

The GOP "Final Four" in the Presidential race



Joel Rosenberg's Report on the Iowa Presidential Forum

(Des Moines, Iowa) ? As America continues hurtling down a dangerous path toward **implosion**, as darkness falls in the Middle East and North Africa, as the forces of evil advance and the forces of freedom retreat, anyone who cares about the American people and the people of the epicenter needs to pay very close attention to the American presidential race.

Indeed, as I **explained** in my last column:

We need a President who understands that [Western leaders ignore the threat of Apocalyptic Islam at their peril.](#)]

- We need a Commander-in-Chief who truly understands the magnitude of the threats posed by Radical and Apocalyptic Islam.
- We need a President who has serious ideas about how to neutralize such threats, and has solid national experience that can assure us that he or she is really ready to confront this evil.
- We need a President who sees Israel as a faithful ally ? not an adversary ? in this showdown with the jihadists.
- We need a President who rejects the insane Iran nuclear deal, and the notion of allowing Russia and Iran to run wild in Syria.
- Commander-in-Chief is not an entry level position.
- There is no time for on-the-job training in the White House for a new President who has little or no experience thinking about foreign policy and national security issues.
- The next President must come in ready for war ? because that's what we're in, and the stakes are simply too high to go with an untested outsider or newcomer.

This is why I accepted the invitation to attend the **presidential forum** here in Des Moines on Friday night that was sponsored and hosted by **The Family Leader**. This is why I traveled 27 hours from Israel to get there ? to have the opportunity to meet, listen to and assess seven of the most compelling candidates vying to be the next Commander-in-Chief. I'm so glad I did. This was the most fascinating, informative and revealing political event I've been to in 25 years.

Moderator Frank Luntz did a fantastic job getting most of the candidates ? most, but not quite all ? to really open up and help the crowd of some 1,600 Evangelical Iowans to better understand the faith, values and experience that drives and animates them. This was far superior to any of the debates that have been held so far. It wasn't a cage match. It was a conversation that gave us a unique window into the heart of these candidates.

It was an honor to be asked to close the event in prayer. Indeed, I'm deeply grateful to Family Leader president Bob Vander Plaats for asking me to do so. I prayed for the Lord to bless and protect all the candidates and their families and to keep them safe. In the spirit of 2 Chronicles 7:14, I also asked the Lord to forgive us of our sins and help us turn back to Him. I asked the Lord to grant America another Great Awakening, even though we don't deserve it, and to show us whom He is raising up to lead this

nation in 2017 and beyond.

?If my people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.? (2 Chronicles 7:14) Amen.

I so wish I could take the time to share with you all the intriguing moments, key anecdotes and quotes from the event, as well as share with you my conversations with some of the candidates and many of the attendees. But at this point I sense two things are best.

First, let me highly recommend that you watch entire Presidential Family Forum.

YouTube Video: [YouTube.com/watch?v=b_CnVvNy8U0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_CnVvNy8U0)

Please also forward this link to family and friends and colleagues. Encourage them to carve out some time to watch as well. Then, please post your comments on the forum and this column on our **?Epicenter Team? page on Facebook**. I'm eager to know what you think. Above all, please pray and fast for the nation, for the candidates, and for wisdom on whom to support.

Second, allow me to share with you my key takeaways from this weekend in Iowa, and from the presidential race over all. Many of you have been asking for my assessment of the candidates. Thus far, I have written and shared mostly about the Biblical principles that are guiding me in my evaluation and decision-making process (i.e., prayerfully seeking a ?Josiah?). But today I do feel the freedom from the Lord to write more specifically about how I see the candidates, given that we are a mere 70 days or so from the actual voting in the Iowa caucuses. I hope you'll find these notes and observations helpful as you prayerfully seek the Lord for wisdom about whom to support.

I believe the GOP presidential race has come down at this point to a ?Final Four? ? four candidates who deserve the most careful scrutiny, prayer and consideration. Maybe this ?Final Four? idea comes from the fact that I graduated from Syracuse University. A touch of March Madness, perhaps. But it is where I've come down after months of analyzing the race closely. More on this in a moment.

