

## 2016 1st QUARTER MEET THE PRESS TOPICS

**Chuck Todd is NBC News Political Director and the moderator of "Meet the Press," the flagship Sunday Morning public affairs program and longest-running broadcast in television history.**

**"Meet the Press" is seen on the NBC Television Network from 9-10 a.m. ET in most markets. In New York City and Washington D.C., the broadcast is seen from 10:30-11:30 a.m. ET.**

**The program re-airs on MSNBC Sunday afternoons at 2 p.m. ET/11 a.m. PT and again at 2 a.m. ET/11 p.m. PT and 4 a.m. ET/1 a.m. PT Monday. At these times, "Meet The Press" will also air on SIRIUS channel 90 and XM channel 120.**

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**COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS" (1/3/16): SUNDAY EXCLUSIVES: GOV. KASICH, SEN. PAUL; ALSO – GUNS IN AMERICA: CAPT. KELLY (RET.), TEXAS LT. GOV. PATRICK**

**SUNDAY EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE GOV. JOHN KASICH (R-OHIO)**

Presidential candidate **Gov. John Kasich (R-Ohio)** speaks with Chuck Todd about his attacks against the two other Republican establishment candidates – Gov. Christie and former Gov. Bush – as well as his strategy a month out from Iowa and New Hampshire.

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**SUNDAY EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE SEN. RAND PAUL (R-KY.)**

Once hailed "the most interesting man in politics" by Time, presidential candidate **Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.)** now trails in the polls as the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary loom; he joins the show from Kentucky to address the future of his presidential campaign.

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**THE FUTURE OF GUN CONTROL**

President Obama is expected to press ahead with executive actions on gun control this month, meeting with Attorney General Loretta Lynch to discuss the measures on Monday.

**Capt. Mark Kelly (Ret.)**, husband of former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords who was injured in a 2011 mass shooting, joins the show after having met with President Obama this past month to discuss gun control.

Meanwhile, Texas is becoming more gun-friendly with the passage of a law this week allowing openly-displayed handguns. **Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick (R-Texas)** joins the show to address the ongoing debate about the state's controversial gun culture.

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### **NEW NBC NEWS/ESQUIRE POLL: ANGER IN AMERICA**

A new NBC News/Esquire poll reveals the sources and expressions of American anger. **Esquire Senior Editor Richard Dorment** joins the show to discuss the poll's findings, debuting on "Meet the Press."

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### **ON THE TRAIL**

NBC News correspondents **Kristen Welker** and **Hallie Jackson** join "Meet the Press" live from the campaign trail as presidential candidates kick off the New Year with campaigning in full swing.

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### **THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

Will the latest top-level resignations from Ben Carson's campaign hurt his efforts going forward? How will Donald Trump's promised \$2 million/week ad buy affect the race? Will Jeb Bush's shift to a ground game in swing states boost his place in the polls? The roundtable discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

#### **Sara Fagen**

Partner, DDC; former White House Political Director for President George W. Bush

#### **Chris Matthews**

Host, MSNBC's "Hardball"

#### **Eugene Robinson**

Columnist, The Washington Post

#### **Jennifer Rubin**

Columnist, The Washington Post

## **COMING UP ON “MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD” 1/10/16: DONALD TRUMP; WH CHIEF OF STAFF DENIS MCDONOUGH**

### **INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE DONALD TRUMP**

After a week of disrupting his rivals’ campaigns, Donald Trump speaks with Chuck Todd on the campaign trail in Iowa about his campaign, his business and his role in the Republican Party.

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### **INTERVIEW WITH DENIS MCDONOUGH, WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF**

White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough joins the show on set to preview the president’s State of the Union address Tuesday evening.

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### **THE GOP ESTABLISHMENT V. DONALD TRUMP**

If Sen. Cruz is the “poster boy of the Republican who won’t compromise within his party,” as Alex Castellanos has noted, should establishment Republicans be focused more on “stop Trump” efforts or “stop Cruz” efforts? Alex Castellanos and Ben Ginsberg join the panel to discuss the state of the party.

#### **Alex Castellanos**

Republican Strategist

#### **Ben Ginsberg**

Republican Lawyer & Strategist

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### **WEEK IN POLITICS**

With gun control and birtherism at the forefront of political conversation this week, the roundtable tackles the state of politics three weeks out from the Iowa caucuses.

#### **Helene Cooper**

Pentagon Correspondent, The New York Times

**Robert Costa**

National Political Reporter, The Washington Post

**Jeff Greenfield**

Former Senior Political Correspondent, CBS News

**Jennifer Jacobs**

Chief Politics Reporter, Des Moines Register

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Transcript - Meet the Press - **January 17, 2016**

CHUCK TODD:

This Sunday, the Democratic showdown. That object in Hillary Clinton's rearview mirror is closer than it appears. She now knows she's in a dead heat with Bernie Sanders in Iowa and New Hampshire.

HILLARY CLINTON:

If he has a plan, he should roll it out and explain it to people so you can make an informed decision.

CHUCK TODD:

Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders join me this morning. Plus, the Republican Donald Trump opening an even bigger lead, while the Trump-Cruz bromance comes to an end.

DONALD TRUMP:

He's got bank loans from Goldman Sachs, he's got bank loans from CitiBank.

CHUCK TODD:

This morning, two Republicans hoping to benefit from the Trump-Cruz fight. Senator Marco Rubio and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. And my sit-down with Amal Clooney, the human rights lawyer and wife of George Clooney, trying to rally America to save an island paradise from the threat of ISIS.

AMAL CLOONEY:

If you're a woman lying on a beach in the Maldives, you might want to know that a kilometer away, another woman is being flogged.

CHUCK TODD:

Joining me this morning for insight and analysis are Republican strategist Steve Schmidt, MSNBC's Joy-Ann Reid, President Obama's 2012 deputy campaign manager Stephanie Cutter, and radio talk show host Hugh Hewitt. Welcome to Sunday. It's Meet the Press.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press with Chuck Todd.

CHUCK TODD:

Good Sunday morning, and what a Sunday morning it is. It's crunch time. Four presidential candidates are joining us. And with just two weeks to go until the first voting, we have some truly head-snapping developments in both campaigns. In just a few hours, the Democratic candidates will gather in Charleston, South Carolina, for the final debate before Iowa. And it airs right here on NBC. That begins at 9:00 Eastern Time. But there was also big news overseas involving Iran, its nuclear program and a prisoner swap. And for that we go to NBC News chief foreign correspondent Richard Engel, live from Vienna.

RICHARD ENGEL:

It has been confirmed that the five American prisoners held by Iran have been freed. Some of them, including The Washington Post reporter leaving Tehran this morning. It was not exactly part of the nuclear deal, but the nuclear deal certainly opened up a dialogue that allowed for this prisoner release to happen.

That nuclear deal was brokered and announced here in Vienna yesterday. It was an enormous breakthrough. This is what people are calling "implementation day" as the terms of the agreement are starting to take effect. After Iran, it has been certified, lived up to its obligations, put checks in place to make it very difficult for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.

So what does Iran get from this deal? First of all, it gets access to international markets. It can bank. Iranians can move money into and out of the country. Iran can now sell oil legally. It also unfreezes tens of billions of dollars, effectively an economic of 80 million people is now being welcomed back into the international community. Chuck?

CHUCK TODD:

Richard, thank you very much. Now let's get back to the presidential campaign. In a few minutes, we're going to get to my interviews with two men who hope to grab the establishment lane in the Republican race. Senator Marco Rubio, Florida, and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. But we start with the Democrats. And a Hillary Clinton-Bernie Sanders race that has turned out to be much closer than the experts thought, especially the Clinton campaign.

In fact, we have some brand new NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll numbers out this morning. And it does have some good news for the Clinton campaign. Nationally, we still have her with a big lead over Bernie Sanders, 59-34. But in Iowa, the story has been very different. Three polls out this week alone, showing a neck-and-neck race, including our own NBC News/Wall Street Journal/Marist poll, which had Clinton leading by just three.

Quinnipiac found Sanders actually up by five, and The Des Moines Register had Clinton up by just two. Bottom line, it is too close to call. So with a closer race has come a more aggressive Clinton campaign against Sanders. And so we begin with Hillary Clinton who joins us from Charleston, South Carolina. Good morning Secretary Clinton.

SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON:

Good morning, Chuck.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me start with the Iran deal. Yesterday, in response to it, you immediately said that Iran is still violating UN Security Council resolutions with its ballistic missile program, which should be met with new sanctions, designations, and firm results. So I guess my question is, what do you tell the American public that say, "Okay, you want new sanctions against Iran, they're still violating agreements, and yet, what do we do yesterday? We just handed them \$100 billion and we just did a prisoner exchange." Would you have still done that, considering your concerns about their missile program?

HILLARY CLINTON:

Absolutely. Look, I have said for a long time that I'm very proud of the role that I played in getting us to the point where we could negotiate the agreement that puts a lid on Iran's nuclear weapons program. But I've also said that the way we're going to hold them accountable is to have consequences when they do anything that might deviate from the agreement or continue to flout the kind of sanctions and mandates that the UN Secretary Council has put on, including on missiles.

So I see these as mutually reinforcing, Chuck. I was delighted that the prisoners are on their way home. That's a good sign. We still don't see Bob Levinson coming home. There's more work

to be done there. But if the implementation of the agreement which is being done today, is to be successful in the way that I expect, we're going to watch Iran like the proverbial hawk.

And when it comes to the missile program, they are under UN Security Council sanctions. And if they are violating it, which the evidence seems to suggest, they should be held accountable. They need to know that this is a good step forward with respect to the nuclear weapons program. But there are other areas of their behavior that we're going to continue to be focused on.

CHUCK TODD:

Do you still consider Iran a national security threat to the United States?

SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON:

Well, certainly we have lowered that threat, because of the nuclear agreement. But they continue to destabilize governments in the Middle East, they continue to support proxies and terrorist groups like Hezbollah. They continue to threaten Israel. There are a lot of concerns. But what I have said for some time now is I'd rather have the nuclear weapons program off to one side and work to make sure they abide by the agreement and then turn our attention to some of these other behaviors that are threatening certainly in the region, and therefore cause concern for us.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, let me move to the campaign. You know, to try to figure out why this race has gotten closer in Iowa, why your lead has shrunk in Iowa, we spoke to a number of voters. I want to play three sound bites from Iowa voters about some potential pause they have regarding your candidacy. I'm going to play it and get you to respond on the other side.

(BEGIN TAPE)

MALE O'MALLEY SUPPORTER:

You get the impression from her that she believes maybe the rules just don't apply to her, or the same rules don't apply to her that apply to everybody else.

FEMALE SANDERS SUPPORTER:

She's worked really hard and done some amazing things. I just feel that Bernie Sanders is kind of, has a little bit more fire lit up in people.

FEMALE CLINTON SUPPORTER:

Well, I hear people talking about questioning her honesty. And I don't necessarily do that. But I think that's one thing that people are kind of not sure. And they felt that way about Bill Clinton too. You know, and so I think some of that rubs off.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Madam Secretary, how do you answer that pause? It's just from Democrats, some pause that they have.

SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON:

Well, first of all Chuck, I always thought this was going to be close. And I can't speak for anybody else. But I've worked as hard as I can to build an organization in Iowa. To be out there, listening and talking with Iowans as they move toward making the first-in-the-nation decision in the caucus on February 1st. And I've also been very consistent over the course of my public life.

If I tell you I'm going to fight for something, I will do my very best to get results. And I think that's why I have such strong support. And I feel very good about where we are. But we're going to just keep working until the very last caucus is decided on February 1st.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, another problem you may be having in Iowa is that you don't ideologically fit. This was in The Des Moines Register poll this week. 43 percent of likely Democratic caucusgoers identified as socialist. Only 38 percent of likely Democratic caucusgoers identified themselves as a capitalist. You in the last debate said you are a capitalist. Bernie Sanders calls himself a Democratic socialist. If you don't win Iowa, do you think that's the reason?

SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON:

Oh, I don't know how people take all this information. But, you know, I support a free-market economy. I support the competitiveness that has created the, you know, greatest economic engine in the history of the world. What I am worried about is that it's not continuing to do what it used to do, which is to give the vast majority of Americans the chance to get ahead and stay ahead.

That's why I've got a very vigorous jobs agenda. That's why I've put raising incomes at the center of my economic policy. And I think what I know will work is to get back to good, old-fashioned job opportunities that will help people get ahead through manufacturing, through infrastructure, through clean energy, through the kinds of plans that I've been putting out. And look, when we have a Democrat in the White House, a Democrat, we do better economically.



We saw that when my husband was president, we've watched President Obama dig us out of the huge ditch that Republican policies put us into. So I'm very confident that I know what will work if we have the right commitment as a nation. And that's what I want to do as president.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me ask you about whether, going with-- in Chicago, right now Mayor Rahm Emanuel has been under fire for what he may have known about a shooting incident. Do you think he still has the credibility to heal the wounds in Chicago between the African American community and law enforcement?

SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON:

Look, like everybody else who watched that video on television, I was just outraged by what happened to Laquan McDonald. I was one of the first to call for a complete Department of Justice investigation. And in fact, urged that it include the entire Chicago police department. This is not a problem that is unique to Chicago, unfortunately. And we've got to do a lot more to deal with the systemic racism and the problems that policing has demonstrated. Mayor Emanuel has said that he is committed to complete and total reform, and I think he should be held to that standard.

CHUCK TODD:

But do you think he still has credibility to do this?

SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON:

Well, that's going to be up to him and up to the people of Chicago to prove.

CHUCK TODD:

Very quickly, the movie Thirteen Hours, about the incident in Benghazi, I know there's a lot of chatter about the movie itself. But let me ask you, the controversy involves whether or not everything was done that night to rescue Ambassador Stevens. Looking back, do you believe everything was done that night, that could've been done, to save his life?

SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON:

Based on everything I know, and based on a Republican-led intelligence committee investigation, a Republican-led armed services committee investigation, the answer to that is yes, that people were scrambling, trying to figure out what could be done if anything. And I can't speak to a movie, but I know people have raised questions about, you know, some of the dramatization.

I testified for more than 11 hours, as you know. I answered every question that I was asked. And my real focus, Chuck, is what do we do to make sure that when we send Americans into harm's way, military or civilian, our diplomats or our soldiers, we take every precaution, to the best of our ability, to what is a unpredictable and dangerous world to make sure that they can discharge their duties and be safe while doing it.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, Secretary Clinton, I've got to leave it there. We look forward to seeing you tonight on stage in Charleston for the Democratic debate. That's right here on NBC. Thank you.

SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON:

Thanks a lot.

CHUCK TODD:

You got it. And just a few minutes ago, I interviewed Bernie Sanders. And I began by asking him about the issue of gun safety.

(BEGIN TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Let me start with one of the issues that is likely to come up tonight at the debate and that is the issue of gun safety. Last night and what the Clinton campaign is referring to as a debate eve conversion, you came out in favor of essentially repealing immunity for gun manufacturers when it comes to be held liable for gun deaths. That is a switch of your positions, what brought you to this conclusion?

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS:

Well, not really. You know, I understand that Secretary Clinton and her campaign understands that, you know, they're losing ground. We started this campaign off at three percent in the polls and now we're closing in in Iowa. But we're doing really well in New Hampshire. So I think in the next two weeks, you're going to see a lot of nonsense being thrown around. Look, I have a D minus--

CHUCK TODD:

This is nonsense? I mean, you did change your position on this though. Isn't that correct?

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS:

What I said, Chuck, what I said several months ago, having a D-minus voting record from the N.R.A., having voted to ban assault weapons way back in 1988, yeah, that was a piece of legislation that I wanted to relook at. And what that legislation had among other things is a prohibition on armor-piercing ammunition designed to kill police officers.

It had language in it for a child-lock safety for our kids, important provisions. There were things in it that I did not like and I was willing to rethink. We have rethought. There's a bill apparently being introduced, I like that bill, it makes some good changes, and we will be supportive of it.

CHUCK TODD:

All right. Another thing that's going to come up on the issue of gun safety is the issue of a waiting period. The Clinton campaign is hitting you for supporting only a three-day waiting period, or instant background checks, and not being in favor of something longer, like a five-day or a seven-day window. And the reason this is being brought up--

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS:

Well look.

CHUCK TODD:

--is that if Dylann Roof, the man who killed those nine folks in Charleston last year, if there had been a longer waiting period, he might have been prevented from buying a gun.

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS:

Look, what we saw here in Charleston is a tragedy of unspeakable dimensions. A guy sits in prayer with people, then he takes out a gun and shoots nine people. I hope we don't have to politicize that issue. I believe very strongly in an instant background check. I think we have to expand it. I think we have other make sure 100 percent that we keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have that, people with criminal backgrounds, people who are mentally unstable.

That has been my view from day one. But, you know, Chuck, I think the reason that the Clinton campaign is getting defensive is they see that we have the momentum, they see that the issues that we are talking about, a disappearing middle class, and almost all new income and wealth going to the top one percent, a corrupt campaign finance system where people like Secretary Clinton can raise millions of dollars through super PACs.

Those are kind of the issues that they don't want to discuss. So tonight, we're going to be discussing a lot of issues. And the main issue for me is why the rich get richer, almost everybody else gets poorer, and the fact that we have got to stand up to the billionaire class and change those dynamics.

CHUCK TODD:

So you're not in favor of a longer background check, a five, seven-day background check?

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS:

We are willing to look at anything that makes sense that keeps guns out of the hands of people who should not have them. But I'm not going to be defensive on that issue. I lost an election in 1988, probably lost an election because I had the courage back then to say that assault weapons should not be sold in America.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me ask you quickly about the Iran deal. Is Iran still an enemy of the United States, even what's going on, the diplomatic relations?

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS:

Well, you know, it's funny. If you think back to, I think it was 2007, during the campaign in which Secretary Clinton ran against Barack Obama, she was critical of him. A question was asked to Obama and said, "Would you sit down and talk to the Iranians?" And he said, "Yeah, I would." Point being that you talk to your adversaries. You don't run away from that.

Secretary Clinton I think called him naïve. Turns out that Obama was right. So clearly, we have many, many issues and many concerns with Iran. But clearly also, we want to improve our relationships with this very powerful country. I think the agreement to make certain that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon was a huge step forward. The fact that we had this prisoner release today was a good, important step forward. So I hope that we can continue to go forward to improve relations with Iran.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, Senator Sanders, I will leave it there. We look forward to seeing you, Secretary Clinton, and Martin O'Malley on stage tonight right here on NBC. Thank you, sir.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

It's going to be a humdinger of a debate. You just heard Senator Sanders there, I think he mentioned Hillary Clinton in almost every single answer. We'll be back in a moment with the Republicans. Trump and Cruz are finally going at it and nobody may be happier about that development than my next two guests, Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush. They join me right after this.

\*\*\*COMMERCIAL BREAK\*\*\*

CHUCK TODD:

Donald Trump and Ted Cruz definitely ended their mutual non-aggression pact this weekend with a flurry of chargers and counter-charges. And while Cruz and Trump fight it out at the top, many Republicans are desperate for someone to emerge as the establishment candidate. Now, they're not the only ones beating each other up. So yesterday I spoke with two candidates vying for that role: Senator Marco Rubio of Florida and former Florida governor, Jeb Bush. Let me begin with Rubio. In Thursday's Republican debate, he took on Cruz directly, accusing him of serially changing his positions.

(BEGIN TAPE)

MARCO RUBIO:

Ted Cruz, you used to say you supported doubling the number of green cards, now you say that you're against it. You used to support a 500 percent increase in the number of guest workers, now you say that you're against it. You used to support legalizing people that were here illegally, now you say you're against it. You used to say that you were in favor of birthright citizenship, now you say that you are against it.

And by the way, it's not just on immigration, you used to support TPA, now you say you're against it. I saw you on the Senate floor flip your vote on crop insurance because they told you it would help you in Iowa, and last week, we all saw you flip your vote on ethanol in Iowa for the same reason.

That is not consistent conservatism, that is political calculation.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

So last night I began by asking Rubio whether he wasn't also guilty of changing his positions many times, particularly on immigration.

(BEGIN TAPE)

MARCO RUBIO:

If circumstances change or you learn something along the way, it's reasonable to say, "Maybe a different approach will work better." So for example, on immigration it is clear no comprehensive solution to immigration is going to pass.

But don't go around pretending that you never do, and certainly don't go around pretending and telling everyone like Ted Cruz does that he is the only consistent conservative running for president. The fact of the matter is that Ted has shown a propensity throughout his career in

the U.S. Senate to take one position in front of one audience and then change his position in front of another.

So he raises money in New York and then criticizes New York values. On the policy issues he used to be in favor of legalizing people that are here illegally, and he said so in front of one audience. But then he portrays this sort of notion that he's the harshest and hardest when it comes to that issue.

That's not been his record. And if you recall, that was in response to an attack from him in the debate, and I think it's important to point out that on the issue he was attacking me on, his record used to be something very different than what he makes it sound like.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me ask you by the way quickly on the 11 million, are you still for finding a way for them to legally stay in the United States?

MARCO RUBIO:

Yeah, look. If you're a criminal alien, no, you can't stay. If you're someone that hasn't been here for a very long time, you can't stay.

CHUCK TODD:

Wait a minute. Define criminal alien--

MARCO RUBIO:

I do believe we have to have a reasonable solution--

CHUCK TODD:

De-- define criminal alien. Isn't anybody who's here--

MARCO RUBIO:

A felon. A felon--

CHUCK TODD:

Okay, so not-- 'cause some people argue--

MARCO RUBIO:

Well I know some people have said that before but I believe--

CHUCK TODD:

Okay, all right--

MARCO RUBIO:

--the opposite. But-- no, but I've said that before, Todd. That's been convinced. I mean, a felon, someone who's committed a crime, a non-immigration-related-- and that's what I've talked about in the past. So I do believe-- I don't think you're gonna round up and deport 12 million people.

Here's what I've said, though. It is very clear now more than ever that we are not going to be able to do anything on people that are illegally until we first prove to people that illegal immigration is under control and America is safe. And ISIS poses a very unique threat unlike anything we have faced in the past.

CHUCK TODD:

Very quickly, you brought up Ted Cruz and his use of the phrase, "New York values." What does that phrase mean to you?

MARCO RUBIO:

I've never used that phrase. I think we're all Americans. I'm campaigning on behalf of American values. And I don't seek to divide people against each other, that's the problem we have with our current president. I think the bigger problem is Ted has raised a lot of money out of New York.

He didn't say that when he was there raising money. He said that in one state and then said something different in another. And time and again, it's proven the sort of level of political calculation that voters are only starting to find out about now as the campaign gets deeper and more heated.

CHUCK TODD:

And finally, last question. Let me talk about the global news of the day having to do with Iran. Do you think these Americans would be coming home if it wasn't for the Iran nuclear deal?

MARCO RUBIO:

I don't think these Americans should have ever been in prison. They didn't do anything wrong. They are hostages. And so now we have a president that has traded hostages in exchange for prisoners who did commit a crime and were convicted after due process and a trial and everything of that sort.

And what the President's now doing, not just with this but what he did with the Castro brothers and what he did with Bergdahl, is he's put a price on the head of every American abroad. Our enemies now know that if you can capture an American, you can get something meaningful in exchange for it.

I'm glad they're coming home. And by the way, the case of Bob Levinson remains unresolved. The Iranians, I believe, know where he is, and they are not cooperating. And it's an outrage. We need to continue to remember about him. But that said, at the end of the day when I am President, I will repeal the deal with Iran.

It will end when I am President, and we're going to reimpose sanctions. And if Iran tries to build a nuclear weapon program, we will stop it.

CHUCK TODD:

So under President Rubio, you would not have negotiated any sort of prisoner exchange for those four American hostages.

MARCO RUBIO:

When I become President of the United States, our adversaries around the world will know that America is no longer under the command of someone weak like Barack Obama. And it will be like Ronald Reagan where as soon as he took office, the hostages were released from Iran. We would impose additional sanctions, not just this Congressional sanctions now that would have been--

CHUCK TODD:

You wouldn't have given Iran anything--

MARCO RUBIO:

more additional sanctions on Iran.

CHUCK TODD:

You wouldn't have given Iran anything even if it meant--

MARCO RUBIO:

We would have gotten them home--

CHUCK TODD:

--that Iran--



MARCO RUBIO:

We would have gotten them home.

CHUCK TODD:

Without giving them anything.

MARCO RUBIO:

Well, we would have given them sanctions, crippling sanctions. In fact, there would have never even been a discussion on these deals until they were released. Iran needs more from us than we need from them. We need to remind ourselves of that.

And at the end of the day, these are people that view these sorts of things as weakness. That's why this week they captured our sailors. They tried to humiliate them on video, putting their hands behind their back and putting them on their knees and videotaping them apologizing. That doesn't happen when I'm President because they will know that we now have a strong President unlike the weak one that we have now.

CHUCK TODD:

Senator Marco Rubio traveling in Iowa. Stay safe on the trail. Thanks for coming on, sir.

MARCO RUBIO:

Thank you.

CHUCK TODD:

Joining me now is the former governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, from the snowy state of New Hampshire this weekend. Governor, welcome back to Meet the Press.

JEB BUSH:

Thanks, Chuck.

CHUCK TODD:

Hey, I want to start with something you said to Kathleen Parker 2 days before Thursday's debate. You said to her, I'm referring to Donald Trump, "I'm going after him. The problem is there is too much low-hanging fruit." And then you go on to tick off that you're going to go after highlight Trump's multiple bankruptcies, his company's massive layoffs, people quote, getting stiffed, including a widow by the name of Vera Coking, whose house Trump attempted to replace in the mid-90's with a parking lot referring to some eminent domain issues. It was

pretty detailed game plan here.; Governor, I don't remember hearing that on Thursday night. What happened?

JEB BUSH:

Well, we talked about the 45 percent tariff that he-- has been advocating that would create a global depression and lay people off and create hardship-- retaliated by Chinese-- the Chinese and makin' sure that we couldn't sell our Boeing planes that-- that are being made a mile away from where the debate took place. I had my chance, and I was the only person that-- goes after Trump on these issues. He's not a conservative.

And-- should the opportunity come up in the next debate to talk about bankruptcies, I'll do it. Four times he went bankrupt and he claims, well, he was just using the law. But a lot of people got wiped out because of that. And the eminent domain issue is really-- a symbol of-- conservative-ism. Conservatives believe that we should use eminent domain for public use, not for private purpose.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, there's been an outside group, I think it's Club For Growth, that has been hammering Donald Trump I think on this on the airways and both Iowa and New Hampshire. None of this stuff sticks. How does this guy have Teflon? I mean, you've gone after him hard... I could argue that you've gone after him more than any other candidate on that stage. You're on the air with a TV ad hitting him. But he's got a Teflon about him? What do you make of it?

JEB BUSH:

Well, there's a lot of anxiety. People are so angry with Washington and so frustrated about their own lives. I saw-- a survey that 63 percent of people can't afford a car repair of 500 bucks. And more than half of Americans have less than \$1,000 in savings. And the big guy comes in and-- and offers the moon and the stars, and-- people are-- are latched onto that.

But the reality is that he's not offering anything to lift people up. And I think the cumulative effect of pointing that out-- respectfully, look-- the guy's entertaining, for sure. But his ideas aren't gonna help people. And he doesn't have the skills to bring people together.

And he has no proven leadership skills in the public domain. So my path is to say I do. I've got a proven record. I don't run away from the fire. I don't blame other people. I don't disparage people. I try to unite around a common purpose. I got to do that as governor. And the ideas that I'm laying out would help America. And that's-- that's my path.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, right when you announced in July, you said the following, you argued that, "finding a way to re-weave the web of civility before progress on substantive issues can be made. You

essentially said that has to be second, third fourth priority, because after you get civility then you can deal with all these other issues. Obviously, this is not a civil time in this Republican primary debate. And I guess I'm wondering, do you just have the wrong temperament for what Republican primary voters are looking for in 2016?

JEB BUSH:

No, look, I-- I'm talking about Washington D.C. The reason why people are angry in the Republican primary is there's no civility in Washington. The president's first impulse is to push someone away and down to make himself look bigger and-- and-- and higher. And we have to have a president that begins to solve problems.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, about a month ago when it came to Donald Trump, there was leaks from your campaign, that you were looking for a way to say, "You know what, I can't support him if he becomes the nominee." You've since backed off on some of your harsher criticism of him. Is that a fair way to read this - that you decided, "Nope, I can support him if he's the nominee, even if I'm not happy about it."?

JEB BUSH:

Look, the-- the-- the prospects of Hillary Clinton were-- or Bernie Sanders to be the president of the United States is-- is pretty chilling to me. I-- I'm-- I'm gonna win this nomination. That's my focus. That's what I'm trying to do. But anybody'd be better than Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders. So-- I am critical-- I am-- I am critical of—

CHUCK TODD:

You're in on Trump, if it's him?

