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Evolution and the GOP's 2016 candidates: A complete guide

Here's where the party's hopefuls stand on the theory



Bobby Jindal, Rick Perry, Ben Carson (Credit: AP/AJ Mast/Kathy Willens/Reuters/Earnie Grafton)

From climate change to vaccines to the theory of evolution, much of the Republican Party has made clear that it's not exactly enamored of modern science. This anti-intellectualism can take a few forms: Republicans may flatly reject empirical evidence. They may accept parts or all of the evidence, but with major caveats — the climate is warming, but humans aren't causing it; vaccines work, but parents should have the right to opt their children out of them; evolution occurred, but it should be taught alongside creationism in public schools. Or, like Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, they take the "I'm not a scientist" tack, and simply decline to state their views.

Asked during a trade mission to London today whether he accepts evolution, Walker replied, "I'm going to punt on that one... That's a question a politician shouldn't be involved in one way or another." The Boston Globe's Matt Viser quipped that following Chris Christie's disastrous trip across the pond, during which the New Jersey governor said that "parents need to have some measure of choice" in whether to vaccinate their children, Walker seemed to have learned that the best approach is to stay mum on such topics.

But Walker's refusal to indicate whether he accepts a fundamental tenet of biology underscores the GOP's tortured relationship with science, not least on evolution. With Walker and other GOP hopefuls gearing up to launch their 2016 campaigns, Salon now provides you with a comprehensive guide to where the Republican candidates stand on the origin of life.

We boil the prospective candidates' positions into four categories: Those who unequivocally accept the science; one candidates who accepts it, but with caveats; those who won't make clear where they stand; and finally, contenders who are evolution denialists.

The Evolutionists

- Nobody.

The Asterisk

- Jeb Bush: Asked in 2005 whether he accepted evolution, Bush affirmed that he did — but that it shouldn't be taught in schools. "Yeah, but I don't think it should actually be part of the curriculum, to be honest with you," Bush said. "And people have different points of view and they can be discussed at school, but it does not need to be in the curriculum." Later that year, he argued that students should be presented with "varying viewpoints."

They Aren't Scientists

- Chris Christie: Does Christie affirm evolutionary science? "That's none of your business," he replied with characteristic brusqueness in 2011. "Evolution is required teaching," he added. "If there's a certain school district that also wants to teach creationism, that's not something we should decide in Trenton."
- Ted Cruz: While his kooky father would like you to know that evolution is a Communist lie, the Texas senator himself "won't discuss evolution directly," the New Yorker reported.
- Bobby Jindal: The Brown University biology major, Rhodes scholar, and scorner of "the stupid party" feigns ignorance on the subject, emphasizing last year that he's not an "*evolutionary biologist*" and contending that local schools should decide what they teach.
- John Kasich: During his 2010 run for Ohio governor, Kasich seemed to place evolution and creationism on a par with one another, saying only that both evolution and "creation science" should be taught in classrooms.
- Rand Paul: During his 2010 Senate campaign, Paul courted young earth creationists and said he would "pass" on the question of how old the earth is.
- Marco Rubio: Asked the earth's age in 2012, Rubio replied, "I'm not a scientist, man." He added, "At the end of the day, I think there are multiple theories out there on how the universe was created and I think this is a country where people should have the opportunity to teach them all." After his remarks on the earth's age were widely derided, Rubio acknowledged that it's 4.5 billion years old, but maintained that that wasn't inconsistent with creationism.
- Scott Walker: He's going to punt on this one.

The Hell No Caucus

- Ben Carson: He may be an acclaimed neurosurgeon, but Carson casts his lot with the creationists. “Evolution and creationism both require faith. It’s just a matter of where you choose to place that faith,” he declared in 2012, proceeding to imply that evolutionists lacked an ethical framework.
- Mike Huckabee: During a 2007 GOP presidential debate, the Southern Baptist preacher and former Arkansas governor indicated that he doesn’t accept evolution. “But you know, if anybody wants to believe they are the descendants of a primate, they are certainly welcome to do it,” he said.
- Rick Perry: Calling evolution just a “theory that’s out there,” Perry proclaimed in 2011 that “God is how we got here.” Creationism and evolution should both be presented in public schools, he added.
- Rick Santorum: Denouncing the idea that evolution is “above reproach,” Santorum said in 2008, “I obviously don’t feel that way. I think there are a lot of problems with the theory of evolution, and do believe that it is used to promote to a worldview that is anti-theist, that is atheist.”