- It was very encouraging to see that Evangelical Christian leaders and activists here truly get the high stakes of this election. They know that we are not just facing a bumpy patch in American history. We're racing towards implosion. Many of them believe, as do I, that we urgently need to unify around a candidate who has the vision, strategies and experience to turn this ship of state around and get us headed in the right direction. I talked to dozens of Iowans this weekend and was deeply touched by how seriously they are taking their ?first in the nation? responsibility to study and vet the candidates. God bless these folks! May their tribe increase!

- While I'm trying very hard in my life not to be a partisan ? indeed, I want Democrats, Republicans and Independents to come together and work together for the good of the country ? the sad reality is that there are not Democrats running for president whom I could support. Neither Hillary nor Bernie nor any of the others will protect the sanctity of innocent human life, or define and defend marriage as a sacred union between one man or one woman, or work to safeguard religious liberty in America, or truly reform and simplify the tax code and reduce the tax burden on the American people, or declare the Iran deal as insane and thus null and void, or move decisively to neutralize the Iran and ISIS threats. That leaves me and other Evangelicals looking only to the GOP field for credible options.

- Many Iowans ? well over half the electorate, I'm told by sharp political analysts here ? really haven't made a decision of which candidate to back. They're telling pollsters what their leanings are at any given moment, but the constantly shifting polls indicate that no one has locked in with a favorite yet. With 70+ days yet to go, we are likely to see many more changes ahead. Remember: Rand Paul was once a frontrunner. So was Mike Huckabee. So was Jeb Bush, and Scott Walker, and Donald Trump, and Ben Carson. The volatility is reminiscent of the 2012 cycle ? so expect more changes.

Donald Trump did not attend Friday's forum. But Trump poses a mortal threat to the conservative movement. He is not a conservative by any stretch of the imagination. He supports Partial Birth Abortion. He supports single-payer health insurance. He has long supported liberal Democrats. He has no foreign policy or national security experience. He has a crazy \$10 trillion tax cut plan. (Last time he ran in 2000 he had a crazy \$5.7 trillion tax increase plan; that would have been half of the GDP of the nation at the time.) He's a narcissist who is very shrewdly tapping into deep popular rage against Washington and using it for his own ends, to

gain attention, and ultimately to gain power and more wealth. Pundits keep predicting his demise, but let's be honest: his poll numbers remain strong, especially in Iowa and New Hampshire. If he wins both, he could also win South Carolina, and the GOP nomination.

- A big question then is: What conservative can stop Trump?

Another big question I'm asking is this: Is God raising up a leader like Josiah who truly loves the Lord, has a humble heart, and also has the vision, courage and experience to make bold, sweeping reforms to try to turn America around and get us back on the right track? **(for a more detailed explanation of what I mean by the need for a ?Josiah,? please click [here](#))**

- The people I spoke with don't want to simply stop Trump. They are praying that the Lord will raise up a leader who can tap the incredible rage at the grassroots level, channel it, win the nomination and the presidency, and win a national mandate to make bold conservative domestic changes in Washington, while also truly leading the war against the forces of Radical and Apocalyptic Islam. Nothing less will suffice. I completely agree.
- Of the 17 candidates that started in the GOP field, three have dropped out.
- Of the 14 that remain, 7 chose not to come to address these Christian grassroots activists.
- I believe the nominee will come ? or should come ? from one of the 7 candidates that did attend.
- Of these seven, however, I believe three are not ready to be president.

Dr. Ben Carson ? he's clearly a genius, a gifted neurosurgeon, a man of faith, and an incredible kind and gracious man. It was an honor to finally meet him this weekend. I totally see the appeal and why he has surged in the polls. He is a national asset. The problem is that he has absolutely no foreign policy or national security experience. Nor does he have solid, specific, crisp, consistent, well-thought through answers for how to make big changes in Washington. For example, it is a bit odd that such a wonderful doctor hasn't introduced a health care reform plan to replace ObamaCare, right? Such facts don't make Carson a bad person. Not at all. But they do mean that while Dr. Carson is good man, he simply isn't prepared to be president at this time. This is why his poll numbers are starting to fade. That said, I have no doubt God can use him to serve this country in a key way. I think he could make an amazing Surgeon General, for example.