JEB BUSH:

I-- he's not gonna win the nomination. And I am-- I am t-- I'm gonna continue to be critical of him when he doesn't advocate conservative principles. He's running for the conservative party's nomination. He should be a conservative, and he hasn't shown it.

CHUCK TODD:

Is there a point when you think it's important for more mainstream conservatives to unite around one candidate at some point to stop a Ted Cruz or Donald Trump because you don't think they can win?

JEB BUSH:

The point is that-- we're running for the presidency right now. And-- New Hampshire and Iowa and South Carolina and Nevada are gonna shape the election in March. We're on every ballot. We have-- we have the resources to go to distance. And I'm gonna do it.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, we have a lot to chew over, don't we? When we come back we'll do just that. It's a New York state of mind for the front runners on the republican side. Ted Cruz apologizes, not really, for his New York values comment. And Donald Trump is hitting back, and hitting back, and hitting back. And later, human rights attorney Amal Clooney, who also happens to be George Clooney's wife, on the small island paradise that has become a breeding ground for ISIS.

(BEGIN TAPE)

AMAL CLOONEY:

If you're a woman lying on the beach in the Maldives you might want to know that a kilometer away another woman is being flogged.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

My sit down with Amal Clooney during her trip to Washington - all that coming up.

\*\*\*COMMERCIAL BREAK\*\*\*

CHUCK TODD:

Welcome back. You just heard Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders trying to frame tonight's showdown at the NBC Democratic debate in Charleston, South Carolina, where the two frontrunners and Martin O'Malley will go at it with just two weeks until Iowa.

As soon as this program is over I'm jumping on a plane to join my colleagues, Lester Holt and Andrea Mitchell, as part of the NBC News team. Our coverage starts on MSNBC and NBCNews.com at 8 Eastern tonight. And just before the debates starts tune in to your local NBC station a few minutes before 9 o'clock and we'll have more coverage.

We'll be back with the Republican race in just a moment.

\*\*\*COMMERCIAL BREAK\*\*\*

(BEGIN TAPE)

TED CRUZ:

Well, you're right, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and Andrew Cuomo and Bill de Blasio have all demanded an apology, and I'm happy to apologize. I apologize to the millions of New Yorkers who have been let down by liberal politicians in that state.

DONALD TRUMP:

A lot of people do not like Ted, to put it mildly. And I kept saying, "Am I the only person that thinks he's a nice guy?" So as it turned out, you know, he finally went off the wagon a little bit and went a little crazy.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Welcome back. The two frontrunners, Donald Trump and Ted Cruz are no longer playing nice. The panel is here. Steve Schmidt, Republican strategist and former senior advisor to John McCain in '08, Joy-Ann Reid, MSNBC national correspondent, and author of Fracture: Barack Obama, the Clintons, and the Racial Divide. Stephanie Cutter, deputy campaign manager for President Obama in 2012, and influential talk radio host, Hugh Hewitt, host of The Hugh Hewitt Show. All right, let's start Trump versus Cruz. Hugh, is this the fight the establish has been waiting for?

HUGH HEWITT:

Well, it has certainly got Jeb Bush's attention. I heard Jeb tell you the "big guy from New York." The last time a big guy from New York took aim at a would-be president who was born outside the country was July 11th, 1804, when Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton. It was not good for either man's career. And I don't know that their fight is good for either man's career.

CHUCK TODD:

Steve?

STEVE SCHMIDT:

Look, right now you look at Trump's strength across the country in the national polls, and all of these establishment candidates, Kasich, Rubio, Bush, Christie, they need Ted Cruz to beat Donald Trump in Iowa. If Ted Cruz doesn't win the state of Iowa, Donald Trump is gone. He's going to win New Hampshire and it's going to be very, very tough to catch as this race moves south and moves into the bigger states.

JOY-ANN REID:

Yeah, I think the problem is for the establishment wing of the parties. The lane is closing very quickly. I think even if you saw all of the establishment candidates sort of consolidate around one person, our polling and other polling is showing that in a three-way race between Trump, Cruz, and fill in the establishment candidate X, Trump still wins. In a two-way race against any of the establishment candidates, even Rubio, who's probably the favorite he still wins.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me pause you there, Joy. Let me put up the numbers.

JOY-ANN REID:

Yeah.

CHUCK TODD:

You're helping produce. I love it. Let me put those numbers up. That three-way race that showed Trump, Cruz, Rubio. And then we did these two-way pairings, as you were talking about. Here's what you need to know. Cruz versus Trump, Cruz wins. Trump versus Rubio, Trump wins. What does that tell you to me? Establishment can't win.

JOY-ANN REID:

That's right. I don't think there's enough strength. And, I mean, not being the Republican at the table. there are other people who are more knowledgeable. But it doesn't seem that there's much of a lane there. The energy in the party is for the outsider candidates. And I think for the establishment, Cruz is almost a bad a scenario because he spent his entire senate career essentially blowing up his home team's court.

CHUCK TODD:

Who do Democrats want to run against here? Trump or Cruz?

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

Well, I think there's pathways on both, let me just say that. But back to the polling for a second, I do think it's interesting that if you look at some of these polls, as many as half of both Cruz and Trump support say that they're open to persuasion to other candidates. But it's sort of soft support that these two have. So what they're doing to each other could provide an opening to somebody--

HUGH HEWITT:

This is what I think is, I disagree with Steve because I think the knight fight is bleeding the vote. Ted Cruz is going to win Iowa. Donald Trump is going to win New Hampshire. But with

Donald with the momentum as you said in the green room. And I think that does allow consolidation to happen. I think we're going to Cleveland, we're going to have an open convention, because it's just too much fun to stop. It really is.

CHUCK TODD:

Steve, we're going to Cleveland. But if Donald Trump wins Iowa, couldn't he be the nominee before Hillary Clinton?

STEVE SCHMIDT:

I think he'll absolutely be the nominee before Hillary Clinton. Look, winning early matters in these contests. This is a momentum business. And past is prologue here. You win Iowa, you win New Hampshire, it puts you in good position going into South Carolina, ultimately to Florida, ultimately to the SEC primary on March 1st.

So if Donald Trump wins in Iowa, give me the scenario by which anyone catches him in New Hampshire and South Carolina. At the end of the day, a person who gets the most votes, they win. And I think the chances of an open convention, brokered convention, I think are very, very minimal.

JOY-ANN REID:

And I think when the son and brother of former president just conceded that you're the big man in the race, I think that that is a concession that you cannot walk back--

CHUCK TODD:

Can we--you brought it up too, I have to say, that was--

HUGH HEWITT:

It was a big line. It was the takeaway of the morning.

CHUCK TODD:

It was a little surprisingly differential.

HUGH HEWITT:

It's unconscious, in fact, with admission against interest, that there's a big guy in the race that you cannot bring down.

CHUCK TODD: And he wasn't the big guy.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

That's how he feels.

HUGH HEWITT:

Yeah, that's how he feels.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

You know, and it's shining through everything he says and does. He feels like Trump has taken all the oxygen. He's untouchable. And while Jeb has good ideas and, you know, has been effective as a governor, he can't understand why Trump is winning.

CHUCK TODD:

Steve, you cut your teeth being a guy that knew how to push a negative message. And I say this as a compliment, not-- so you have Rubio trying to paint Cruz as a flip-flopper. Is that possible? I mean, Ted Cruz is a guy that I don't think if you watch his-- Are people going to think he's some sort of establishment, finger-in-the-wind politician? That's going to be tough to sell, isn't it?

STEVE SCHMIDT:

No. I think it's very tough to sell. And I also think it misses the point about what this race is about. So you have an exasperated Jeb Bush this morning wondering how is it that the big guy is ahead in the race, as if, well, he's ahead because he sucked up all the oxygen. And that's not the case. His base, blue collar, downscale economically, non-college educated, no real wage growth in 25 years.

These people and Republicans in general believe that Barack Obama has won, he has changed America, and that he did it over a complicit, feckless, corrupt Republican Congress, who when Donald Trump says, "Make America great again," that is a powerful message for that Republican electorate.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

I do think, on Cruz however, these arguments that Rubio is making, they happen to have the virtue of being true on Ted Cruz. I don't think it's going to hurt him in the primaries, but if he becomes the general election candidate, he will get decimated--

JOY-ANN REID:

The flip-flopping has also occurred in Rubio's own career. I mean what Marco Rubio's *raison d'etre* in Washington was to get immigration reform done, he's been walking back from that for various reasons--



CHUCK TODD:

He's opened himself up to that very recently.

JOY-ANN REID:

--and he keeps changing the reason why.

HUGH HEWITT:

But Team Cruz is very happy with what happened over the last 48 hours. They read this as consolidated Iowa. I've never run a national campaign, I didn't stay at a Holiday Inn last night. But team Cruz is very happy. So is team Rubio. I think there's a lot more--

CHUCK TODD:

But Hugh let me ask you, very quickly I want to show you this Cruz campaign that's pushing out this hit on Donald Trump. It's Donald Trump praising Hillary Clinton. I'm going to just play a quick piece of it. I think we have it here.

(BEGIN TAPE)

DONALD TRUMP:

Hillary Clinton I think is a terrific woman. I mean, I'm a little biased, because I've known her for years. I live in New York, she lives in New York, I know her very well and I know her husband very well.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Okay, Jeb Bush tried this with Donald Trump six months ago and it didn't work. With Ted Cruz doing it, can it work?

HUGH HEWITT:

Yes. Ted Cruz is messaging into the Iowa caucuses, and it's--

CHUCK TODD:

You think he can message this better?

HUGH HEWITT:

Yes, I believe that.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

And i also think it is a time to-- this is the time to be doing it. This is how you want to close a race.

STEVE SCHMIDT:

This isn't news to anybody. In fact, it allows Donald Trump to sell a virtue, which is honesty. That hey, I was in business. And when I was in business, I needed to be friends with everybody. It's what people tend to believe. And he's not penalized for these relationships, he's credited with the honesty in describing the relationship.

JOY-ANN REID:

And by the way, the people who are supporting Donald Trump are not necessarily the doctrinaire hard-core conservatives. Those people are with Ted Cruz. I don't think he pays a penalty with them.

CHUCK TODD:

And by the way, some of them probably voted for Bill Clinton back in the '90s, some of these Trump supporters.

CHUCK TODD:

All right. We're going to take a pause here. We've got the big take on the Democratic race from you guys in just a few minutes. But up next, something a little bit different. My sit-down with Amal Clooney. She's a human rights lawyer, also has a famous last name because she's the wife of George Clooney. And we talked about her efforts to win freedom for a key political prisoner right after this.

\*\*\*COMMERCIAL BREAK\*\*\*

CHUCK TODD:

Welcome back. Amal Clooney was a prominent international human rights lawyer long before she acquired a famous name from her husband, Hollywood actor George Clooney. This week, NBC News followed her in Washington as she met with lawmakers to discuss the plight of her client, Mohamed Nasheed, the former president, Democratically elected, of the Maldives, islands in the Indian Ocean.

The Maldives are known as an idyllic vacation destination, but they now have become a top recruiting ground for ISIS. Now this former president Nasheed was thrown into prison in what he describes as simply a coup. And he was sentenced to 13 years there. Then yesterday, suddenly the government announced it would allow Nasheed to travel to the United Kingdom for back surgery.

Though, it's not at all clear that will happen now. And it may have been simply a PR stunt, timed for Amal Clooney's trip to Washington. I sat down with her earlier this week and began by asking what she was hoping to accomplish on this trip to Washington.

AMAL CLOONEY:

You have an increasing authoritarian regime where protesters are being rounded up and arrested, where lawyers are being attacked, TV stations are being closed down, and every opposition leader in the country is now either behind bars or being persecuted by the government. So my client is one of them.

And he was subjected to a political show trial, as is now being recognized by the UN and others. Since I've been in Washington, I've been meeting around the administration and with members of Congress to discuss the imposition of targeted sanctions against members of the regime.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me ask you a basic question that many in America, when they hear stories like this, it's tragic, but then they say, "Why is this America's problem?"

AMAL CLOONEY:

I understand the question. I mean, Maldives is not usually the top of anyone's political agenda. And it may be on the short list of holiday destinations. I think there are two reasons. First of all, U.S. values are at stake. You know, we just had the president's State of the Union address. And he said American leadership in the 21st century means rallying the world around causes that are right.

And he gave an example, the U.S. supporting Ukraine's fight for democracy. And that's what we're asking for too in this case. Maldivians have the right to democracy, and their democracy is under threat at the moment. There's another reason that is also not very well known. Just last month, the European parliament issued a report saying that at the moment, the Maldives has the highest per capita rate of recruitment to ISIS in the world. And this is really shocking. So the figures that have been released by the State Department say 200 fighters have gone from the Maldives to Iraq or Syria.

CHUCK TODD:

Is this a country that you feel as if it is enabling ISIS and is serving as a breeding ground for ISIS?

AMAL CLOONEY:

The president has made speeches saying that there's only room for Islam in the Maldives and Sharia punishment should be imposed. You've had fighters who've gone to ISIS come back to the country and not be prosecuted. Also last year, you had a rally on the streets of Malé where people were waving ISIS flags and the police did not crack down on those and no arrests took place. So you certainly have a regime that could be doing a lot more to minimize the terrorist threat.

CHUCK TODD:

Because of your last name, you were attacked by one of the, at the time, vice presidents that helped in the coup. He said, chalked you up to being just part of the Hollywood fictional world that is trying to make up things about the Maldives.

AMAL CLOONEY:

Yes.

CHUCK TODD:

And then what happened to this gentleman?

AMAL CLOONEY:

So his attack was that I didn't let facts get in the way when I was saying that Nasheed had been subjected to an unfair trial and that there were political prisoners in the country. What has happened since then is that he himself was arrested, follow, you know, because the president is now increasingly paranoid I think and is going after members of his own party, having dealt with the opposition in its entirety.

He announced it from the jail cell and penned a very different op-ed to the one that attacked me and said, "What are these lawyers talking about?" That he now says, and I believe this is a direct quote, "I join the swelling ranks of political prisoners in the Maldives, including President Nasheed." And he also adds, you know, "Any casual observer of the judicial system in the Maldives knows that it's impossible to get a fair trial here."

CHUCK TODD:

Is this a case where your connection to celebrity, is it an asset or a liability in something like this?

AMAL CLOONEY:

I think that it's easy to dismiss criticism on that basis, like the, you know, I think the kind of attacks that I got from that vice president just smacks of desperation and is easy to dispose of. So it's not something that's worrying. I think on the other hand, if in representing this client and trying to just secure his release and the release of other political prisoners, if people are made aware of the situation in the Maldives, I think that's a good thing.

