 Syrian refugees who are already here in the United States. Will you send them back or let them stay?

PAUL: What my bill would do would be only for refugees going forward. So I haven't taken a position on sending anyone home. But I have taken the position that we have a lot of problems here in our country. And that one of the things that we do -- charity is about giving your own money. Charity isn't giving someone else's money. To put everyone in government housing and food stamps and bring them in from around the world I think is a mistake. To give of your own money, I've given to my church. My church has helped people that came from Bosnia. That's a good thing.

But we shouldn't have a program where we just say that we're going to take care of the world's refugees. Nobody in the Middle East is doing anything. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait -- all the Gulf nations are doing nothing. They need to step up and take...

(CROSSTALK)

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: We have another -- we have another question. We have another question from Facebook. Let's listen.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

QUESTION: My name is Carla Hernandez. I'm from the University of Texas at Austin. And my question is directed to all the candidates.

If the Bible clearly states that we need to embrace those in need and not fear, how can we justify not accepting refugees?

BLITZER: Governor Christie, you say there should be a pause in allowing new refugees to come into the United States, including orphans under the age of five. What do you say to Carla?

CHRISTIE: What I say to Carla is that the first job of the president of the United States is to protect your safety and your security and the security and safety of your family. And this debate stops with me in the discussions with the FBI director.

CHRISTIE: Now, listen, I'm a former federal prosecutor, I know Jim Comey. We've worked together. He was the U.S. attorney in Manhattan when I was a U.S. attorney in New Jersey.

And when Jim Comey gets up before Congress and says, we cannot effectively vet these people, for me as president, that's the end of the conversation. We have to put America's security first.

(APPLAUSE)

The American people -- we on this stage need to open our ears. We need to open our ears. The American people are not whispering to us. They are screaming to us. And they're screaming to us that it's our job to actually make this government work.

It's so dysfunctional under Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. It's so ineffective. It's so ineffectual that the American people say, we don't trust them to do anything anymore. So I'm not going to let Syrian refugees, any Syrian refugees in this country.

And it was widows and orphans, by the way, and we now know from watching the San Bernardino attack that women can commit heinous, heinous acts against humanity just the same as men can do it.

And so I don't back away from that position for a minute. When the FBI director tells me that he can vet those people, then we'll consider it and not a moment before because your safety and security is what's most important to me.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Governor Kasich.

KASICH: You know, obviously, as president of the United States, we've got to keep the people safe. That's first and foremost.

But as governor of Ohio, I have an obligation to keep the 11.5 million people in Ohio safe. And we have been very effective with our Joint Terrorism Task Force, being able to make busts.

In fact, we just made one three-four weeks ago against a person who was favorable to ISIS living in Akron.

But let me tell you what is interesting about the administration. We had Central American miners that were placed in Ohio, and we never knew a thing about it. We didn't know where they were. And, in fact, we know now that some of them, there is a case going on where some of them may have been human-trafficked.

So when the administration tells me we have a great vetting process, the proof is in the pudding. They sent these miners to us. Our schools were disrupted. We didn't know where they were. And bad things happened to them. And now they tell me that we ought to be able to admit these Syrian refugees.

So, Wolf, look, people have accused me at times of having too big of a heart. You know, that's OK. But I have to also to say I must keep the people of my state safe. So we take a pause.

BLITZER: Thank you, Governor.

There is much more coming up. We are only just beginning. Coming up, what other global hot spots await the next president of the United States.

(APPLAUSE)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BLITZER: Welcome back to the CNN-Facebook Republican Presidential Debate. We're here at the Venetian Las Vegas. Tonight we have been focusing on the Middle East, but let's turn to some other world threats that you will potentially face as Commander in Chief.

Ms. Fiorina, candidates here have called the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un a maniac who is mentally unstable. Last week he said he now has a hydrogen bomb. If you were elected president, what would you do about Kim Jong-Un?

FIORINA: Well, first, Kim Jong-Un is a dangerous leader, without a doubt. And both Republican and Democrat administrations have been completely ineffective in dealing with him. So we must continue to isolate him. We will need China as part of that strategy.

China is a rising adversary. So one of the things we have to do if we want China's support is to push back on China. They, too, recognize one thing -- strength and their own economic interest.