Carly Fiorina ? she has real strengths as a woman of deep faith, and impressive global business experience. It was a blessing to meet her this weekend. I've enjoyed seeing her star rise. Her first two debates were remarkably impressive. However, Mrs. Fiorina also has very little foreign policy and national security experience. After the Paris attacks ? and in the wake of the rise of ISIS and the Iran nuclear threat ? it's simply not wise to choose someone who isn't ready to lead the nation to war. As I've noted above, Commander-in-Chief is not an entry-level position. What's more, I have to say I'm surprised that a woman of such business accomplishments hasn't laid out a detailed tax reform and economic growth plan. For such reasons, her poll numbers are drifting downward now after a spike. That said, I like her a lot. I'm deeply grateful for her passionate pro-life advocacy. She's very open and genuine about her faith, which I love and deeply respect. Indeed, I believe she has a real contribution to make to the nation. She would make a great Commerce Secretary, Ambassador or other Cabinet officer. Eager to see where God takes her.

Sen. Rand Paul ? as I have written before (see [here](#), and [here](#)), he's an isolationist, he's not a friend of Israel, and he would be a disaster as president as we face threats from Russia, Iran, ISIS, China and North Korea. That said, he's an ardent champion of liberty, he's pro-life, he wants to dramatically reduce the role of government, and he supports a flat tax, among other strengths. So I don't want him to lose his Senate seat. But I believe he will withdraw from the presidential race soon.

I believe the GOP presidential race has come down at this point to a ?Final Four? ? Cruz, Rubio, Santorum and Huckabee.

- Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio are the two brilliant, up-and-coming, and very compelling young Cuban conservatives.
- Gov. Huckabee and former Sen. Rick Santorum are the two deeply principled, tried and tested, and very experienced previous Iowa Caucus winners.

On the plus side, Cruz and Rubio have money, organization and some momentum. They are incredibly attractive and talented candidates and powerful communicators. They hail from big states, Texas and Florida, respectively. They are both devout Evangelical Christians. Both are strongly pro-life. Both are passionate about defending religious liberty. They both love Israel. They have solid foreign policy credentials. Cruz serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee, while Rubio serves on both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Intelligence Committee. They both seem to understand the threat of Radical Islam and talk about it a great deal. They have both offered impressive pro-growth tax reform plans. **Cruz wants a flat tax ? see details [here](#).**

Meanwhile, **Rubio proposes a two-rate plan along the Reagan '86 model ? see details [here](#).** Either of one of them could win the nomination and both offer the face and voice of a new, young, dynamic generation of conservative leadership.

On the minus side, both Cruz and Rubio are first term Senators and have very few accomplishments yet on the national stage. We simply haven't seen them tested over the long haul. They have changed a number of their positions in a relatively short

period of time. For some of Rubio's changes, see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). For some of Cruz's changes, see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). Some are accusing the two of changing positions for political purposes, of being 'flip-floppers' or even opportunists. I'm not sure that's fair. I think they are works in progress ? new to Washington and finding it challenging to consistently apply their principles to the major issues of the day. But such charges do give me pause because the stakes are so high. I want to be sure what the next president will do in office. I don't want to constantly wonder if a Republican president will zig-zag or betray me and the country in the Oval Office. Consider the marriage issue, for example. Both Cruz and Rubio are on the record as pro-marriage. I believe them. The question is this: how hard will they defend the institution of one-man/one-woman marriage? How will they handle the recent Supreme Court decision sanctioning same-sex marriage and get us back to traditional, Biblical marriage? Will they stand firm on principle, and truly fight for our values with strategies than can win, or will they dodge or avoid the issue as President and say marriage is a lost cause? How will they be influenced by the media, by donors, by friends who disagree with them and want them to avoid 'messy social issues'? I'm not saying either or both will fold under pressure. I'm simply saying they are so new. They don't have a long track record we can observe to give us deep confidence of how they will handle the intense pressures in Washington to cave on critical matters.