Because there are thousands of tourists going every year. And I think if people know what's going on, they might find that they don't want to support that regime either, you know? If you're a woman lying on the beach in the Maldives, you might want to know that a kilometer away, another woman is being flogged. And you might want to find your own way to protest that.

CHUCK TODD:

Next time you're around, give us a call.

AMAL CLOONEY:

Thank you so much.

CHUCK TODD:

Amal Clooney, thanks for coming.

AMAL CLOONEY:

Thank you.

CHUCK TODD:

We should note that the Maldives government still insists that Mohamed Nasheed return after his surgery in the United Kingdom. And that, as of now, he has not left the country. When we come back, our endgame segment. How much should Hillary Clinton be concerned about the surging Bernie Sanders?

\* \* \*COMMERCIAL BREAK\* \* \*

CHUCK TODD:

Endgame time. The panel is here. We turn to the Democrats. Stephanie Cutter, there is a feeling among some Democrats of déjà vu all over again, from Hillary Clinton and Iowa - we spent the week talking to Iowa voters about the hesitance, Iowa Democrats, but the hesitance for Clinton. Here's a little compilation.

(BEGIN TAPE)

MARISOL AGUERO:

She comes from a wealthy, privileged family. And so for me, it's a bit, do you understand really what individuals like us, who are underrepresented, who may have come from low-income families, are you really going to understand our standpoint and really defend us?

HARLAN QUICK:

Her tie-in to Wall Street and connections there, which are very good for running a government, they may be as exciting for people that view Wall Street as a negative.

JAY HELTON:

And I don't want to harp on the email thing, but that's kind of a barometer. You know, first of all, there's this kind of denial, and then, "Oh, well, yeah," and then, "Oh, well, we paid the guy." And, I mean, it's not like you're getting the whole story all the time, up front, right now.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

It's not one thing. It's like a little. That's what we found out. It's a little bit of something. But they found something and they can't figure it out.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

Well, we've always known this. You know, there's not much about Hillary Clinton that people don't know. And people have very strong opinions. But let's not mistake this. She still has very strong support on the ground in Iowa. And even more important than that, she has a terrific ground operation. Which, as you know, in a caucus atmosphere, is critical.

CHUCK TODD:

She thought she had a good ground operation eight years ago.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

But not as good as Obama.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, Joy, I had a flashback, The New York Times does this, "What's wrong with the Clinton campaign?" You know, here we go, the blind quotes are coming, and all this stuff. The flashback

I had was not to Clinton '08, it was to Al Gore, 2000. It was to George H. W. Bush '88. When you're running for the third term, you're passionately fighting for continuity.

JOY-ANN REID:

For continuity.

CHUCK TODD:

And Bernie Sanders is passionately fighting for change.

JOY-ANN REID:

For change, absolutely. But at the same time, there is a little bit of a flashback to '08 in the sense that the Clinton team just seems to have this talent for a combination of underestimation and overcorrection. And I say they underestimate the threat, they did so with Barack Obama. And then when they realized it, it sort of delayed it even, they sort of overcorrected, overattacked.

CHUCK TODD:

Do you see it coming again?

JOY-ANN REID:

And I think they're doing that with Bernie Sanders. I think this sort of DEFCON 1 response to every single thing, to his medical records, everything else, among the sort of Clinton world is a bit of a throwback.

CHUCK TODD:

Steve, you absolutely captured this the other night during the State of the Union coverage. And it was right after Sanders' interview. You said, "It's remarkable that she's made a 74 year old, former gadfly senator relevant."

STEVE SCHMIDT:

Absolutely. Look, much of this is about Hillary Clinton as a candidate. But it's also about the Democratic party. And we've talked a lot about on the Republican side, the rise of the teaparty and the drift right. But remarkable polling numbers, 43 percent of Iowa Democrats identify as socialists, not as capitalists. So what Hillary Clinton - what Hillary Clinton in this race has found herself in is an ideological fight with the challenger to the left. And I don't think anybody should doubt that had Elizabeth Warren gotten into this race, she would've been the likely Democratic nominee--

STEVE SCHMIDT:

--president of the United States. And so Hillary Clinton has a formidable challenge now from her ideological left. And he has every capacity to win in Iowa, to win in New Hampshire.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

Iowa has always had, whether they call themselves socialists or liberal Democrats, has always had this tremendously liberal strain in the Democratic party.

CHUCK TODD:

It's like the really conservative on the Republican side of the state.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

And it was there in '08, and it was there in 2012. Which is why as an Obama campaign official, we never really pushed too hard back on the socialist arguments that people in your party were making. But I--

CHUCK TODD:

Does it help in Iowa?

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

I think that Hillary Clinton has done everything right. She has run a good campaign. She has outperformed in debates, she's raised money, she's done a great ground game. But what she can't control is this string of anger that is connecting both parties right now. It's what's given rise to Trump and it's what's given rise to Sanders--

CHUCK TODD:

I agree with Stephanie here.

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

The Republicans have not figured out how to handle it.

CHUCK TODD:

But it has impacted the Democratic--

STEPHANIE CUTTER:



And the Democrats haven't--

STEPHANIE CUTTER:

And that's the rise of Bernie Sanders. And it struck me when I was watching the two interview that he's got this sense of anger and injustice about the economy, and she's talking about advanced manufacturing. And there's a difference in that when you're two weeks out from an Iowa caucus --

HUGH HEWITT:

Her weakness remained. In fact, her ten minutes with you, Chuck, was both her best and worst that I've seen thus far. She was very good at the top on Iran. She dodged the Rahm Emanuel question. She did not answer the Thirteen Hours question. I hope tonight you follow up and ask her if she's seen the movie. And I think on Groundhog's Day, which is the day after the night of the Iowa caucuses, she is going to have the Bill Murray experience--

CHUCK TODD:

Wow.

HUGH HEWITT:

--of living the same thing that you did to her eight years ago--

JOY-ANN REID

Except that Sanders voters will vote for her.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, that's all right. But the Groundhog Day reference, Hugh, all right. You win the interview segment. That's all for today. Don't forget to tune into tonight's Democratic debate. Our coverage will begin on MSNBC and NBCNews.com at 8:00 Eastern. And then just before the debate starts, tune in on your local NBC station a few minutes before 9:00. I'll be there, Lester and Andrea. If it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

\* \* \*END OF TRANSCRIPT\* \* \*

**COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD" 1/24/16: SUNDAY EXCLUSIVE WITH HILLARY CLINTON; ALSO: SEN. BERNIE SANDERS, FORMER SEC. BOB GATES**

**SUNDAY EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH FORMER SEC. HILLARY CLINTON, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton joins the show from the campaign trail in Iowa to discuss the narrowing race between her and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), similarities in the race compared to eight years ago and more.

###

### **INTERVIEW WITH SEN. BERNIE SANDERS (I-VT.), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) speaks with Chuck Todd about his growing momentum in the Democratic field, how he feels one week from the Iowa caucuses and the state of his presidential campaign.

###

### **INTERVIEW WITH FORMER DEFENSE SEC. ROBERT GATES**

Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates joins Chuck Todd live on-set Sunday morning to discuss his new book "A Passion for Leadership."

###

### **THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

Will Trump emerge triumphant from the Iowa caucuses? How would a Sanders nomination affect red state Democrats? What can we expect from Thursday's debate? The roundtable discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

#### **David Brooks**

Columnist, The New York Times

#### **Chris Cillizza**

Political Reporter, The Washington Post

#### **Kasie Hunt**

NBC News Political Correspondent

#### **Kristen Welker**

NBC News White House Correspondent

###

## **COMING UP ON “MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD,” LIVE FROM IOWA 1/31/16: SEN. TED CRUZ, SEN. BERNIE SANDERS, SEN. MARCO RUBIO**

### **INTERVIEW WITH SEN. TED CRUZ (R-TEXAS), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

For Sen. Ted Cruz, winning the Iowa caucuses could potentially propel him to the Republican convention as party nominee this summer. He joins Chuck Todd live Sunday morning in Des Moines to discuss the significance of Monday’s caucus votes and his strategy going forward in the race.

###

### **INTERVIEW WITH SEN. BERNIE SANDERS (I-VT.) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

After a NBC News/Wall Street Journal/Marist poll this week showed Sen. Bernie Sanders neck-and-neck with Hillary Clinton in Iowa, Monday’s nominating contest plays a crucial role in his fight for the party nomination. Sen. Sanders joins the show in Iowa to address the momentum he has gained across the country and what the future of his campaign looks like.

###

### **INTERVIEW WITH SEN. MARCO RUBIO (R-FLA.), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

How does Sen. Marco Rubio fare in Monday’s caucuses? Does he have a third place finish as predicted by the NBC News/Wall Street Journal/Marist poll? Sen. Rubio joins Chuck Todd live in Iowa to talk about his strategy to win the Republican nomination.

###

### **THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

Did Donald Trump win Thursday’s debate without even showing up? Which Democratic candidate will emerge victorious from the Iowa caucuses? How will Monday’s nominating contest affect the New Hampshire primary next week? The roundtable discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

#### **Tom Brokaw**

NBC News Special Correspondent

#### **David Brody**

Chief Political Correspondent, CBN News

**Jennifer Jacobs**

Chief Politics Reporter, Des Moines Register

**Joy-Ann Reid**

MSNBC National Correspondent

###

**COMING UP ON “MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD,” LIVE FROM N.H. 2/7/16: FORMER SEC. HILLARY CLINTON, DONALD TRUMP, SEN. BERNIE SANDERS**

**INTERVIEW WITH FORMER SEC. HILLARY CLINTON, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Former Sec. Hillary Clinton joins the show to address Thursday debate, the party’s embrace of progressivism, Sen. Sanders’ “artful smear” and how she feels before Tuesday’s New Hampshire primary.

###

**INTERVIEW WITH DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump sits down with Chuck Todd to discuss his narrow loss in Iowa, his plan to win the Granite State primary and more.

###

**INTERVIEW WITH SEN. BERNIE SANDERS (I-VT.), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) talks with Chuck Todd about the his relationship with Wall Street, foreign policy, the momentum of his campaign and more.

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**THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

Does Sen. Rubio have a chance to win New Hampshire? Will Sen. Sanders win by the margin that polls are predicting? What candidates will stay in the race after Tuesday's primary? The political roundtable discusses all of this and more.

### **Hugh Hewitt**

Host, "The Hugh Hewitt Show"

### **Hallie Jackson**

NBC News National Correspondent

### **Chris Matthews**

Host, MSNBC's "Hardball"

### **Andrea Mitchell**

NBC News Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent; Host, MSNBC's "Andrea Mitchell Reports"

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## **COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD" 2/14/16: DONALD TRUMP, SEN. MARCO RUBIO, GOV. JOHN KASICH**

### **INTERVIEW WITH DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump speaks with moderator Chuck Todd live from Florida about his New Hampshire win, his strategy going into South Carolina and more.

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### **INTERVIEW WITH SEN. MARCO RUBIO (R-FLA.), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Amid criticism for "scripted" responses, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) discusses his Saturday night debate performance, approach to the upcoming South Carolina GOP primary next week, released tax plan and more.

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### **INTERVIEW WITH GOV. JOHN KASICH (R-OHIO), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Following his second-place win in New Hampshire, Ohio Gov. John Kasich joins the show to address his potential to win the South, finding himself in the line of fire of former Gov. Jeb Bush and his path to Super Tuesday.

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## **THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

Is the Democratic presidential race turning into a referendum on Sen. Bernie Sanders, not former Sec. Hillary Clinton? Will Donald Trump win South Carolina? Will Sen. Sanders' relationship with President Obama be an effective South Carolina storyline? The roundtable discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

### **Chris Cillizza**

Political Reporter, The Washington Post

### **Ron Fournier**

Senior Political Columnist, National Journal

### **Gwen Ifill**

Moderator & Managing Editor, PBS "Washington Week"; Co-anchor & Managing Editor, PBS "NewsHour"

### **Kathleen Parker**

Columnist, The Washington Post

### **Rev. Al Sharpton**

Host, MSNBC's "Politics Nation"; Founder & President, National Action Network (NAN)

## **TRANSCRIPT - Meet the Press - Feb. 21, 2016**

**CHUCK TODD:**

This Sunday morning, another big win for Donald Trump. Now the undisputed Republican frontrunner.

(BEGIN TAPE)

DONALD TRUMP:

It's tough, it's nasty, it's mean, it's vicious, it's beautiful.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

But Republicans believe it's a three-man race, as Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz vie to become the chief Trump challenger.

(BEGIN TAPE)

MARCO RUBIO:

And the 21st century conservative movement is the son of a bartender and a maid from Cuba.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Meanwhile, the Bush dynasty comes to an official end.

(BEGIN TAPE)

JEB BUSH:

Tonight, I am suspending my campaign.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Trump, Rubio, and Cruz all join me this morning. Plus Hillary Clinton gets the win she so desperately needed in Nevada.

(BEGIN TAPE)

HILLARY CLINTON:

Some may have doubted us, but we never doubted each other.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

While Bernie Sanders loses in the first state with a diverse electorate.

(BEGIN TAPE)

BERNIE SANDERS:

We are going to see the results of one of the great political upsets in the history of the United States.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Bernie Sanders makes his case this morning. Joining me for insight and analysis are radio talk show host Hugh Hewitt, MSNBC's Joy-Ann Reid, Amy Walter of The Cook Political Report, and Jon Ralston, the dean of the Nevada Political Press Corps and an NBC analyst. Trump, Rubio, Cruz, and Sanders. Welcome to Sunday in a post-primary and caucus edition of Meet the Press.

ANNOUNCER:

From NBC News in Washington, this is Meet the Press with Chuck Todd.

CHUCK TODD:

Good morning. I'm wishing every Saturday had primaries, because welcome to an amazing Sunday, where everything seems a tad bit clearer this morning. Very simply, there are two headlines out of shake-up Saturday, thanks to South Carolina and Nevada. We now have that three-way Republican race that so many expected. And we now have a Democratic frontrunner, again, and her name is Hillary Clinton, again. But let's start with the Republicans. Donald Trump made it clear that he is now the Republican frontrunner.

Trump scored a big win in South Carolina, winning 33% of the vote and all 50 delegates at stake. The battle for second, a distant second, frankly, were the back and forth all night with Marco Rubio edging out Ted Cruz by just one percentage point, 23-22. Bush, Kasich, Carson, they all finished way behind. And before the night was over, of course, Jeb Bush was officially out of the race. Here are Trump, Rubio, and Cruz as the night unfolded.