I have done business in China for 25 years, so I know that in order to get China to cooperate with us, we must first actually retaliate against their cyber-attacks so they know we're serious. We have to push back on their desire to control the trade route through the South China Sea through which flows \$5 trillion worth of goods and services every year.

We cannot let them control the disputed islands, and we must work with the Australians, the South Koreans, the Japanese and the Filipinos to contain China. And then we must ask for their support and their help with North Korea. Because believe

BLITZER: Dr. Carson, what would you do about Kim Jong-Un?

CARSON: Well, I definitely believe that he is unstable, and I do, in fact, believe that China has a lot more influence with him than we do. But we also recognize that North Korea is in severe financial straits, and they have decided to use their resources to build their military, rather than to feed their people and to take care of the various humanitarian responsibilities that they have.

We can capitalize upon that. You know, we should use our economic power in lots of different ways. I think we can use that in order to keep Putin contained, because he is a one-horse show. Energy. And we have an abundance of energy, but we have archaic energy exportation rules. We need to get rid of those, allow ourselves to really make Europe dependent on us and other parts of the world dependent on us for energy. Put him back in his little box where he belongs.

And, you know, we need to be doing lots of other things with the resources that we have. So economic power works just as well as military power, perhaps even better. And speaking of that, our Military needs to be upgraded. You know, you look at things like our Ohio Class submarines, they're 25 years old. Our minuteman 3 missiles -- they are 34 years old. Our B-52 bombers -- 50 years old. You know, if we don't get the military right nothing else matters.

BLITZER: Thank you, Dr. Carson. Dana and Hugh you have questions as well.

BASH: Governor Christie, you've said if China launches a cyber- attack against the U.S. on your watch, "they're going to see cyber- warfare like they have never seen before." What exactly would that response look like?

CHRISTIE: Well, what it would like is, we have one of the great advantages of America being the open society that we are. It is, we are not hiding things from the American people, but China everyday is conducting business in a way that hides things from their people.

CHRISTIE: So if they want to come in and attack all the personnel records in the federal government, which they've done, and which -- they now have my Social Security number and my fingerprints, as well as maybe some other folks' who are on this stage.

The fact is, they need to be fought back on. And what we need to do is go at the things that they are most sensitive and most embarrassing to them; that they're hiding; get that information and put it out in public. Let the Chinese people start to digest how corrupt the Chinese government is; how they steal from the Chinese people; and how they're enriching oligarchs all throughout China.

They need to understand that. And we need to take those type of steps. This president has seen personnel records of people who have sacrificed for the American people and for the federal government stolen by the Chinese and he's done nothing in return. This is why -- this is what I said at the beginning that this administration, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton

incursions in the Middle East and in eastern Europe, and has led -- has led to significant problems in the Middle East as well, and the death and murder of lots of folks.

BASH: Governor Bush, what you just heard from Governor Christie, are you concerned that that could really escalate with China, that they would retaliate? And, for example, as the NSA has said, attack the U.S. and maybe it's power grid, which the Chinese have the capability to do?

BUSH: I completely agree with Chris. And this administration has been so lax. Think about it. Hillary Clinton is using a private server for -- where classified information go by. This is a -- this is a serious administration?

The president receives an inspector general's report that the Office of Personnel Management could be hacked into; they had antiquated firewalls; 23 million files have been -- are in the hands of the Chinese allegedly, including, by the way, members of the press, it turns out, last week. Maybe that's the only part that's good news, so that you guys can get a feel for what it's like now to see this type of attack.

This is something -- we have to have the best defensive capabilities. We need to coordinate all of our efforts with the private sector. We need to give them liability relief so that we can do that. And offensively, we need to have capabilities second to none. We need to create a situation where they know that there will be adverse impacts if they continue to do what they're doing.

They'll respect that. They'll respect a United States that is serious about protecting our -- our infrastructure. If we don't do it, we'll continue to see what's -- exactly what's happening, not just from the Chinese, by the way. The Russians and rogue actors, including ISIS -- this is a serious part of the 21st century security challenge that we face.

HEWITT: Mr. Trump...

(APPLAUSE)

... Dr. Carson just referenced the single most important job of the president, the command, the control and the care of our nuclear forces. And he mentioned the triad. The B-52s are older than I am. The missiles are old. The submarines are aging out. It's an executive order. It's a commander-in-chief decision.