Also on the minus side: their positions on immigration. Rubio admits he made a mistake when he joined the '**Gang of Eight**' on **comprehensive immigration reform that included amnesty**. He now promises to focus first on securing the border before dealing with the 11 million undocumented workers and residents in the U.S. It is good that he sees the mistake and is working to correct it. But let's be honest: that was a major mistake if you oppose amnesty (as I do), so it's hard to ignore. **Cruz, however, also supports a form of amnesty** ? that is, while he would not grant full citizenship to illegal aliens, he has proposed allowing them to stay in the U.S. in a legal status. Moreover, rather than slowing down or cutting legal immigration to allow more Americans to find good jobs and see their wages rise, **Cruz actually proposed a 500% increase in H1-B visas**. That's a problem for me. Now he's **backing off** on this a bit, recalibrating his position. But this does raise questions about whether he understands how angry Americans are about Washington's refusal to protect American workers by sealing the border, requiring illegal immigrants to return home, and giving American citizens first crack at good jobs and higher wages.

- To be fair, every candidate has weaknesses, as well as strengths. Our job is to study each candidate carefully and prayerfully assess which are the more serious flaws, and what we can live with.

Now let's turn to the two previous Iowa Caucus winners ? Huckabee and Santorum. They are lagging far behind in the polls, even here in Iowa. Still, **they have decades of policy and political achievements under the belts, Iowans ? and conservatives nationally ? have deep respect for them, and thus they are worth considering very seriously.**

Gov. Mike Huckabee ? he was a governor for a decade so he has lots of experience. At the time, Arkansas was a largely Democrat state. So Huckabee made some compromises conservatives don't like ? he raised taxes, he increased spending, and so forth. But he also is responsible for helping turn Arkansas into a red state ? it's now a Republican conservative environment because people saw and liked how Huckabee led. He is deeply pro-life and strongly pro-marriage. I have not a single doubt he would govern as president to protect life (including banning all abortions) and trying to turn the country back to a pro-marriage policy. There's no concern he will 'go soft' or 'flip flop' on these issues. He's also funny, personable, and an effective communicator. He has a deep love for Israel and has been there forty or fifty times. He knows Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders well and personally and would totally restore the U.S.-Israel alliance. That said, he doesn't have foreign policy and national security experience beyond Israel. What's more, he supports the Fair Tax but hasn't laid out a specific plan to make it work. That's a problem. And while I'm glad he so strongly supports keeping our promises to seniors on Social Security, Huckabee seems resistant to entitlement reform which is a mistake since these programs are leading the nation towards bankruptcy. Not long ago, Huckabee was the front-runner in Iowa, South Carolina and nationally. But he has faded to the back of the pack. Can he turn things around? I honestly don't know.

Sen. Rick Santorum ? he, too, is deeply pro-life and pro-marriage and a devout born again Catholic who was came to a personal relationship with Christ while in the Senate, as he shared at the forum. Indeed, much of the pro-life legislation that has been passed in Washington in the last generation was written by him. For example, he wrote the law that banned Partial Birth Abortion, and got it passed with bipartisan support, and got it signed into law after multiple vetoes. That's impressive. He has long fought to defend traditional, Biblical marriage, despite intense ? and often cruel ? attacks by the Left and the media. I have no doubt he would govern on principle on these issues in the Oval Office and there's no fear of him folding or caving. On economic growth, I have to say I absolutely love his '**20/20 Flat Tax**' **proposal** and '**Economic Freedom Agenda**.' (see also [here](#).) His **immigration plan** is far and away the most conservative and principled in the field ? including no amnesty of any kind, and a 25% cut in legal immigration. This is why he **received an 'A' rating** from a leading national immigration watchdog group, the highest in the field of presidential contenders. What's more, Santorum was the author of major conservative reform bills in the Senate ? from welfare reform (ending

welfare as we know it) to Health Savings Accounts ? and was able to build bipartisan support to get them passed, sometimes over repeated presidential vetoes. Perhaps more than any candidate running, he has actually passed big reforms on the national stage despite the toxic political environment in Washington. He has the fire and passion of a Ted Cruz; but he has also built bipartisan coalitions to get big legislation passed.