(BEGIN TAPE)

DONALD TRUMP:



There's nothing easy about running for president, I can tell you. It's tough, it's nasty, it's mean, it's vicious, it's beautiful. When you win, it's beautiful. And we are going to start-- we are going to start winning for our country.

(END TAPE)

(BEGIN TAPE)

MARCO RUBIO:

And now the children of the Reagan Revolution are ready to assume the mantle of leadership.

(END TAPE)

(BEGIN TAPE)

TED CRUZ:

Tonight, despite millions and millions of dollars of false and nasty attacks, despite the entirety of the political establishment coming together against us, South Carolina has given us another remarkable result.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

By the way, no Republican has ever won South Carolina and Iowa or New Hampshire, as Trump has, without going on to win the nomination.

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton got the win she needed to blunt the Bernie Sanders momentum. Clinton beat Sanders 53-47, finally getting an unambiguous victory after that nail-biter in Iowa, and of course that big loss in New Hampshire. Here are Clinton and Sanders as the results in Nevada became clear.

(BEGIN TAPE)

HILLARY CLINTON:

Tens of thousands of men and women with kids to raise, bills to pay, and dreams that won't die. This is your campaign.

(END TAPE)

(BEGIN TAPE)

BERNIE SANDERS:

I believe that when Democrats assemble in Philadelphia in July at my convention, we are going to see the results of one of the great political upsets in the history of the United States.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

This morning a packed show. We're going to hear from Donald Trump, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, and Bernie Sanders this morning. But we're going to begin with the Republican frontrunner. Donald Trump, who joins me live from Palm Beach, Florida. Mr. Trump, good morning and congratulations, sir.

DONALD TRUMP:

Good morning. Thank you, thank you very much.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me start with this idea of whether it is a three-way race. Do you believe the Republican nominations a three-way race, or do you believe this is you on your way to getting the nomination?

DONALD TRUMP:

Well, I think I have a big advantage. But it's certainly a three-person race. And you have a couple of other people that are very talented there too. So we have a five-man race. And I think that it's going to be not easy. I have a big advantage. But a long way from being won.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, that's very humble of you this morning. Look, it's been a dramatic week of I guess changes, position changes even by your standards. On Wednesday, you praised the healthcare mandate, by Friday you said to abolish it, on Saturday, you said Planned Parenthood did wonderful things, on Thursday you said you'd defund it. Similarly, at the debate, you called George W. Bush a liar, you sort of backtracked on that later in the week. It comes across, are you taking positions that you believe, or are you sort of, as things get heated, are you switching at the last minute? What are we to make of all this this week?

DONALD TRUMP:

Well, on the mandate, if you look at the mandate, we had a situation where we were, Anderson Cooper, who's terrific, by the way, and did a terrific job, but we were talking over each other. Look, I want, we're going to repeal and replace Obamacare. Obamacare is a total and complete

disaster. It's going to be gone. We're going to come up with a great healthcare plan, whether it's healthcare savings accounts, we have a lot of different things. We're going to get rid of the lines between states, we're going to have great competitive bidding. But I say all the time, you can call it anything you want. People are not going to die in the middle of the street. People are not going to die on the sidewalk if I'm president, okay?

CHUCK TODD:

Well, let me get something definitive from you on this.

DONALD TRUMP:

But Chuck, I say that, excuse me, I say that to packed houses with thousands and thousands of people, Republicans mostly, and I get standing ovations. I'm not going to let that happen. If I'm president, we're not going to have people dying on the streets. So you can call it whatever you want. I don't call it a mandate, I just say it's common sense.

CHUCK TODD:

No, I understand that. Well, let me ask you this. Do you think that it should be a law that anybody who can afford health insurance has to have it?

DONALD TRUMP:

I think, no, I think it's going to be up to them, okay? I want it to be up to them. But I'm really talking about people that can't afford it. We're not going to let people die in squalor because we are Republicans, okay? That's part of the problem with the Republicans, where somehow they got fed into this horrible position. We're going to take care of people. But no, people don't have to have it. We're going to have great plans, they're going to be a lot less expensive than Obamacare. They're going to be private. There are going to be lots of different options. We're going to have a lot of different options. Right now you have no options. You know why? Because the insurance company controlled Obama because they gave him a lot of money. That's why you have lines around the states. And you can't get competitive bidding.

CHUCK TODD:

Now let's move to Planned Parenthood. You defended the other work Planned Parenthood does. And now you said you'd defund it.

DONALD TRUMP:

That's right, I do. That's right, I would.

CHUCK TODD:

Now, the government will say, Democrats will say the money they give to Planned Parenthood does not go to abortions. That the money they give to Planned Parenthood only goes to other women's health issues, including mammograms and things like that. If you knew that government money were only going to that, would you support funding Planned Parenthood?

DONALD TRUMP:

Yeah, if it didn't have to do with abortions. Look, I understand that I have many, many friends who are women who understand Planned Parenthood better than you or I will ever understand it. And they do some very good work. Cervical cancer, lots of women's issues, women's health issues are taken care of. I know one of the candidates, I won't mention names, said, "We're not going to spend that kind of money on women's health issues." I am. Planned Parenthood does a really good job at a lot of different areas. But not on abortion. So I'm not going to fund it if it's doing the abortion. I am not going to fund it. Now they say it's 3 percent and it's 4 percent, some people say it's 60 percent. I don't believe it's 60 percent, by the way. But I think it's probably a much lower number. But Planned Parenthood does some very good work. But I would defund as long as they're doing abortions.

CHUCK TODD:

All right. Let me move to the issue of Iraq. Obviously, a couple clips came out. Let me play you the Howard Stern clip in 2002.

DONALD TRUMP:

Okay, sure.

(BEGIN TAPE)

DONALD TRUMP:

We have an idea who the enemy is, and a lot of times, the politicians don't want to tell you that.

HOWARD STERN:

Are you for invading Iraq?

DONALD TRUMP:

Yeah, I guess so. You know, I wish the first time it was done correctly.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

Now, clearly, you didn't sound like an enthusiastic supporter of the war.

DONALD TRUMP:I wasn't.

CHUCK TODD:

But I am curious of the second part of that quote-- The first time it was, "I wish the first time it was done correctly." What do you mean by that?

DONALD TRUMP:

Well, what I mean by that is it almost shouldn't have been done. And you know, I really don't even know what I mean, because that was a long time ago, and who knows what was in my head. I think that it wasn't done correctly. In retrospect, it shouldn't have been done at all. It was sort of, you know, it was just done. It was just, we dropped bombs. Now if you look back, actually, that was probably the correct way of doing it, not going in, and not upsetting, giving them a lesson or not. I mean, I think Senior actually did a pretty good job of what he was doing. He went in, he taught them a lesson. What happened is he was taunted. Because Saddam Hussein was saying, "We drove back the Americans. The ugly Americans were driven back, the power of Iraq, the power."

Well, we weren't driven back. He just decided not, General Schwarzkopf and others said maybe let's not go in. I'm not sure, although I think Schwarzkopf actually maybe wanted to go in. I think he maybe did the right thing. I can say this, if you look at my conversation with Howard, who's a friend of mine, who's actually a very good person and a good guy, different from what you see on the radio, okay, I will tell you. But if you look at my conversation, I was a very-- that was probably the first time-- don't forget I was in business. I was a businessman. I was a real estate man and a businessman. That was the first time I think that question was ever even asked of me. That was long before the war took place. That was, you know, many, many months before the war took place. And you could see by my answer, I wasn't exactly thrilled.

Joe Scarborough just released something yesterday more on point, much nearer. And he put out a tweet saying that you know, "Trump is right, look what he just said." So you have to take a look at that. But regardless. The war in Iraq was a disaster. It was probably the worst thing. If you look at the Middle East now, all started because of that horrible decision to go into Iraq. And you know what we end up with? Nothing. We spend 2 trillion dollars, we have thousands and thousands of lives killed, and just thousands, carnage, and we have wounded warriors who I love all over the place, right? And we have nothing. And Iran is now taking over Iraq. They've been trying to for many, many decades. And now they're finally taking over Iraq. As we sit here, they're taking over Iraq. We get nothing.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me give you one more issue where you sort of went counter to what is perceived as Republican orthodoxy, and that is on the issue of Israel and the Palestinians. You said Wednesday you wanted to be neutral in that dispute. Explain what neutral means, because some heard that in the pro-Israeli community and thinks, "Oh, he's going to be anti-Israel." Explain what you mean by neutral.

DONALD TRUMP:

If they want me, look, no, I'm very pro-Israel. In fact, I was the head of the Israeli Day Parade a number of years ago, I did a commercial for Netanyahu when he was getting elected, he asked me to do a commercial for him, I did a commercial for him. I am. But I don't want to be-- look, the hardest thing to do is that, in terms of deals, you're a deal person, right? The ultimate deal is that deal. Israel, Palestine, if you're going to make it, that probably is the hardest deal there is to make. People are born with hatred, they're taught hatred. And I have to say, it's mostly on the one side, not on the other side. But they're taught hatred. I say this. If I'm going to be president, I'd rather be in the position, because I will try the best I can, and I'm a very good dealmaker, believe me, to try and solve that puzzle. You're not going to solve it if you're going to be on one side or another. Everyone understands that. If I'm going to solve the problem, I want to go in with a clean slate. Otherwise, you're never going to get the cooperation of the other side. So that's all I'm saying.

CHUCK TODD:

Donald Trump, I'm going to leave it there. Again, congratulations on your big win. Stay safe on the trail.

Thank you.

CHUCK TODD:

We'll be watching on Tuesday.

DONALD TRUMP:

Thank you very much.

CHUCK TODD:

You got it. All right, I'm joined now by the man who came in second last night, Senator Marco Rubio of Florida. Senator Rubio, welcome back to Meet the Press, sir.

MARCO RUBIO:

Thank you. Thanks for having me on.

CHUCK TODD:

You got it, okay, sorry about that. Let me start with how you feel about this win - this second-place finish last night. You had every major endorsement that you could have had. And yet you still finished a distant second in South Carolina. How do you look at this as a positive and not a negative?

MARCO RUBIO:

Because 65% of the people voted yesterday, and about 70% of Republicans around the country have said, "We want someone other than Donald Trump to be our nominee." And the problem is, that vote was still divided, even last night, among five other people, four other people. I think now the race is narrowing even more. And as it narrows and continues to narrow, we're going to continue to gain.

So it was a very unusual year. You usually don't have five campaigns operating full time in a state this late into the process, three states in. But I feel great that now that the choices have become less and less, more and more that new voter or alternative to Donald Trump vote, is going to coalesce around us. And obviously, we have to go out and do the work of making that happen. But, well, we feel good about that.

CHUCK TODD:

But, you know, the issue that it seems like I think all Republicans have had going up against Donald Trump is whether it's been Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, you've done it a little bit as well, you say, "He's not a real Republican on this issue, he's not a real Republican on this issue." I'm sure you just heard my interview with him. He doesn't have a lot of traditional Republican stances on issues. And yet, he's still winning. How do you ever win over his voters?

MARCO RUBIO:

Yeah. Well, a couple things happened. Number one is he'll say something over the top, and then you guys in the press will decide, "Let's not cover anything, let's just focus on the outrageous statements." So he's been very good at dominating that. And in an 11-person or 15-person field, it crowded a lot of people out. That's going to become harder to do.

The second point that I would make is look, people are really angry at Washington. And they have a right to be. It's why I ran in 2010, by the way. And it's because I didn't want my next U.S. senator to be someone who was going to go up there and do the same stuff people have been doing. But I guess our argument is it's okay to be angry and upset at Washington.

But anger alone is not going to be enough. You deserve a nominee who tells you exactly, "Here's what we're going to do," and outlines that. So you know what you're getting. So there's

some level of accountability here. So my campaign is about this. We are very realistic about our challenges right now in this country.

But we're also optimistic about the future, but only if we do a few things. And I'm going to tell you exactly what those things are. And that's a big difference in this campaign between Mr. Trump's campaign and mine. And I think that's going to begin to matter a lot more now because there are less people in the race and more time to pay attention to some of that.

CHUCK TODD:

Look, throughout the night, it was clear a lot of campaigns thought you had momentum, a lot of campaigns were going after you. Here's one attack ad that Cruz put up on immigration. I want to play a snippet of you - uh, of it - and get a reaction from you on the other side.

(BEGIN TAPE)

MARCO RUBIO:

We know we have to deal with the 11 million people that are here illegally.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

We have to deal with the 11 million individuals who are here illegally. The bill that Senator Rubio put forward, I think is a great place to start.

MARCO RUBIO :

They still have to qualify for it, meaning--

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

Passing a background check.

MARCO RUBIO:

Passed a background check.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

Paying a penalty.

MARCO RUBIO:

Pay a fine.



PRESIDENT OBAMA:

Paying taxes.

MARCO RUBIO:

Start paying taxes.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

It won't be a quick process.

MARCO RUBIO :

That is a long path.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

But it will be a fair process.

MARCO RUBIO:

But I do think it's fair.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

So Senator, I know you couldn't see the ad as we played, I'm sure you've heard it and I'm sure you've seen a reference to it. What part of that ad is not true?

MARCO RUBIO:

It doesn't matter. First of all, people didn't care about it. This is now an attack that has now been going on in state after state, and people are processing and they understand that this is a serious issue that needs to be solved. Number two, I can put the exact same ad on about Ted Cruz.

Ted Cruz said he wanted to find a compromise. Ted Cruz said he wanted to bring 11 million people out of the shadows. Ted Cruz said that he wanted immigration reform to pass. Here's the bottom line. I tried to solve a very difficult issue, and we tried to produce the best and most conservative bill possible in a Senate controlled by Harry Reid at the time, and then send it over to the House and have them, conservatives, make it even better.

It didn't work out because the House never took it up. And so now, it's very clear that the only way forward is going to be to do it in pieces, beginning by securing our border. And that's what we'll do. When I'm president, the Senate bill is not going to be what we're operating off of. It's going to begin by focusing on securing our border first and foremost. And until you do that, you're not going to be able to do anything else.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, I've got to talk process. You woke up in Tennessee this morning. That tells me - that's a little bit of a tell. That's a state obviously you think you can win on Super Tuesday. Where else do you win on Super Tuesday? Because now it's about winning. You haven't won yet. You've got to win somewhere.