What's your priority among our nuclear triad?

TRUMP: Well, first of all, I think we need somebody absolutely that we can trust, who is totally responsible; who really knows what he or she is doing. That is so powerful and so important. And one of the things that I'm frankly most proud of is that in 2003, 2004, I was totally against going into Iraq because you're going to destabilize the Middle East. I called it. I called it very strongly. And it was very important.

Frankly, I would have said get out of Syria; get out -- if we didn't have the power of weaponry today. The power is so massive that we can't just leave areas that 50 years ago or 75 years ago we wouldn't care. It was hand-to-hand combat.

The biggest problem this world has today is not President Obama with global warming, which is inconceivable, this is what he's saying. The biggest problem we have is nuclear -- nuclear proliferation and having some maniac, having some madman go out and get a nuclear weapon. That's in my opinion, that is the single biggest problem that our country faces right now.

HEWITT: Of the three legs of the triad, though, do you have a priority? I want to go to Senator Rubio after that and ask him.

TRUMP: I think -- I think, for me, nuclear is just the power, the devastation is very important to me.

HEWITT: Senator Rubio, do you have a response?

RUBIO: I do. First, let's explain to people at home who the triad -- what the triad is. Maybe a lot of people haven't heard that terminology before. The triad is our ability of the United States to conduct nuclear attacks using airplanes, using missiles launched from silos or from the ground, and also from our nuclear subs' ability to attack. And it's important -- all three of them are critical. It gives us the ability at deterrence.

Now, some have become more critical than others; for example, the submarines. And that's the Ohio Class submarine that needs to be modernized. The air component also needs to be modernized. The B-52, as someone earlier pointed out, is an outdated model that was flown by the grandparents of people that are flying it now. And we need a serious modernization program as well on our silo-launched missiles. All three are critical for the defense of the country.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator Rubio.

Some of you on this stage have questioned whether your opponents have temperament, the right temperament, to be in control of the nuclear codes.

Dana, you have a question on this?

BASH: Mr. Trump, just this weekend you said Senator Cruz is not qualified to be president because he doesn't have the right temperament and acted like a maniac when he arrived in the Senate. But last month you said you were open to naming Senator Cruz as your running mate.

TRUMP: I did.

BASH: So why would you be willing to put somebody who's a maniac one heartbeat away from the presidency?

TRUMP: Let me just say that I have gotten to know him over the last three or four days. He has a wonderful temperament.

TRUMP: He's just fine. Don't worry about it.

(APPLAUSE)

BASH: Okay.

Senator Cruz. Senator Cruz, you have not been willing to attack Mr. Trump in public.

TRUMP: You better not attack...

(LAUGHTER)

BASH: But you did question his judgment in having control of American's nuclear arsenal during a private meeting with supporters. Why are you willing to say things about him in private and not in public?

CRUZ: Dana, what I said in private is exactly what I'll say here, which is that the judgment that every voter is making of every one of us up here is who has the experience, who has the vision, who has the judgment to be commander in chief. That is the most important decision for the voters to make. That's a standard I'm held to. And it's a standard everyone else is held to.

And I will note, you know, in the whole course of this discussion about our foreign policy threats, it actually illustrates the need for clarity of focus.

You know, my daughters, Caroline and Catherine, came tonight. They're 7 and 5. And you think about the Los Angeles schools canceling their schools today.

And every parent is wondering, how do we keep our kids safe? We need a commander in chief who does what Ronald Reagan did with communism, which is he set out a global strategy to defeat Soviet communism. And he directed all of his...

(CROSSTALK)

CRUZ: I'm answering the question, Dana.

He directed all of his forces to defeating communism.

One of the things we've seen here is how easy it is for Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton to get distracted from dealing with radical Islamic terrorism. They won't even call it by its name.

We need a president who stands up, number one, and says, we will defeat ISIS. And number two, says the greatest national security threat facing America is a nuclear Iran.

BASH: Senator, senator, I just...

CRUZ: And we need to be focused on defeating...

BASH: Senator, a lot of people have seen...

CRUZ: ... defeating radical Islamic terrorists.

