

Cain Says His Deadly Fence Plan Was 'a Joke'

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Highlight: Herman Cain's remarks on a deadly border fence were taken seriously, but the candidate says they shouldn't have been.

Body

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At two campaign rallies in Tennessee on Saturday night, the Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain said that part of his immigration policy would be to build an electrified fence on the country's border with Mexico that could kill people trying to enter the country illegally.

But by Sunday morning, in a dramatic change of tone, Mr. Cain, a former restaurant executive, said he was only kidding.

"That's a joke," Mr. Cain told the journalist David Gregory during an appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press," where he was asked about the electrified fence. "That's not a serious plan. I've also said America needs to get a sense of humor."

Mr. Cain's attempt to pass off incendiary comments as nothing but a joke may take more effort, however. In making the initial remarks about an electrified fence killing illegal immigrants, Mr. Cain was detailed and repetitive. He did not introduce his thoughts as anything but serious commentary, beginning with the words, "We have a crisis of illegal immigration."

And the crowds responded with cheers, not laughs.

As [Ed Wyatt reported](#) on Saturday from Tennessee:

The remarks, which came at two campaign rallies as part of a barnstorming bus tour across the state, drew loud cheers from crowds of several hundred people at each rally. At the second stop, in Harriman, Tenn., Mr. Cain added that he also would consider using military troops "with real guns and real bullets" on the border to stop illegal immigration.

The remarks were among the most pointed yet by Mr. Cain about illegal immigration, and they come as he is enjoying a surge in national political polls on the back of his victory in a recent Florida straw poll.

When Mr. Gregory asked if Mr. Cain would describe himself as a "neoconservative," -- the foreign policy approach championed by the Bush administration that favored the aggressive use of military power to promote American interests and values abroad -- Mr. Cain seemed unsure:

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MR. **CAIN**: I'm not sure what you mean by neoconservative. I am **a** conservative, yes. Neoconservative -- labels sometimes will put you in **a** box. I'm very conservative.

MR. GREGORY: You're familiar with the neoconservative movement?

MR. **CAIN**: I'm not familiar with the neoconservative movement. I'm familiar with the conservative movement. Let me define what I mean by the conservative moment: less government, less taxes, more individual responsibility.

Mr. **Cain** also found himself on the defensive on his tax **plan** when he addressed **a Washington Post report** that his proposal to impose **a** 9 percent income tax, 9 percent corporate tax and **a** 9 percent sales tax would hurt many poor and middle-class families. Analysts **say** that since those families pay little to no taxes under the current tax structure, they would now pay both income and additional sales taxes.

"Some people will pay more," he **said**. "But most people will pay less, is my argument."

Mr. **Cain** also dismissed **a Wall Street Journal editorial** critique that "**a** 9% rate when combined with state and local levies would mean **a** tax on goods of 17% or more in many places."

"Don't combine it with state taxes," he **said**. "This doesn't address state taxes. If you combine it together, yes, you would get that number. This is **a** replacement structure. These are replacement taxes, they're not on top of anything."

Mr. Gregory asked then him, "Are you **saying** they're going to be repealed?"

Mr. **Cain** replied: "With the current structure, you have state taxes, right? So with this new structure, you're still going to have state taxes. That is muddying the water."

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