MARCO RUBIO:

It is. Well, I think first of all, as we understand, all of these states award delegates differently. So we have a different strategy for each of these states, depending on how they award delegates. When we get into the winner-take-all states in the middle of March, Ohio, Florida, big chunks of delegates, that's where you really need to begin to win states.

And I feel very good where we're going to be by then. So obviously, I'm not going to reveal to you today our campaign playbook, but I'm going to tell you that we're going to be in a lot of different places. Today I'm in Tennessee, I'm in Arkansas, I'll be in Nevada. We're going to contest and work very hard for those caucuses on Tuesday. And then we're going to keep moving forward in a bunch of other places. We have a national campaign. And I feel great about it, especially after last night.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, Senator Marco Rubio. I'm going to leave it there. Stay safe on the trail. It's going to be a big, quick race--

MARCO RUBIO:

Yes, sir.

CHUCK TODD:

--over the next 23 days. Thank you. And now to the Democratic race, and a close but crucial victory for Hillary Clinton in Nevada yesterday and a big blow for my next guest, Senator Bernie Sanders. Welcome back to Meet the Press, Senator.

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

Good to be with you.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me start with something you said on Friday. You said on Friday, "It could be that 10, 20, 30 years from now, people will look back at what happened in Nevada and say, 'This was the beginning of the political revolution.'" Obviously the results didn't turn out the way you thought. What happened, sir?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

Well, what happened is over the last five weeks, Chuck, we came from 25 points down to five points down. As I understand it, we actually won the Latino vote yesterday, which is a big breakthrough for us. But the voter turnout was not as high as I had wanted. And what I've said over and over again, we will do well when young people, when working-class people come out. We do not do well when the voter turnout is not large. We did not do as good a job as I had wanted to bring out a large turnout.

CHUCK TODD:

You know that at the last minute, there were reports that Harry Reid and the Culinary Union were working to try to beef up turnout in places where Hillary Clinton was going to do well, including right there on the Strip in Las Vegas. Do you think that made a difference?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

It's hard to say. But what I do know is, Chuck, that our message of a rigged economy in which people in Nevada and around this country are working longer hours for low wages, why almost all new income and wealth is going to the top one percent. And I'll tell you something else, there's issue of a corrupt campaign finance system, where big money interests and Wall Street are trying to buy elections.

Those are the issues that are resonating. Again, I wish we had had a larger voter turnout. But by the way, we did phenomenally well with young people. I think we did well with working class people. But remember, we were taking on a candidate who ran in 2008. She knew Nevada a lot better than we did, she had the names of a lot of her supporters. So I am proud of the campaign that we ran. Obviously, I wish we could have done a little bit better. But at the end of the day, I think she gets 19 delegates, we get 15 delegates, we move onto the next state.

CHUCK TODD:

You know, it's interesting listening to her victory speech last night. I want to play a clip of it, because it may sound familiar to you. Here it is.

(BEGIN TAPE)

SEC. HILLARY CLINTON:

Wall Street can never be allowed to threaten main street again. No bank can be too big to fail, no executive too powerful to jail.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

It's pretty clear she has ratcheted up her rhetoric on Wall Street because of your candidacy. Do you see that as a victory of sorts? That you've got her trying to--

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

Chuck, Chuck--

CHUCK TODD:

parrot your message?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

We're looking into the copyright issues here. Those are our words (LAUGHTER). Well, obviously I think what the secretary has recognized is the American people are extremely angry about the power of Wall Street, the greed, the illegal behavior of Wall Street.

And by the way, the fact that, you know, when a kid gets picked up with marijuana, that kid gets a police record, Wall Street executives destroy the economy, there's no prosecution against them. The American people understand that we need real change in this country, in my view, a political revolution, which says to the people on top, "You know what, you guys can't have it all."

CHUCK TODD:

You know, it's interesting. The guy who had the bigger super PAC of all time had to drop out of the race. Jeb Bush outspent everybody. He it's arguably had more special interests supporting his candidacy. Isn't sort of the people already overturning Citizens United, isn't your message, and Donald Trump, who have done this without super PACs, isn't this already resonating?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

No, well, in some ways it is. But I think, you know, if you looked at Jeb Bush's campaign, it's more than just money. It's the nature of the candidate and the message and all that stuff. Look, but let me give you an example. Right now, we have raised, as I understand it, Chuck, more contributions from people than Hillary Clinton has. But she's now going into the super PAC that she has which comes from Wall Street and very wealthy individuals. She will be outspending us in the next number of weeks, precisely because of that super PAC. Do these things matter? Yes, they do.

CHUCK TODD:

Where are you going to win next? You can't just come close. You're right, you came close in Nevada, but to win, you've got to win. In Super Tuesday, can you win a majority of the delegates on Super Tuesday? You don't have to win a majority of the state, but you need to win a majority of the delegates if you're going to win this thing.

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

Right. Well, we're studying that issue very closely, obviously, as to where we allocate our resources and allocate my time. I think we have a good shot in Colorado, a good shot in Minnesota, a good shot in Massachusetts. I think we are looking pretty good in Oklahoma. The last poll I saw in my old state of Vermont had us at 80%, so I think we've got a shot to win there. And I think we will surprise people in some other states as well.

CHUCK TODD:

Don't you have to beat her in a place like Texas or Virginia or Tennessee? A big state, to say, "You know what, I can win this nomination. I can't just come close." Don't you have to do that?

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

No, you're right. Look, look, at the end of the day, what you're saying is true. You need delegates. And as you know, these are state by state proportional delegates go out. We're looking hard at Michigan. We think we have a pretty good shot at parts of Texas. So trust me, we are focusing very hard on trying to get as many delegates as we can.

But let me also say this. We are in this race to the convention. I think we've got some states coming down the pike that we're going to do very, very well in. I think, you know, if you look at national polling, our support is growing. So we think, Chuck, we have come a very, very long way. I think the first time I was on your show, we were probably at five percent in the polls. We're moving, we're making progress.

CHUCK TODD:

All right, Bernie Sanders. I know you're in South Carolina this morning. But this race goes national in hurry. Thanks for coming on. Stay safe on the trail, sir.

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS:

Thank you.

CHUCK TODD:

And when we come back, how will Ted Cruz respond to another third place finish? He joins me next.

\*\*\*COMMERCIAL BREAK\*\*\*

CHUCK TODD:

Welcome back. I'm joined now by the very narrow third-place finisher in South Carolina, Senator Ted Cruz. Senator, welcome back to Meet the Press.

SEN. TED CRUZ:

Chuck, good morning.

CHUCK TODD:

Let me start with-- a clip from your press conference that you held on Wednesday, because I have a question on the other side, but I want to show it because it seems unlike other events that you had held throughout the campaign. Here it is.

(BEGIN TAPE)

BEN CARSON:

A culture exists within the Cruz camp that would allow people to take advantage of a situation like this in a very dishonest way.

SEN. MARCO RUBIO:

I said he's been lying because if you say something that isn't true, and you say it over and over again, and you know that it's not true, there's no other word for it.

DONALD TRUMP:

If you talk about people that lie, this Ted Cruz, this is the biggest liar I've ever seen.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

That was going to be my second question, but I'm going to go it there, you heard it there. Three different candidates have accused you of being a liar. A third, one out of three South Carolina voters thought you were running the most untruthful campaign. Has all of this hurt you? Has it stuck?

SEN. TED CRUZ:

Oh listen, Chuck, what we saw with both Donald Trump and Marco Rubio, that their response, whenever you point to anything in their record, is just to yell, "Liar, liar, liar," and to get very personal and to make direct character attacks. And my approach, from the very beginning of this campaign, starting a year ago, is that I will not respond in kind. I do not intend to insult any of the candidates.

I will sing their praises, I'll sing Donald's praises and Marco's praises and everybody else's praises. But I'm going to keep the focus on substance and records. And there's a reason why they scream "Liar." Because when you point to their own records, their own voting records, their own words, they don't like their records because their records are inconsistent with what they're running on.

And you know, Donald Trump threatened to file a defamation suit against me for running a TV ad that consisted only entirely of his own words on national television. Now, that's really a remarkable theory, that it is defamation to show people what he said on national TV. I think the voters are smarter than that.

CHUCK TODD:

But senator, let me, okay, now I want to play that press conference clip for you now. Because it, to me, contrasts what you just said. Here it is.

(BEGIN TAPE)

SEN. TED CRUZ:

Donald has had a long career of using great wealth and power trying to bully others. Whenever anyone points to their actual record, the response of both Donald Trump and Marco Rubio is to yell the word, "Liar." Whenever anyone does as this ad does, plays the actual words of Donald

Trump on national television, his response is to yell, "Liar." Their strategy is simply to yell, "Liar, liar, liar."

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

You did an entire press conference. It was some 30 minutes on Wednesday. You weren't talking about the issues that you normally do talk about on the trail. You weren't the happy warrior that you just described yourself as being. It seemed as if you allowed yourself to essentially let Trump and Rubio so get under your skin that you focused on them and you've lost focus on your own message.

SEN. TED CRUZ:

Oh listen, Chuck, I was then and am now very much a happy warrior, very much joyful. That press conference was simply discussing the facts, was laying out the actual facts. Not engaging in character attacks myself, just putting out, "Here are the facts, here are the evidence." And I noted, for example, that both of them were relying on fabrications.

For example, Donald Trump tweeted out to the world a quote allegedly from Senator Tom Coburn impugning my honesty. Within hours, Tom Coburn came out publicly and said, "That quote was an utter fabrication." And I said, "It's really remarkable to see two candidates, Trump and Rubio, making things up and putting things out for which there is no evidence and no basis."

But listen, Chuck. The important thing is we had an incredible evening last night. Last night, what we saw happen in South Carolina, particularly when you put Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina together, two things have happened. Number one, there is now only one strong conservative in this race who can win. And we see conservatives continually unite behind our campaign.

But number two, for anyone who doesn't believe that Donald Trump is the best candidate to go head to head with Hillary Clinton in November, and that's about 70 percent of Republicans nationwide who don't think Donald Trump is the right guy, our campaign is the only campaign that has beaten Donald Trump and that can beat Donald Trump. So what we're seeing is we're seeing Republicans coming to us in incredible numbers, going to [TedCruz.org](http://TedCruz.org)--

CHUCK TODD:

But Senator, wait a minute.

SEN. TED CRUZ:



--signing up, volunteering, contributing.

CHUCK TODD:

Senator, you finished third in a state with the highest evangelical turnout that we've seen yet. And you finished third. That sort of doesn't support what you just said, that conservatives are coming together and rallying to your cause.

SEN. TED CRUZ:

So Chuck, our path to victory from the beginning was always do well in the first four states, and then have a strong, strong night on Super Tuesday coming up on March 1st. In Iowa, everyone in the press said we couldn't win. We won an overwhelming victory in Iowa. In New Hampshire, everyone in the press said, "A conservative couldn't do well in a moderate New England state." We won a strong third there.

And then in South Carolina, we were effectively tied for second. A week ago, Donald was 20 points ahead. We closed that gap. And what we saw there, there were a number of very encouraging things. For one thing, we won young people in South Carolina. Our campaign was in first place with young people. By the way, we won young people in Iowa as well, and we were in second place with young people in New Hampshire.

One of the things we're seeing is young people who are optimistic, who want a future, want our constitutional rights, are coming to our campaign. And if you want to beat Donald Trump, you know, one of the clearest indications of who can beat Trump is Donald spends every waking moment attacking me. He doesn't attack any other candidates, because his campaign views us as the only real threat to him.

And that's why we're seeing so many people come around and say, "Listen, we want a real conservative. We don't want a Washington dealmaker who will support Democrats and cut deals to grow government and give into the cronyism and corporate welfare."

CHUCK TODD:

Very quickly, are you going to beat Donald Trump in Texas on March 1st?

SEN. TED CRUZ:

I certainly hope so. We're going to work hard to do so. And I've got to tell you, Texas, I love Texas, I can't wait in a couple of days to be home to the great state.

CHUCK TODD:

Must win?

SEN. TED CRUZ:

It'll be wonderful to sleep in my own bed.

CHUCK TODD:

Must win I take it, for you?

SEN. TED CRUZ:

Look, we hope we do well. I believe we will do well. We've got an amazing team in Texas. I love Texans. And Texas is clearly the crown jewel of Super Tuesday. We believe we're going to do very, very well in Texas, and we're going to do very well across Super Tuesday. And we're headed right now in just an hour, we're headed to Nevada to go and work to earn votes there.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, speaking of the road to Super Tuesday, that's what I'm dealing with next. Anyway, Senator Ted Cruz, thanks for coming on. Stay safe on the trail, sir.

SEN. TED CRUZ:

Thanks, Chuck, you too.

CHUCK TODD:

When we come back, that proverbial road to Super Tuesday and the states each candidate will be focusing on.

\*\*\*COMMERCIAL BREAK\*\*\*

CHUCK TODD:

All right. Time to set the road ahead. We're using Meet the Press data download to do it, because if you think things have been turbulent through now, wait till you see the next 23 days. First, the Republicans head west to Nevada on Tuesday. Democrats will go to South Carolina next Saturday.

But it's March 1st where things get fascinating, the first of a couple of Super Tuesday. Fourteen contests that day. On the GOP side, the establishment favorite Marco Rubio, he's going to be focusing in places like Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Virginia. Ted Cruz, he's going to be

campaigning in the Deep South SEC states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia. And of course, he has got to win in his home state of Texas.

Large evangelical populations he hopes will make the difference of all those Deep South states. But I'm watching Tennessee very closely. I think this is going to be the swing state of Super Tuesday along with Virginia. Where establishment candidates have won in the South over more conservative candidates.

That's where Rubio needs to beat Trump. Trump, of course is going to be a factor everywhere, as he's proven so far. For the Democrats, we're looking already at Hillary Clinton shifting her focus to big states like Texas, where she had an event last night. Bernie Sanders, he's cherry-picking states so far. He's outspending Clinton in places like Oklahoma, Minnesota, Colorado. And he's the only one on the air in Massachusetts.

But can he beat her in a bigger state? Haven't seen it so far. Moving down the road on March 5th, could actually be a good day for both Cruz and Sanders. Why? Two of the states are caucus states, Kansas and Nebraska, which you see on the left. Heavy for the bases there, while Clinton will be focusing that day on Louisiana. It's a primary with a large African-American electorate.

Shifting gears to the 8th, all eyes will be on Michigan, where the perception that with winning will be just as important as the delegates on the line. Probably John Kasich's last stand, by the way. It is an open primary, which means in Michigan, you don't have to be registered with a party to vote in either Democrat or the Republican side. Good news potentially by the way for Sanders and Trump as well.