BASH: ... a lot of people have seen these comments you made in private. I just want to clarify what you're saying right now is you do believe Mr. Trump has the judgment to be commander in chief?

CRUZ: What I'm saying, Dana, is that is a judgment for every voter to make. What I can tell you is all nine of the people here would make an infinitely better commander in chief than Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you, senator. Thank you.

CRUZ: And there is a real danger, Dana, when people get distracted.

I'm answering the question, Wolf.

CRUZ: There's a real danger when people get distracted by peripheral issues. They get distracted by democracy building. They get distracted about military conflicts. We need to focus on defeating jihadism. ISIS and Iran have declared war on America, and we need a commander in chief who will do everything necessary to keep our children safe.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

CRUZ: And I will do everything necessary to keep our children safe.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

We're a month and a half away now from the first real test who will be the Republican presidential nominee.

Hugh, you have a question?

HEWITT: My listeners tell me again and again they are worried that Hillary Clinton will win the White House because you'll

run as an independent. Are you ready to assure Republicans tonight that you will run as a Republican and abide by the decision of the Republicans?

TRUMP: I really am. I'll be honest, I really am.

(APPLAUSE)

TRUMP: I mean, the people have been putting me...

(APPLAUSE)

TRUMP: I really am.

(APPLAUSE)

HEWITT: Dr. Carson, last week...

TRUMP: Let me just. Can I just finish my...

HEWITT: Please.

TRUMP: I've gained great respect for the Republican leadership. I've gained great respect for many -- and I'm going to even say -- I mean, in different forms for the people on the dais, in different forms.

(LAUGHTER)

TRUMP: In different forms.

But I have great respect for the people I have met through this process. I've never done this process before. I've never been a politician. I mean, for the last six months I've been a politician.

But I will tell you, I am totally committed to the Republican Party. I feel very honored to be the front runner.

(APPLAUSE) TRUMP: And I think I'll do very well if I'm chosen. If I'm so fortunate to be chosen, I think I'll do very well.

Polls have come out recently saying I would beat Hillary. I will do everything in my power to beat Hillary Clinton, I promise you.

(APPLAUSE)

HEWITT: Dr. Carson, Mr. Trump just committed to stay the distance regardless of the result. How about you?

CARSON: Well, you know, the statement that I made last week, that I would leave the party was contingent upon whether in fact the party acts like they have in the past with a lot of subterfuge and dishonesty, or like they're going act now because I spike to Reince Priebus, and he assured me that the Washington Post writer had it all wrong, and that they're not be engaging in anything to thwart the will of the people.

That's why I got into this race, as a member of we the people, to try bring some honesty and integrity back to the process.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: All right. Candidates, we have more coming up. When we come back, everyone will have an opportunity to explain why this particular candidate, each of you on the stage, believes he or she should be the Republican presidential nominee.

(APPLAUSE)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BLITZER: Now it's time for the closing statements from the candidates. Each one has 30 seconds.

Senator Paul.

PAUL: The greatest threat to our national security is our debt. We borrow a million dollars a minute. And whose fault is it? Well, frankly, it's both parties' fault. You have those on the right who clamor and say, oh, we will spend anything on the military, and those on the left who say the same for domestic welfare.

But what most Americans don't realize is there is an unholy alliance. They come together. There's a secret handshake. We spend more money on everything. And we are not stronger nation if we go further into debt. We are not projecting power from bankruptcy court.

To me, there is no greater threat than our debt. I'm the only fiscal conservative on the stage because I'm willing to hold the line on all spending. I hope you will consider me in the election. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Governor Kasich. KASICH: No Republican has ever been elected president of the United States without winning Ohio. Let me give you a little tip on how you win Ohio, it's reform, it's hope, it's growth, it's opportunity, and it's security.

The people of Ohio are the people of America. The people of America are reflected in Ohio. Our message has to be big, and

bold, and positive, and connect, not just with people's heads but also connect with their hearts.

If we do it, we will beat Hillary Clinton, and we will run the White House, and we will strengthen and fix America, I promise you.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Governor Christie.

CHRISTIE: On September 10th, 2001, I was named chief federal prosecutor in New Jersey and on September 11th, 2001, my wife and my brother who are in the audience tonight went through the World Trade Center and to their offices just blocks away from the Trade Center.

