

Ted Cruz supporters in S. Florida see campaign as a mission



Ted Cruz may be behind in the polls, but his followers are fervent.

BY ANTHONY MAN | Staff writer

Ted Cruz is behind in the latest Florida poll — even with his base among tea party activists and white evangelical Christians — and the political drama swirls around the looming Sunshine State showdown between Donald Trump and Marco Rubio.

But Cruz's South Florida supporters see the uber conservative U.S. senator as a cause, and they're

not backing down from what many see as a mission to save America.

"It's a matter of fighting and defending our liberty and our freedom. If we continue down the same path, we're no longer going to have this country the way it should be," said Roger Garcia, 27, of Weston.

Garcia was so moved by Cruz that he's given up virtually everything but work to devote himself to

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volunteer work for the campaign, making calls, holding signs, spreading the word on social media.

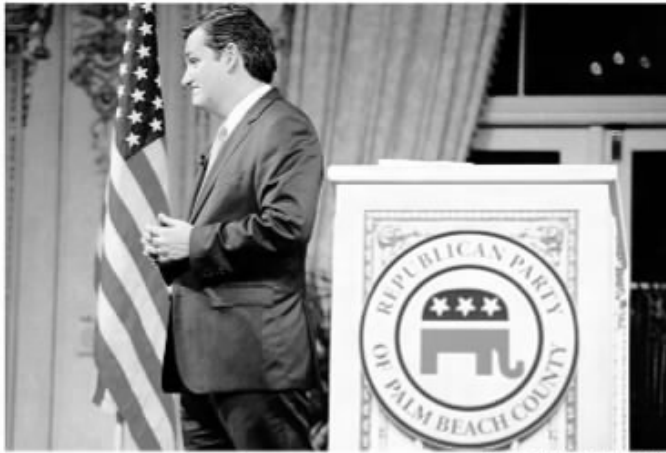
He said it's the first time he's felt inspired by a politician. Garcia has been a fan since Cruz was elected to the Senate in 2012. He signed up for that campaign as soon as Cruz announced in March.

"I go for the 'constitutional' label. That's the main thing, that Ted Cruz has been tested, and he's trusted to follow the Constitution in all his policies. And that's what America-loving citizens want. They want the Constitution followed and not the liberal policies that we see," said Frank Hunt of West Delray, who describes himself as "retirement age."

Hunt, who's been active in conservative causes and Republican campaigns before, was so inspired that he drove from South Florida to Alabama last year for the chance to see his candidate in person.

From the Cruz app on her smartphone, Jean Miller can check in for the latest Cruz news, share what she's doing on social media, and help with efforts to contact Republican primary voters. She said it's much different from the last time she volunteered for a presidential candidate — in 1972, when she worked on behalf of the most liberal presidential candidate of the last half of the 20th century, Democrat George McGovern.

"Who possibly could be better for our country? And not only that, I'm a Christian, and I'm a firm believer that Ted Cruz was heaven sent. I really do, because if we ever needed somebody like him, it's right now. I mean with ISIS going on the way they are, our borders, and I don't know what



JIM BASSOL/STAFF FILE PHOTO

Ted Cruz was the keynote speaker at the Palm Beach County Republican Party dinner at Mar-a-Lago in February 2016.

[President Barack] Obama plans for this country," said Miller, 63, of Davie.

Miller became a Republican in 2008, even though her new party didn't excite her at the time. Now, because of Cruz, "I'm really happy to be a Republican. ... I've watched over the years. I've watched our country absolutely be destroyed. And I just can't do it any more."

Garcia, Hunt and Miller have a formidable task.

Florida looks like the setting for a battle between Trump, the real estate mogul and part-time Palm Beach resident, and Rubio, Florida's Republican U.S. senator. A Quinnipiac University poll released Thursday found Trump had the support of 44 percent of Florida likely Republican voters, Rubio had 28 percent and Cruz had 12 percent.

Trump has led in other states' polls, and gone on to win in New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada. But that doesn't don't faze Joe Goldner, of Sunrise, local Cruz Crew coordinator

who concentrates on social media.