And then just around the corner, the other big Super Tuesday of March, March 15th. It's the closest thing we're going to get to a preview of the November battleground. We've got Florida, Illinois, Missouri, North Carolina, and Ohio, all heading to the polls that day. Could be the establishment's last stand on the Republican side to stop Trump. We'll be back in a moment on this remarkable Sunday morning with a look at the Republican race. Can Rubio or Cruz turn this into a two-man battle with Donald Trump?

\*\*\*COMMERCIAL BREAK\*\*\*

CHUCK TODD:

Wow. Welcome back, panel is finally here to react to the four big candidate interviews on this Sunday morning. Hugh Hewitt, host of The Hugh Hewitt Show. key destination this year for Republican presidential contenders. Joy-Ann Reid of MSNBC, she's been all over the country for us these last couple of weeks. Amy Walter, editor of The Cook Political Report. And our Nevada political guru, Jon Ralston, host of Ralston Live on PBS in Nevada, who's now an NBC political analyst. Welcome to all. All right, let me just start with this. Hugh Hewitt, nobody has won New Hampshire and South Carolina back to back and had been denied the Republican nomination. Why isn't this over?

HUGH HEWITT:

Because it's the last war. Donald Trump has been practicing the chords of reality politics for 11 years doing reality television. And so he's clearly the frontrunner and he is clearly dominating. But I still believe in some old rules.

I believe Marco Rubio is going to win Florida, I think Ted Cruz is going to win his Alamo in Texas. And I think a month from now, we may be back here talking about an open convention, because I think old rules apply. John Kasich's going to win Ohio as well.

CHUCK TODD:

Look, if this is a three-way race, we actually have some-- you can see it in the exit poll in South Carolina. Let me put up some numbers here. We had, "The candidate who shares my values," was Ted Cruz, the leading candidate. "The candidate who was there to bring me to change," the leading candidate there was Donald Trump. And "The one that can win in November," the leading candidate was Marco Rubio.

AMY WALTER:

Marco Rubio, right.

CHUCK TODD:

There's your split, right there, right?

AMY WALTER:

Yup.

CHUCK TODD:

Trump's change, Rubio's electability, and Cruz's values.

AMY WALTER:

And the difference there is that the Trump number on change is so much larger than the lead that the other two have in their lanes. And that's going to be the challenge for those other two going forward. The other challenge for Marco Rubio, and this assumption that you're just going to get all those Bush and Kasich voters.

You may. It's true, if you add up all the New Hampshire, Bush, and Kasich voters, all the South Carolina, Bush, and Kasich voters, you give those to Rubio, he wins. But he's got to show that he can go up one on one against Donald Trump and survive that.

CHUCK TODD:

Who gets to the one on one?

AMY WALTERS:

Right.

CHUCK TODD:

And I don't know. Is Marco Rubio, he is the one guy that hasn't felt the wrath of Trump yet. Everyone else who has is either out of the race or severely damaged.

JOY-ANN REID:

But he--

CHUCK TODD:

Ted Cruz has been damaged.

JOY-ANN REID:

Right, but Marco Rubio has felt the wrath of Chris Christie and proved that he has a glass jaw. And I think that the question is going to be could he withstand a similar barrage from Donald Trump, who is relentless in going after the people he thinks are a threat to him. And in addition to that, you know, Hugh says Marco Rubio will win Florida. That isn't really clear at this point, that Donald Trump couldn't win there too.

CHUCK TODD:

I don't know if it's clear that Ted Cruz is going to win Texas, by the way.

JOY-ANN REID:

Right. It's not enough to keep winning seconds and thirds. At some point, Ted Cruz has actually won on. Rubio's got to actually win a state.

CHUCK TODD:

Speaking of a first, uh, three months ago, his first win was supposed to come in your home state of Nevada, Mr. Ralston.

JON RALSTON:

Yeah, and--

CHUCK TODD:

That's Tuesday. Is he going to win?

JON RALSTON:

No, he's not going to win. He'll be lucky to finish second. Donald Trump is going to win Nevada easily. Now, of course, it's a weird process in Nevada. Isn't everything a weird process? In Nevada, where they have it on Tuesday night, different start times, turnout may be lucky to get to 10%. But Hugh talks about old rules. You guys are talking about this math.

There are no rules anymore. The old math doesn't work. Nobody knows what's going to happen. I don't know why we're all afraid to say that. But right now, who goes one on one with Trump is the key question. And it doesn't look like to me from your interviews, from anything else, that either Cruz or--

CHUCK TODD:

Ain't they ready-

JON RALSTON:

--they're not going to get out, right?

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah.

JON RALSTON:

And as long as that exists, and you know, Kasich and Carson are hanging around for a little while, as long as there's that many candidates, then Trump is going to win every race.

CHUCK TODD:

Hugh, you heard Donald Trump with me today. He does not stick to Republican orthodoxy, which, you know, and this is always supposed to have been his downfall. Maybe it's his strength.

HUGH HEWITT:

Well, we have a debate on Thursday night. It'll be interesting to see how he handles the Bush lie. That was his Waterloo moment, and the pope rescued him from that.

CHUCK TODD:

That's right, I agree.

HUGH HEWITT:

--exactly what happened.

CHUCK TODD:

I agree.

HUGH HEWITT:

And so we will see on Thursday night how he nuances that, as he did with you. But I do believe he is the frontrunner for a reason. He does represent a smashup of Washington D.C. He represents a total leveling of everything that people are angry about. And he has Ivanka. And I must say, she was there last night, and she is the generational bridge that he needs, because Marco Rubio, the "children of Reagan" line is a good line.

CHUCK TODD:

Yeah, you know, when we're looking at this, should we assume? Go ahead.

AMY WALTER:

No. I mean, the only problem with the "children of Reagan" line is it reminds you that he is the young candidate.

JOY-ANN REID:

Right.

AMY WALTER:

So you have to be careful about using that. But, look, I think you still have a problem here when you're going and you're looking not just that Trump is winning, but he's winning in a broad swath of voters. It's not just that he's got this one lane, oh, he only wins when there's low turnout, he only wins when conservatives, he only wins in these kinds of states. He wins enough across a broad array -

CHUCK TODD:

And I saw people hanging their hat last night on the fact that yes, late deciders, he got crushed among the 40 percent of voters who were late deciders. But guess what, the early deciders they had 60 percent!

JOY-ANN REID:

And not only that, but Donald Trump is actually doing what Bernie Sanders was billed as doing. He's doing new voters into the process.

CHUCK TODD:

Look at the turnout in South Carolina.

JOY-ANN REID:

Exactly.

CHUCK TODD:

My gosh that was a huge--

JOY-ANN REID:

And he's actually doing that. He is accomplishing getting, particularly white, working-class voters, who are turned off by their own party. I think one of the interesting pieces of data last night, people who were angry at their own party, at the Republican party, and who feel-- and the only other candidates that were--

HUGH HEWITT:

Who does Hillary want to run against though? Who does Hillary--

JOY-ANN REID:

Donald Trump.

HUGH HEWITT:



You think?

CHUCK TODD:

I don't think so anymore. I think Cruz.

HUGH HEWITT:

I don't think so.

JOY-ANN REID:

He would be stronger than the democrats think.

CHUCK TODD:

I think the only-- Of the three, I think Cruz is the one she wants to run against.

JON RALSTON:

That's that's it's who she wants to run against.

CHUCK TODD:

And oddly, it's the easier race for her, in her mind.

JON RALSTON:

You know, what's amazing watching your interview with Trump is that he's like a guy who thinks that every question is, "Okay, I asked you a question, now free-associate. Say what comes into your head." And so now he's sort of evolved, kind of evolved on the health care question, where someone he read the Cliffsnotes like we did in school when we weren't quite prepared. And since he knows the issue of portability now, someone taught him what healthcare savings accounts are. But clearly, he can't get past the rock skipping across - But it doesn't matter to his base, right?

CHUCK TODD:

Doesn't matter, it doesn't matter.

JON RALSTON:

It just does not matter.

CHUCK TODD:

No. It's been the message that matters. I'm going to pause there. We've got to go to the Democratic side when we come back, and why Hillary Clinton's win yesterday might actually be seen in hindsight as the game changer of the Democratic race.

\*\*\*COMMERCIAL BREAK\*\*\*

CHUCK TODD:

Welcome back, panel is here. Now we're going to talk about the Democratic side of things, from Shakeout Saturday, after Hillary Clinton's big Nevada win. Joy, I want to start with you. There's a new ad that Hillary has out here, second one now narrated by Morgan Freeman. I'm going to play it for you and get your reaction.

(BEGIN TAPE)

MORGAN FREEMAN:

She says their names.

SEC. HILLARY CLINTON:

Trayvon Martin, shot to death. Dontre Hamilton, unarmed. Sandra Bland did nothing wrong.

MORGAN FREEMAN:

And makes their mothers' fight for justice her own.

(END TAPE)

CHUCK TODD:

It was only nine months ago that when asked about Black Lives Matter, Hillary Clinton said, "All lives matter."

JOY-ANN REID:

Yeah.

CHUCK TODD:

And now, look where she is today. Look at the rhetoric she's now adopting from Bernie Sanders. You can't say she's not evolving as a candidate. And boy is she trying very hard to move to where the Democratic base is.

JOY-ANN REID:

Well, I mean, you also recall that a couple months ago, she met with a lot of the mothers in Chicago, she has the endorsement of some of the moms. Bernie Sanders I think has one or two of the family members too. I'm a little uncomfortable with using the families of these dead children this way.

CHUCK TODD:

You think it's too much--

JOY-ANN REID:

But both of them have. I mean, both Sanders and Hillary Clinton are now--

CHUCK TODD:

Eric Garner, yeah.

JOY-ANN REID:

--trying to evoke the memories and use the family members of these young people in their campaign.

CHUCK TODD:

Do you think it's too crass?

JOY-ANN REID:

It makes me uncomfortable. But I do have to say that Hillary Clinton understands fundamentally that her candidacy is in the hands of African Americans, full stop. In Nevada, it was a 72 percent route with African Americans that carried her over the top. South Carolina, she will be saved by African Americans over age 50. And not even just all African Americans, but African Americans of a certain age, right, over 50. And she knows that that is what she needs.

CHUCK TODD:

Look at the next 12 states on the Democratic side. It's something like, I want to say seven of the 12 have an African American electorate percentage of 30 percent or more.

AMY WALTER:

Right.

CHUCK TODD:

I mean, this is, Joy's right, this is--

AMY WALTER:

She is exactly--

CHUCK TODD:

And it may come across a little crass, but that's what she's doing.

AMY WALTER:

Well, and the generational divide, you're exactly right, doesn't hurt as much. Because yes, she doesn't do as well with younger voters, but she doesn't need to. If you look at what happened in Nevada the other day, she lost under 45 year olds by a tremendous margin, where she picked it up was over 45 year olds who still make up a bigger percent of the electorate. And they will in South Carolina as well.

CHUCK TODD:

So did Harry Reid, the most valuable player? Is Harry Reid going to be known as the person who saved Hillary Clinton's nomination?

JON RALSTON:

I think he will be and he should be, I think he came back to the state.

CHUCK TODD:

How about that?

JON RALSTON:

He saw what was happening in the state. He saw the internal polls. Clinton was hemorrhaging. She went from a 25-point lead down to nine after New Hampshire. And it was neck and neck.

Harry Reid said, "I've got to do something." He called up the head of the Culinary Union, they were being wallflowers, they weren't on the dance floor.

He said, "You've got to get these folks out to vote." Heavily Latino, they knew they would go for Clinton. And he did that with other unions too by the way Chuck, not just with the Culinary Union. But what Joy's talking about, the African American vote is forgotten because we talk so much about the Latino vote in Nevada--

CHUCK TODD:

Right, but it's about half of the non-white vote.

JON RALSTON:

Right.

CHUCK TODD:

Not just Hispanic.

JON RALSTON:

And the fact that she got three-quarters of that vote, and she had every elected official, every African elected official, except maybe one or two in her corner, campaigning for her, saying and doing all of the right things, but Harry Reid is the guy.

CHUCK TODD:

Hugh, now that it looks like Hillary Clinton's back to being the favorite for the nomination, and suddenly it is Hillary Clinton that's standing there as the boogey person for the Republican party, does that change Republican voter calculus or no?

HUGH HEWITT:

It does. She--

CHUCK TODD:

--Changes your calculus, but does it really change the Republican calculus?

HUGH HEWITT:

The former secretary of State is the nominee. She is also the Willie Sutton of classified data. And there is going to be a long-term effort of Republicans, whether it's Donald Trump, Marco

Rubio, or Ted Cruz, to paint her into the corner. They have another release of data on Friday. There's one more coming. She is a tremendously flawed candidate.

CHUCK TODD:

Look, she loses all the trust questions to Sanders. That-- that-- that has been a fact. Her now sitting there as the threat, where no longer it's like, "Oh my God, maybe Sanders will win," does that change the way voters think in the Republican primary about Trump?-

HUGH HEWITT:

I think it does. I think voters are very sophisticated, very strategic. They know that she can be beaten. And so they will look at Donald Trump, and they will look at Marco Rubio, they will look at Ted Cruz, and maybe John Kasich and say, "Who can beat her? Who's the best matchup?" And I think that's what's going to work on Super Tuesday.

CHUCK TODD:

Well, we shall see. It's what the Republican establishment hopes the voters think. And they haven't been right yet. When we come back, in less than a minute, our endgame segment, and the end of the game for the Bush dynasty.

\* \* \* COMMERCIALS \* \* \*

CHUCK TODD:

It's being treated as an afterthought now, but guys Jeb Bush dropped out of the race last night. South Carolina put George H.W. Bush into the White House, But George W. Bush into the White House and sent Jeb Bush back to Miami.

But let me show you these money totals. Jeb Bush, you hate to say this, he's the new John Connelly. He was the biggest spender in Iowa, one delegate. He was the biggest spender in New Hampshire I think he got three more delegates there. And he was the biggest spender in South Carolina. Nothing symbolically represents the establishment downfall so far than this, does it Hugh?

HUGH HEWITT:

No, and it's because he's such a good man and the rules have changed so dramatically, as John pointed out, Amy and Joy pointed out. The rules are completely different. They are not the Jeb Bush rules of the 90s, they are the reality television rules of this decade and he was not suited for it.

CHUCK TODD:Joy, this is conservative governor

JOY-ANN REID:

Very.

CHUCK TODD: Arguably, his record as governor is more conservative than any current republican governor in the country.

JOY-ANN REID:

Moreso than Kasich, moreso than any--

CHUCK TODD:

How did he get painted the moderate?