I lost touch with them for six hours that day and prayed that they were alive. Luckily, they were sent home. But many of our friends and others in our neighborhood lost their lives that day.

Terrorism -- radical jihadist terrorism is not theoretical to me. It's real. And for seven years, I spent my life protecting our country against another one of those attacks. You won't have to worry when I'm President of the United States whether that can be done because I've already done it. I want the chance to do it again to protect you, your children and your families.

If you give me the chance and give me your vote I will protect America from the wars that are being brought to our door step.

BLITZER: Ms. Fiorina.

FIORINA: I too remember September 11th. I remember immediately putting into place security procedures all throughout our company that did business in 170 countries where we thought corporate interests would be attacked next. To take our country back, to keep our nation safe, we have to begin by beating Hillary Clinton.

We need to unify our party. We need to better than our government, which 75 percent of the American people now think is corrupt and incompetent. They're right. We need to better than our politics. 80 percent think we have a professional/political class of both parties that cares more about its power, position and privilege than actually on getting anything done.

We need to unify our party, we need a real Conservative in the White House, and we need to beat Hillary Clinton to take our country back and keep our nation safe.

I can. I am. And together, if you join me, we will take our country back.

BLITZER: Governor Bush. BUSH: Ask yourself, which candidate will keep you and our country safer, stronger and freer?

proven record suggests that -- my detailed plans will fortify our national and economic security. And my proven record as governor makes -- will give you a sense that I don't make false promises. I deliver real results.

For America to be safe and sound, I ask for your support. Thank you all very much.

BLITZER: Senator Rubio.

RUBIO: Thank you. As we near the end of this year, we enter one of the most important elections in a generation. For what's at stake in this election is not simply what party's going to be in charge. But our very identity as a people and as a nation. For over 200 years this has been a special country. A unique place where anyone from anywhere can achieve anything. But now millions of Americans feel like they're being left behind. Insecure in their future and unsafe in the face of terrorism. This election is about electing a president that will restore our economic vibrancy so that the American dream can expand to reach more people and change more lives than ever before. And rebuild our Military and our intelligence programs so that we can remain the strongest nation on earth. Tonight I ask you for your vote.

If you do this, we will rebuild this country, and together we will usher in a new American century -- the greatest era in the history of this great land.

BLITZER: Senator Cruz.

CRUZ: Judgment, strength, clarity and trust. Barack Obama has said he doesn't believe in American leadership or America winning -- he is wrong. America can win again and we will win again. Ronald Reagan reignited the American economy, rebuilt the Military, bankrupted the Soviet Union and defeated Soviet Communism. I will do the same thing.

Cutting taxes, cutting regulation, unleashing small businesses and rebuilding the Military to defeat radical Islamic terrorism -- our strategy is simple. We win, they lose. We've done it before and we can do it again.

BLITZER: Dr. Carson.

CARSON: I've been fortunate enough to travel to 58 different countries and I thank God everyday that I was born in this country. The most exceptional country that the world has ever known. And I want to make sure that we preserve that exceptionalism for the next generation. My mother told me if I work hard and I really believed in American principles and I believed in God, anything is possible. I believe that is true, and that's why I'm not anxious to give away American values and principles for the sake of political correctness.

TRUMP: Our country doesn't win anymore. We don't win on trade. We don't win on the military. We can't defeat ISIS. We're not taking care of our great people, the veterans. We're not taking care of them.

We have to change our whole way, our health care system is a disaster. It's going to implode in 2017, just like you're sitting

there. It doesn't work. Nothing works in our country. If I'm elected president, we will win again. We will win a lot. And we're going to have a great, great country, greater than ever before.

Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thanks to all the Republican presidential candidates. That does it for this Republican presidential debate.

On behalf of everyone at CNN, we want to thank the candidates, Facebook, the Republican National Committee, and the Venetian Las Vegas. My thanks also to Hugh Hewitt and Dana Bash.

We especially want to wish everyone a very merry Christmas, happy holidays, especially to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines protecting us around the world.

Anderson Cooper picks up our coverage of tonight's debate right now -- Anderson.

Your Three.

Video curated for you.



Husband finds love, loss in baseball



In search of the Delmarva fox squirrel
0:00



'Did you fall from heaven?': D.C.'s pick-up lines
2:02

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