

GOP CANDIDATES DEBATE IMMIGRATION

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The Republican presidential candidates' disagreement about immigration has grown increasingly heated. Here's the latest exchange.

BLITZER: All right. Let's start with a question from the audience.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hello. Can you tell me what specific actions you'll take to address the costly consequences of illegal immigration while preserving the rights of those who seek to immigrate legally?

BLITZER: All right.

Senator Santorum, let's take that question. But also, in the course of that question, express your opinion on what we heard from Governor Romney, that self-deportation, or illegal immigrants leaving the country voluntarily, is a possible solution.

SANTORUM: Well, the possible solution is – I actually agree with Governor Romney. The bottom line is that we need to enforce the laws in this country.

We are a country of laws. People come to this country. My grandfather came to this country because he wanted to come to a country that respected him. And a country that respects you is a country that lives by the laws that they have. And the first act when they come to this country, is to disobey a law, it's not a particularly welcome way to enter this country. What I've said is from the very beginning, that we – we have to have a country that not only do you respect the law when you come here, but you respect the law when you stay here.

And people who have come to this country illegally have broken the law repeatedly. If you're here, unless you're here on a trust fund, you've been working illegally. You've probably stolen someone's Social Security number, illegally. And so it's not just one thing that you've done wrong, you've done a lot of things wrong. And as a result of that, I believe that people should no – should not be able to stay here.

And so I think we need to enforce the law at the border, secure the border. Secondly, we need to have employer enforcement, which means E-verify and then we need to have not only employers sanctioned, but we have to have people who are found who are working here illegally, they need to be deported. That is again the principle of having a rule of law and living by it. I am very much in favor of immigration. I'm not someone – my dad came to this country and I'm someone who believes that – that we need immigration. We are not replacing ourselves.

We have – we need not only immigration for – to keep our population going, but we need immigration because immigrants bring a vitality and a love of this country that is – infuses this country with – with great energy. And so, I support legal immigration, but we need to enforce the law and in fact, if you don't create an opportunity for people to work, they will leave because they can't afford to stay here.

BLITZER: Speaker Gingrich, you've suggested that self- deportation as advocated by Governor Romney is in your words, "An Obama level fantasy." Why?

GINGRICH: Well look, I think that first of all, you should control the border, which I have pledged to do by January 1, 2014. You should fix legal immigration in terms of visas so people can come and go easily – more easily than doing it illegally. You should also make deportation easier so when you deport people who shouldn't be here. The 13 gang members, for example. It should be very quick and very clear.

You should have a guest worker program, probably run by American Express, Visa or MasterCard so they minimize fraud, which the federal government won't do. And you should have much stronger employer penalties at that point because you can validate it. I actually agree that self-deportation will occur if you're single. If you've only been here a short time. And there are millions of people who faced with that, would go back home, file for a guest worker program and might or might not come back.

The one group I singled out, were people who have been here a very long time who are married, who may well have children and grandchildren. And I would just suggest that grandmothers or grandfathers aren't likely to self-deport. And then you've got a question. I – I offered a proposal, a citizen panel to review whether or not somebody who had been here a very long time, who had family and who had an American family willing to sponsor them, should be allowed to get residency, but not citizenship so that they would be able to stay within the law, but would not have any chance of becoming a citizen, unless they went back home. I don't think grandmothers and grandfathers will self-deport.

BLITZER: Governor Romney, the few times and I think it was only once, that they experimented with self-deportation, only a handful of individuals voluntarily left. What makes you think that — that program could work?

ROMNEY: Well, you've just heard the last two speakers also indicate that they support the concept of self-deportation. It's very simply this, which is for those who come into the country legally, they would be given an identification card that points out they're able to work here and then you have an E-verify system that's effective and efficient so that employers can determine who is legally here and if employers hire someone without a card, or without checking to see if it's been counterfeited, then those employers would be severely sanctioned.

If you do that, people who have come here illegally won't be able to find work. And over time, those people would tend to leave the country, or self-deport. I don't think anyone is interested in going around and rounding up people around the country and deporting 11 million Americans – or, excuse me 11 million illegal immigrants into America. Now, let's look at – and – and I know people said, but isn't that unfair to those 11 million that are here and have lived their lives here and perhaps raised children here? But I think it's important to remember, that there are three groups of people that are of concern to us.

One are those that have come here illegally, 11 million. The second is the group of people who are brought over by coyotes and who are in many cases abused by virtue of coming into this country illegally. And the third, are the four to five million people who are waiting at home in their own nations trying to get here legally. They have family members here asking them to come here. Grandparents and uncles and aunts. Those are the people we have a responsibility for. And the second group as well, those that are abused. We — we're concerned about them.

Let's focus our attention on how to make legal immigration work and stop illegal immigration.