What makes Santorum particularly distinctive in this cycle, however, is his expertise on foreign policy and national security issues. His first vote ever as a freshmen Congressman in January 1991 was not to name some post office but to go to war with Saddam Hussein to remove Iraq from Kuwait. He has been serious about dealing with Mideast terror and Radical Islam ever since. Indeed, it was Santorum who wrote the original law to impose economic sanctions on Iran. And as he said in the forum on Friday night, who tried to stop that those sanctions from passing? Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, John Kerry and Joe Biden. Interesting. Santorum served eight years on the Senate Armed Services Committee. In 2006, he started warning of that Radical Islam was a ?Gathering Storm? we must deal with. He has spoken out clearly about the threat of Apocalyptic Islam, as well. Last August when Hamas was firing 4,500 rockets and missiles at Israel, Santorum brought a delegation of Evangelical pastors on a solidarity mission to stand with Israel. He asked me to be part of that delegation, and I was honored to. It was interesting to see him interacting with Israeli leaders. He really gets this stuff. Many have ignored him, or tried to marginalize him, but he's been right and consistent on these issues for 25 years. Arguably more than any other candidate besides Sen. Lindsey Graham, he is the best prepared to be Commander-in-Chief. Santorum is also a very effective debater who would do well up against Hillary. He's become a far better communicator over the past four years, and his **?Blue Collar Conservative?** message would be very effective in swing states in the general elections.

- Still, Santorum is far behind in the polls. True, his support came late in the Iowa caucus process last time. Indeed, he eventually won the caucuses and 11 states, coming very close to winning Ohio and Michigan and earning the nomination. Could it happen again? It could. Iowans like and respect him here. They could break late for him. But right now they seem to be more interested in the new faces. Thus far, Santorum's Super PAC hasn't raised enough money to launch an ad campaign to make a strong case for their man. The competition Santorum faces for conservative and Evangelical voters is stronger this time. In the wake of the Paris attacks, I can see a path to the nomination for Santorum ? more so than for Huckabee, though I like them both and am friends with both ? but it is getting late.

- Which brings us back to the two Cuban conservatives. I just met Marco Rubio for the first time on Friday night. We spent 15 or 20 minutes together, one-on-one, before the forum. I was deeply impressed. I have met Ted Cruz a number of times over the last several years, and spent a day with his dad, Rafael Cruz, in August 2014. Love Rafel. Great guy. Passionate. Fascinating. Engaging. And gracious. Yet I find myself reluctant about Ted. In person, I have found him shy, even awkward. And his public style can be off-putting to some. Not to me, not entirely. I love Ted's passion. He's brilliant, and he's a fighter. And conservatives are gravitating towards him, and I can see why. But others are reluctant, like I am, and we're trying to figure out why.

- Rubio is personally warmer, more winsome, and a more effective communicator than Cruz. He is more empathetic and comes across as a team builder, a unifier. I suspect Marco could be more effective in a debate with Hillary. Cruz knows how to win a debate on points ? few do it better ? but presidential debates are not high school and college debates. You're not debating to score points with judges but to win trust with voters. And while I have little doubt Cruz could win the GOP nomination, I wonder if he would come across as too strident, too doctrinaire on stage with Hillary, and put the general election in jeopardy. Then again, I see Cruz trying to use more stories and more humor than before. He certainly did on Friday night. And Ted's passion and fire certainly fits with the mood of much of the country that is ready to burn Washington to the ground, metaphorically, at least. Perhaps my reluctance and that of others will fade. Perhaps Cruz can keep the fire of his convictions yet learn to be not just a fighter but a team builder, a unifier within the party and the nation.

- Still, we have to keep Trump in mind. The question is not who is the perfect conservative candidate. The questions for me are: 1) Who is the Lord raising up to lead America? 2) Are one of these four men a ?Josiah?? 3) Which one can win Iowa, thus slowing down or derailing the Trump momentum? and 4) Who can win next November? The answer ? I honestly am not sure yet. I see flaws in each of the ?Final Four,? but I also see great strengths and much potential. Would you join me in studying these four more carefully, and praying and pleading for the Lord to have mercy on our nation and give us the leader we need, not the one we deserve?

God bless you, and may God continue blessing America.

NOTE: These are my own personal views. I offer them in my individual capacity as an American citizen. They do not reflect or represent the position of The Joshua Fund, a non-profit organization, or any other group or organization.

Photo Credit: Screen shot from video of Forum