JOY-ANN REID:

Well I think because Jeb Bush's sort of theory of the case was always that he would be painted as the grown-up, right? This theory would be that the party would go to somebody, perhaps a Sarah Palin, perhaps another sort of another gaslight candidate. And the party would come to him.

But number one, that lane is so fragmented between establishment candidates. And by the way, having lived in Florida for as long as you did as well, Jeb Bush has never really been that great of a politician. He's benefited from a lot of good luck. He torched his own campaign in '94, he had a weak Democratic opponent in '98, he benefited from the Clinton boom and got out before the Bush bust.

CHUCK TODD:

But it's funny how history gets rewritten. She's right. That's now how the history of Jeb Bush is going to be rewritten. It could have been a different version of the same events--

AMY WALTER:

But it was very clear, even from long before Donald Trump got in this race, when he would talk to Republicans, the number-one concern they had about Jeb Bush was whether he was too rusty for this, and whether he was going to be strong enough to stand up to Hillary Clinton. The Bush folks thought that money was going to help paper that over, they would remind people about his conservative record.

But when he went on that debate stage and totally flubbed it, and when he came on the shows and couldn't answer questions about Iraq, and when he looked like he was unsteady, it absolutely solidified the concerns that they had had all along about his skills.

JON RALSTON:

You used the right words, "strong." This is the election about strength. Donald Trump looks strong to Republican voters. Jeb Bush, anyone who's been around him, he's a substantive guy, he was a conservative governor. But he doesn't project well. He's a terrible candidate, right? He was the wrong guy at the wrong time for this election. They want someone like Donald Trump who is going to say what they want to hear. Jeb Bush, they don't want to hear his policy prescriptions. They don't want to hear him talk the way he talks.

CHUCK TODD:

And by the way, that money number that I just put up, all those money things, Hugh, doesn't that support what Jon said earlier, which is there are no rules anymore?

HUGH HEWITT:

There are no rules.

CHUCK TODD:

Because guess whose name wasn't on any of the top three of any of those three states? Donald Trump.

HUGH HEWITT:

I will say one thing has changed dramatically which is this Supreme Court vacancy, and it will reshape the race on my side, because I'd rather lose an election than lose the Supreme Court. And so I think going forward, this is the narrative changer. And I don't know how the candidates respond to this, because--

CHUCK TODD:

I you lose the election, you lose the court.

HUGH HEWITT:

I know.

CHUCK TODD:

You said--

HUGH HEWITT:

But it's worth fighting for you have to put it at the center of the election.



CHUCK TODD:

No, I hear you. All right, well, I've got to leave it there. That's all, what an amazing. All primaries should be on a Saturday. We'll be back next Sunday, a primary Saturday. And if it's Sunday, it's Meet the Press.

\* \* \*END OF TRANSCRIPT\* \* \*

**COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD" 2/28/16: TRUMP, CRUZ, SANDERS, KASICH; ALSO: NEW NBC NEWS/WSJ/MARIST POLL NUMBERS**

#### **INTERVIEW WITH DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump talks with Chuck Todd about his endorsement from New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie this past Friday, news from this week -- including calls for his tax returns and attacks on Trump University -- as well as his expectations for Tuesday night's primary contests.

###

#### **INTERVIEW WITH SEN. TED CRUZ (R-TEXAS), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Republican presidential candidate Texas Sen. Ted Cruz joins the show ahead of Super Tuesday to discuss how he'll fare in his home state and his path to the nomination.

###

#### **INTERVIEW WITH SEN. BERNIE SANDERS (I-VT.), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders responds to his warning Friday from the Federal Election Commission on problems with his February campaign finance report, addresses his momentum into Super Tuesday and reacts to Saturday's South Carolina primary results.

###

#### **INTERVIEW WITH GOV. JOHN KASICH (R-OHIO), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Ohio Gov. John Kasich, who said "nobody's gonna win but Trump" on Super Tuesday after Thursday's Republican debate, speaks with Chuck Todd about his strategy to win voters.

###

## **NEW TEXAS, TENN. & GA. POLL NUMBERS FROM NBC NEWS/WSJ/MARIST**

Ahead of Tuesday's nominating contests, a new poll from NBC News/Wall Street Journal/Marist debuts on "Meet the Press" with the latest insight from the ground in Texas, Tennessee and Georgia.

###

## **THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

Will Clinton win big in Saturday's South Carolina Democratic primary? What does Gov. Christie's endorsement of Trump mean for the GOP field? Are Rubio's attacks on Trump too late? What are the possible delegate outcomes from Super Tuesday? The political panel discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

### **Charlie Cook**

Editor, Publisher of The Cook Political Report; Political Analyst, National Journal

### **Erick Erickson**

Founder, Resurgent; Host, WSB Radio's "Atlanta Evening News"

### **Heather McGhee**

President, Demos Action

### **Andrea Mitchell**

NBC News Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent

**COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD" 3/6/16: ROMNEY, GRAHAM, SPACEY; ALSO: NEW MICHIGAN POLL FROM NBC/WSJ/MARIST**

**INTERVIEW WITH FORMER GOV. MITT ROMNEY, 2012 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE**

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney delivered a scathing speech on Thursday attacking Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump. He speaks with moderator Chuck Todd live Sunday morning to discuss the Republican Party's path to nomination.

*"Donald Trump is a phony, a fraud. His promises are as worthless as a degree from Trump University. He's playing the American public for suckers: He gets a free ride to the White House and all we get is a lousy hat." - Former Gov. Romney in a speech Thursday*

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### **INTERVIEW WITH SEN. LINDSEY GRAHAM (R-S.C.)**

South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, who ended his presidential bid for the Republican nomination in December, has not hidden his disdain for fellow congressman Senator Ted Cruz in the past, so it was surprising this past Super Tuesday when he indicated support for Cruz. Graham joins "Meet the Press" to address the future of the Republican Party.

*"Ted Cruz is not my favorite by any means, but ... we may be in a position where we have to rally around Ted Cruz as the only way to stop Donald Trump." - Sen. Graham on CBS this past Tuesday*

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### **INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR KEVIN SPACEY, NETFLIX'S "HOUSE OF CARDS"**

Actor Kevin Spacey, who plays Frank Underwood on Netflix's "House of Cards," joins Chuck Todd live in-studio Sunday morning to discuss the show's new season, which went live on Friday, and how it mirrors politics in real life.

*"For those of us climbing to the top of the food chain, there can be no mercy. There is but one rule: hunt or be hunted." - Frank Underwood on "House of Cards"*

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### **NEW MICHIGAN POLL NUMBERS FROM NBC NEWS/WSJ/MARIST**

New numbers from NBC News/Wall Street Journal/Marist debut on "Meet the Press" with the latest insight from the ground in Michigan ahead of the state's primary for both parties this Tuesday.

###

## THE WEEK IN POLITICS

Is Trump unstoppable? Did Romney's Thursday speech sway Republican voters? Because the majority of Saturday's nominating contests are closed, will Senator Cruz benefit the most? The political roundtable discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

### David Brooks

Columnist, The New York Times

### Stephen Henderson

Columnist, The Detroit Free Press

### Mary Matalin

Republican Strategist

### Kelly O'Donnell

NBC News Capitol Hill Correspondent

**COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD" 3/13/16: TRUMP, SEN. CRUZ, GOV. KASICH; PLUS: NEW OH, FL, IL POLL NUMBERS**

## INTERVIEW WITH DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump joins the show to discuss recent disturbances at his campaign events as well as his path to the nomination.

*"There are two different Donald Trumps. There's the one you see on the stage and there's the one who is very cerebral, sits there and considers things very carefully." - Ben Carson in his endorsement of the candidate on Friday*

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## INTERVIEW WITH SEN. TED CRUZ (R-TEXAS), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

After picking up his first congressional endorsement this week (Sen. Mike Lee) and one from the National Review, Texas Senator Ted Cruz speaks with Chuck Todd about his victories in seven states and how he'll work with his rivals against Donald Trump.

*“Donald does well with voters who have relatively low information, who are not that engaged and who are angry and they see him as an angry voice.” – Sen. Ted Cruz in an interview Wednesday with CBN*

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### **INTERVIEW WITH GOV. JOHN KASICH (R-OHIO), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Ohio Gov. John Kasich addresses how he feels ahead of the state's primary Tuesday, rumors of home state support from Sen. Marco Rubio's campaign and his thoughts on the current state of the Republican Party.

*“If you're a Republican primary voter in Ohio, and you don't want Donald Trump to be the nominee, John Kasich is your best bet.” – Rubio campaign spokesperson Alex Conant*

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### **NEW OHIO, FLORIDA & ILLINOIS POLL NUMBERS FROM NBC NEWS/WSJ/MARIST**

Ahead of Tuesday's nominating contests, new polls from NBC News/Wall Street Journal/Marist debut on “Meet the Press” with the latest insight from the ground in Ohio, Florida and Illinois.

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### **THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

Will the primary season last another three months? How much responsibility does a candidate bear for what happens at his or her events? What can we expect from this coming Tuesday's primaries? The roundtable discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

#### **Alex Castellanos**

Republican Strategist

#### **Anne Gearan**

Political Correspondent, The Washington Post

## **Hugh Hewitt**

Host, "The Hugh Hewitt Show"

## **Doris Kearns Goodwin**

American Biographer; Author, "Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream"

### **COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD" 3/20/16: KASICH; MCCONNELL, REID ON SCOTUS NOMINEE; SCHMIDT, STEVENS ON 'STOP TRUMP' MOVEMENT**

#### **INTERVIEW WITH GOV. JOHN KASICH (R-OHIO), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

After winning his home state primary earlier this week, Ohio Gov. John Kasich speaks with Chuck Todd about the 'Stop Trump' movement, his pledge earlier this week to not hold his tongue when it comes to Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump and his path to the party nomination.

*"I'm not interested in being combative, but every once in a while, when you see something that makes your blood boil, I think you should say something about it." - Gov. Kasich in a Yahoo! News interview this week*

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#### **HOW CONGRESS IS REACTING TO SCOTUS NOMINEE GARLAND**

President Obama's nomination of Judge Merrick B. Garland on Wednesday has ignited debate across the aisle, as congressional Republican leaders continue to pledge they will not take any action during the president's lame duck year. Todd talks with the Senate leaders of both parties about where the fight is headed.

#### **Senator Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.)**

*"It seems clear that President Obama made this nomination not with the intent of seeing the nominee confirmed but in order to politicize it for purposes of the election." - Sen. McConnell on Wednesday*

## **Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.)**

*“Why can’t the Republicans do what they’re supposed to do, do their jobs?” - Sen. Reid on Thursday*

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## **BEHIND THE ‘STOP TRUMP’ MOVEMENT**

Republican strategists Steve Schmidt and Stuart Stevens join Todd to discuss why party opponents still don’t have a unified strategy to stop Trump from becoming the GOP presidential nominee.

### **Steve Schmidt**

MSNBC Contributor; Former Strategist, 2008 McCain Presidential Campaign

### **Stuart Stevens**

Former Strategist, 2012 Romney Presidential Campaign

*“We are committed to ensuring a real conservative candidate is elected. We believe that neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump, a Hillary Clinton donor, is that person.” - Thursday statement from Conservatives Against Trump*

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## **THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

Though the energy and math are there, will there be a unified strategy to stop Trump? What will President Obama’s more active role in the Clinton v. Sanders race look like? How will Arizona, the biggest delegate prize on Tuesday, play out for the GOP? The roundtable discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

### **José Díaz-Balart**

Anchor, NBC News; Anchor, Telemundo’s “Noticiero Telemundo” and “Enfoque”

### **Molly Ball**

National Political Reporter, The Atlantic

### **Robert Costa**

National Political Reporter, The Washington Post

**Joy-Ann Reid**

National Correspondent, MSNBC

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**COMING UP ON "MEET THE PRESS WITH CHUCK TODD" 3/27/16: SEN. SANDERS; GOV. KASICH; LEITER, ENGEL ON NATIONAL SECURITY LATEST**

**INTERVIEW WITH SEN. BERNIE SANDERS (I-VT.), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders is expected to fare well Saturday evening in the Washington, Hawaii and Alaska contests, but are those enough for the delegate math to play out in his favor? Sanders joins moderator Chuck Todd to discuss his showings in those states as well as his policy positions in light of this week's terror attacks in Belgium.

*"At the end of the day, we can not allow the Trumps of the world to use these incidents to attack all of the Muslim people in the world. That is unfair." - Sen. Sanders Tuesday on Jimmy Kimmel Live*

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**SUNDAY EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH GOV. JOHN KASICH (R-OHIO), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE**

Ohio Gov. John Kasich, who has recently drawn criticism from conservatives that he is hindering the party's efforts to stop Donald Trump, joins the show to discuss his campaign efforts and how he would have responded to Tuesday's attacks as president of the United States.

*"If I'm the only one that can beat Hillary in the fall, why would anybody say I should leave? I mean that's just -- that's nuts!" - Gov. Kasich on CNN Monday*

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**LATEST IN U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY & THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS**

In the wake of Tuesday's terrorist attacks in Brussels, NBC News' Keir Simmons updates the show from Brussels; national security expert Michael Leiter and NBC News' Richard Engel discuss how the brothers who attacked the subway and the airport were listed in U.S. terror databases as well as how numerous terror plots have been thwarted in the U.K., France, Belgium and Germany.



## **Richard Engel**

Chief Foreign Correspondent, NBC News

## **Michael Leiter**

EVP, Leidos; Former Director, U.S. National Counterterrorism Center

## **Keir Simmons**

Correspondent, NBC News

*"We have an entire focus on foreign fighters. In fact, a month ago, here in Belgium, we had a foreign fighter search team here working with the Belgians in order to try and make sure that they were dealing appropriately with this potential at any time in the future." - Sec. Kerry to Engel Friday*

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## **THE WEEK IN POLITICS**

How did the week's political dialogue develop into a battle over wives after a terrorist attack? Is Texas Sen. Ted Cruz outmaneuvering Donald Trump in the delegate hunt? Will Sanders' expected wins in Alaska, Hawaii, and Washington tomorrow night even change the delegate math? The roundtable of NBC News correspondents discusses all of this and more from the week in politics.

## **Ben Ginsberg**

Contributor, NBC News; Republican Strategist

## **Hallie Jackson**

Correspondent, NBC News

## **Andrea Mitchell**

Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent, NBC News

## **Katy Tur**

Correspondent, NBC News

## **Kristen Welker**

White House Correspondent, NBC News

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