BLITZER: All right. Governor Paul – sorry, excuse me, Congressman Paul you're from Texas. The state with the longest border with Mexico. Is this a viable option, what we just heard?

PAUL: Well, I'd talk about it, but I don't see it as being very practical. I think it's a much bigger problem.

You can't deal with immigration without dealing with the economy. The weaker the economy, the more resentment there is when illegals come in. If you have a healthy, vibrant economy, it's not a problem; we're usually looking for workers.

Even under today's circumstances, a lot of businesses are looking for workers and they don't have them. They're not as well-trained here.

But also, the way we're handling our borders is actually hurting our economy because the businesspeople – you know, visitors have a hard time coming in. I mean, we don't have a well-managed border. So I think we need more resources and I think most of the other candidates would agree we need more resources. But where are the resources going to come from?

I have a suggestion. I think we spend way too much time worrying about the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Use some of those resources on our own border.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Speaker Gingrich, you had an ad, but you pulled it this week, in which you described Governor Romney as the most anti-immigrant candidate. Why did you do that?

GINGRICH: Why did we describe him that way?

Because, in the original conversations about deportation, the position I took, which he attacked pretty ferociously, was that grandmothers and grandfathers aren't going to be successfully deported. We're not – we as a nation are not going to walk into some family – and by the way, they're going to end up in a church, which will declare them a sanctuary. We're not going to walk in there and grab a grandmother out and then kick them out.

We're not going – and I think you have to be realistic in your indignation. I want to control the border. I want English to be the official language of government. I want us to have a lot of changes.

(APPLAUSE)

I am prepared to be very tough and very bold, but I'm also prepared to be realistic, because I've actually had to pass legislation in Washington and I don't believe an unrealistic promise is going to get through, but I do believe, if there's some level of humanity for people who have been here a long time, we can pass legislation that will decisively reduce illegality, decisively control the border and will once again mean the people who are in America are here legally.

BLITZER: I just want to make sure I understand. Is he still the most anti-immigrant candidate?

GINGRICH: I think, of the four of us, yes.

BLITZER: Go ahead, Governor.

ROMNEY: That's simply unexcusable. That's inexcusable. And, actually, Senator Marco Rubio came to my defense and said that ad was inexcusable and inflammatory and inappropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not anti-immigrant. My father was born in Mexico. My wife's father was born in Wales. They came to this country. The idea that I'm anti-immigrant is repulsive.

Don't use a term like that. You can say we disagree on certain policies, but to say that enforcing the U.S. law to protect our borders, to welcome people here legally, to expand legal immigration, as I have proved, that that's somehow anti anti-immigrant is simply the kind of over-the-top rhetoric that has characterized American politics too long.

And I'm glad that Marco Rubio called you out on it. I'm glad you withdrew it. I think you should apologize for it, and I think you should recognize that having differences of opinions on issues does not justify labeling people with highly charged epithets.

GINGRICH: I'll tell you what...

(APPLAUSE)

I'll give you an opportunity to self-describe. You tell me what language you would use to describe somebody who thinks that deporting a grandmother or a grandfather from their family – just tell me the language. I'm perfectly happy for you to explain what language you'd use.

ROMNEY: Mr. Speaker, I think I described following the law as it exists in this country, which is to say, I'm not going around and rounding people up and deporting them.

What I said was, people who come here legally get a work permit. People who do not come here legally do not get a work permit. Those who don't get work will tend, over time, to self-deport.

I'm not going to go find grandmothers and take them out of their homes and deport them. Those are your words, not my words. And to use that rhetoric suggests to people that somehow, if you're not willing to keep people here who violated the law, that you're anti-immigrant. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I am pro-immigrant. I want people to come to America with skill and vitality and vibrance. I want them to come legally. There are grandmothers that live on the other side of the border that are waiting to come here legally. I want them to come here, too, not just those that are already here.

(APPLAUSE)

GINGRICH: Well, so we have gone – we've gone from your Washington attack when I first proposed this and you said it was outrageous; it would be a magnet to you're accepting the fact that, you know, a family is going to take care of their grandmother or their grandfather.

The idea that you are going to push them out in some form by simply saying they can't go get a job – I think the grandmother is still going to be here. All I want to do is to allow the

grandmother to be here legally with some rights to have residency but not citizenship, so that he or she can finish their life with dignity within the law.

(APPLAUSE)

ROMNEY: You know, our problem is not 11 million grandmothers. Our problem is – all right.

(APPLAUSE)

ROMNEY: Our problem is 11 million people getting jobs that many Americans, legal immigrants, would like to have. It's school kids in schools that districts are having a hard time paying for. It's people getting free health care because we are required under the law to provide that health care.

And the real concern is the people who want to come here legally. Let's let legal immigrants come here. Let's stop illegal immigration.