

The Wildcard Goes South



Photos by Jordan E. Ferrell

Supporters of business mogul and presidential candidate Donald Trump drove as long as six hours to begin securing their spot at the Jacksonville Landing on Oct. 24. The crowds were swelling as early as 9:30 a.m.



Trump lands in Jacksonville

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Special to the Recorder

“The American Dream is back. We are going to bring it back bigger, better and stronger than ever before and we are going to make America great again.”
– Donald J. Trump

Strange days are definitely ahead.

Playboy has announced that it will no longer be printing nudity, LeBron James is regarded as the most socially astute athlete of his generation and a man who most Americans recognize from a reality TV show is leading the GOP circuit by as much as 26 points in New Hampshire according to the most recent CBS poll.

The Donald J. Trump Express has pulled out of station and is in full locomotion.

With just under 100 days until the Iowa Caucus, things look grim for establishment favorites Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz. The polling data that puts the ex-Democrat, ex-Republican, independent candidate ahead of his competition is plastered on the front page of every weekly in the nation and discussed at least 20 times a day on every major news network. The enigma candidate has revealed himself — and the question is not if he is flying the highest but how long will the wind stay under his wings.

Despite his ample lead in the southern states, Trump went on a two-stop tour in Florida to secure a more

accurate pulse on the large and polarizing state, which holds 29 electoral votes.

Trump's first stop in the Sunshine State was on Oct. 23 at his very own hotel in Miami, the Trump National Doral, where he held an enthusiastic and heavily protested rally. The following day Trump would make a bee-line for Jacksonville, where the crowd was willing and waiting to hear the current frontrunner speak.

A warm welcome at the Jacksonville Landing

On Oct. 24, Trump was scheduled to speak at the Jacksonville Landing at noon. Supporters, who drove as long as six hours to see the candidate, gathered as early as 9:30 a.m. to secure a spot for the speech. Chants of “We want Trump” rang out from the crowd, which was adorned in “Vote for Trump” button and shirts, plus hats that read “Make American great again” in every direction.

The current front runner for the GOP arrived on the scene at 12:30 p.m. In the summer-like heat, Trump began with statements of adoration for the city of Jacksonville and comments regarding his self-admitted obsession with polls and ratings. According to Trump, he had just recently helped Chris Wallace of Fox News achieve the highest ratings he has seen in six years when he made an appearance on his show last week.

“People want to hear this message,” Trump said, as people started to clap. “It’s an amazing message. And you know what it is? It’s basically saying we are going to go out and work, we are going to get rid of all these horrible restrictions. We are going to make this dynamic.”

Trump continued his speech for the next 60 minutes, boasting about his numbers, taking small jabs at the other GOP candidates (especially Rubio and Bush) and reassuring his supporters that he will do whatever



“People want to hear this message,” Trump said to the crowds at the Landing on Oct. 24.

it takes to make America the country that it once was.

About halfway through the rally, a group of disgruntled youth unraveled a “Dump the Trump” banner over the side of the Main Street Bridge. The noise and excitement coming from the center of the Landing had clearly captivated the entire audience, though. Nothing could be heard except the sound of hands clapping and the frequent shouts of distaste for Hillary Clinton.

One of the points Trump made sure to communicate was that he has been campaigning thus far on his own dime and that it pales in comparison to the amount of money other Republican candidates — with the help of super political action committees (PACs) — have already spent. He went on to relate his low-budget campaign to the kind of approach government needs to take in order to turn the country’s debt crisis around.

“That’s what we have to do for our country,” he said. “I’m not doing this in a braggadocios way. I’ll put up as much money as I need. I’m not going anywhere —

TRUMP

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that I can tell you.”

Trump’s outspoken resentment for super PACs most likely wins him a good deal of support from the voters who have been complaining about the amount of money wasted on campaigning and the formidable power these action committees possess.

“What I’m saying is, wouldn’t it be nice if we had a country that would spend the least and be number one?”

Looking ahead on the campaign trail

The type of gumption that Trump is portraying is something you would normally see in a candidate around March of election year, when the field has cleared out and the targets are easier to see. But Trump’s momentum in a crowded field is impossible to ignore. Voters are now interested in learning more about the candidate’s concrete plans for reform and seeing the longevity potential of his campaign.

Many middle-class supporters have recently gotten on board with Trump’s highly acclaimed tax plan, which proposes a simplified tax code and a max 15% income tax on all businesses. The tax plan vows to cap the maximum income tax for single and joint filers at 25% (down from the current 38.6). Trump vows to reform a tax system that has only increased in the amount of brackets since the millennium and never been lower than a max 31%. The time is coming when Trump will have to explain how he plans to push through his radical reforms.

Currently, Trump is trailing in Iowa by as much as 14 points according to the most recent Monmouth University poll. Things look a lot different in Florida though. According to the state’s most recent poll done by the University of North Florida, he has a leg up on his



A small group of protesters situated on the Main Street Bridge unfurled a “DUMP THE TRUMP” sign halfway through Trump’s speech at the Jacksonville Landing. The sign could be seen over Trump’s shoulder as he continued his speaking engagement.

Photos by Jordan E. Ferrell

closest competition (Marco Rubio) by three points. In September, Trump was in the lead by 12 points according to a Quinnipiac University poll.

Keeping in mind that it is still very early on in the presidential race, UNF’s Dr. Michael Binder said he doesn’t see Trump as a long term candidate for several reasons. Binder says that the average voter is looking at ideas and “statements of simplicity” at this leg of the campaign trail, which Trump has been happily providing.

“Trump might be the king of the prom right now, but it’s a long race,” says Binder. “If he starts rolling out more policies with more substance, maybe he lasts a little longer, but I just don’t see it.”

With Florida being a swing state, voters can count on seeing many GOP candidates making stops here in the hope of securing much needed votes later on down the line if they become the primary candidate.

According to Binder, a primary can-



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didate needs to win Florida to win the Whitehouse. Rubio appears to have the best chance of locking up the Sunshine State in the 2016 election, Binder says, due to his consistently good approval ratings as Senator.

“[Trump’s] competition is himself,” said Binder. “How is he going to overcome those huge unfavorables within

the Republican Party and outside of it?”

But only time will tell if the new “Teflon Don” has the political endurance to stay on the campaign trail. One thing is for certain: the fat lady will be singing very soon for a good chunk of GOP candidates that are struggling to compete with the air time Trump is receiving. The clock is ticking.

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