"I don't trust the polls down here because we know what we see," Goldner said. "We know those polls are false."

Even if he loses, Cruz could have an effect. Florida's March 15 primary puts it in the first wave of winner-take-all states in the competition for delegates. Whoever comes in first gets all 99 delegates to the Republican convention, even if it's just a narrow victory.

That assumes that Cruz, Rubio and Trump are still standing after the March 1 Super Tuesday contests, when voters in 11 states weigh in on the Republican presidential field.

Another challenge is Cruz's persona. Sid Dinerstein, former chairman of the Palm Beach County Republican Party, said he hears from many Republicans who don't care for the Texas senator.

"One of the things that I find striking is how many people who are Republican and would consider voting Republican then say to me 'I

won't vote for Ted Cruz. I just don't like him," he said. "There is something personal between Ted Cruz and the electorate that is about him."

The Quinnipiac Poll found 26 percent of Florida likely Republican voters "would definitely not" support Cruz for the nomination, compared with 21 percent for Trump, 17 percent for Rubio and 11 percent for Gov. John Kasich of Ohio.

David Booch of Pompano Beach, a Republican committeeman and Trump supporter, said his candidate "is telling the truth. What I can see is Ted Cruz has lied about so many things since Iowa."

Miller, the Cruz supporter from Davie, said Trump doesn't have the temperament for the presidency. "I don't think he's the best person to run our country. I don't think he has any self control," she said.

Many Cruz supporters are passionate — in their antipathy toward Rubio.

"He's a liar. He's a liar. He's a liar," Gabriel Jose Carrera said about Rubio.

Debates, elections, deadlines

March 1 (Super Tuesday): Alabama, Alaska Republicans, American Samoa Democrats, Arkansas, Colorado Democrats, Democrats abroad (through March 8), Georgia, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia.

March 3: Republican candidates debate in Detroit. Televised on Fox News.

March 5: Early voting begins in Broward and Palm Beach counties.

March 5: Kansas, Kentucky Republicans, Louisiana, Maine Republicans, Nebraska Democrats.

March 6: Maine Democrats, Puerto Rico Republicans.

March 6: Democratic candidates debate in Flint, Mich. Televised on CNN.

March 8: Hawaii Republican, Idaho Republicans, Michigan, Mississippi.

March 9: Democratic candidates debate, Miami-Dade College Kendall campus.

March 9: Last day to request a vote by mail (absentee) ballot from county supervisor of elections office.

March 10: Republican candidates debate, University of Miami.

March 12: Northern Mariana Democrats, District of Columbia Republicans.

March 13: Last day of early voting in Broward and Palm Beach counties.

March 15: Florida, Illinois, Missouri, North Carolina, Northern Mariana Islands Republicans, Ohio.

March 15: Polls open in Florida from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. for people registered in Democratic and Republican parties (and no party affiliation/independent voters who live in cities, towns and villages with local elections).

Mail ballots must be received by the county supervisor of elections' offices by 7 p.m.

SOURCES: News reports; Broward and Palm Beach county supervisors of elections offices

The Fort Lauderdale resident is among many grassroots Republicans and tea party activists who feel betrayed by Rubio's involvement in the so-called Gang of Eight group of senators that tried to pass comprehensive immigration reform. If it weren't for that, Rubio would be "the No. 1 GOP presidential candidate," Carrera said.

"That killed him. He was done then," Goldner said.

Several of Cruz's South Florida supporters said they would support the eventual Republican nominee — even if it isn't Cruz.

"We need to make sure the Democrats don't get in

power again," Hunt said.

Garcia won't entertain the notion that Cruz could lose Florida and the nomination.

"He is going to be president. That's the final statement. And I believe it," he said.

Carrera said he, too, is convinced. "We're not a big group, but Jesus changed the world with 12 disciples," he said at a recent campaign organizing meeting. "They call us crazy, let them call us crazy. They call us religious nuts, let them call us religious nuts, but Ted Cruz is going to be president."

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