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Immigrants group decries Trump visit

Leader: State GOP draws bad marks

by [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) | July 18, 2015 at 3:00 a.m. | Updated July 18, 2015 at 3:00 a.m.

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HOT SPRINGS -- Mireya Reith, executive director of immigrants' group Arkansas United Community Coalition, said Friday the state's still trying to come to terms with its civil-rights history.

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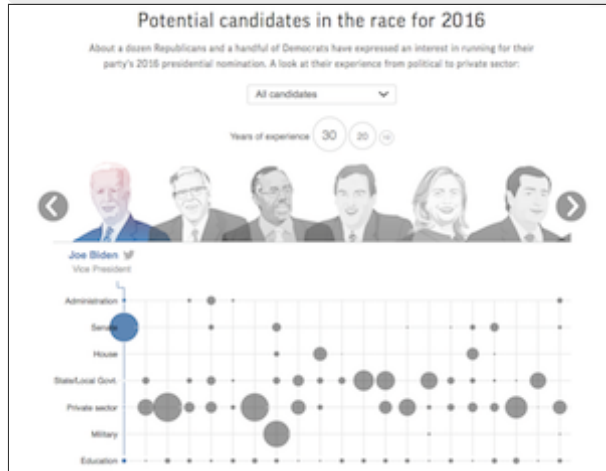
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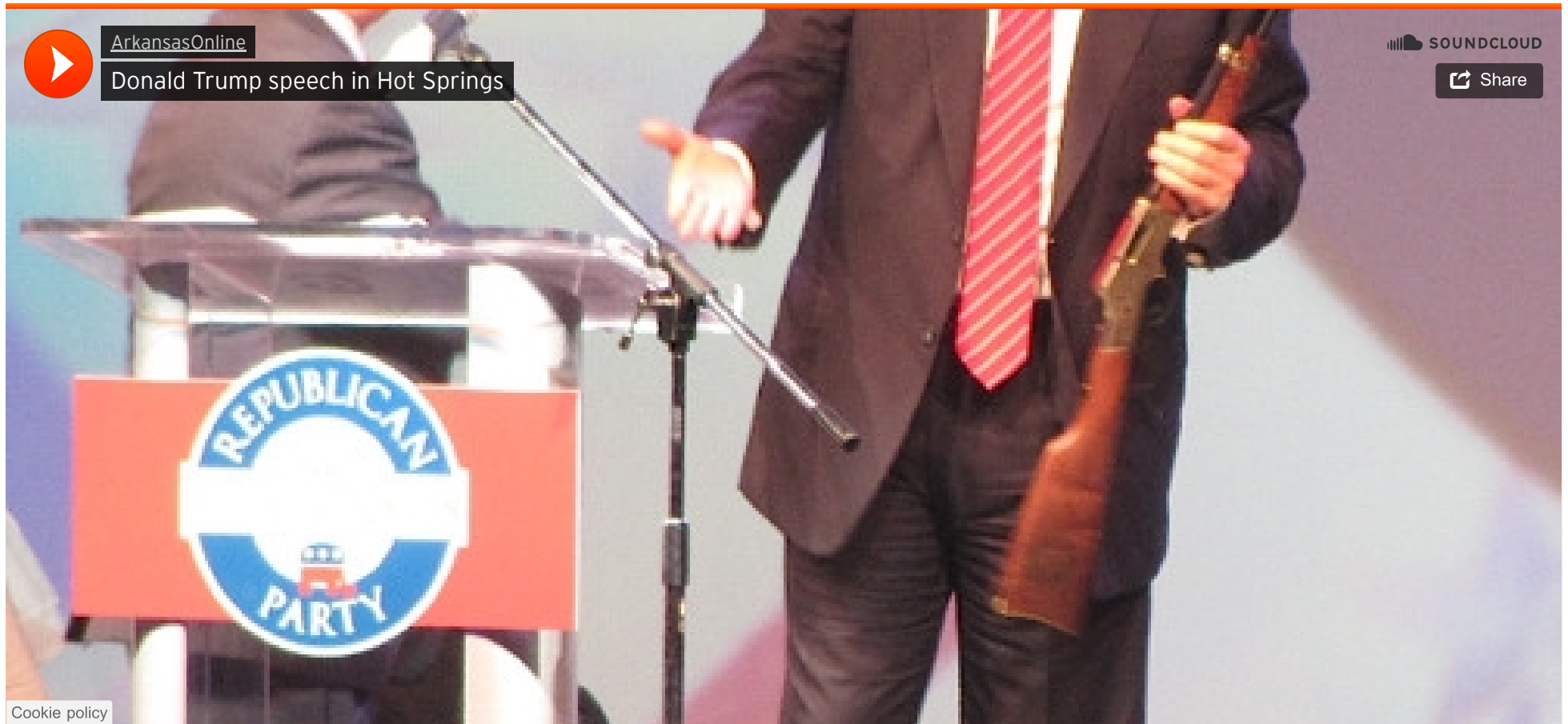
Blunt talk of Trump draws 1,000



INTERACTIVE: 2016 candidate tracker Trump speaks at GOP dinner

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump on Friday, July 17, 2015, spoke to the Arkansas Republican Party's Reagan-Rockefeller dinner. (By Gavin Lesnick)

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So when the Republican Party of Arkansas invited Donald Trump to speak at its fundraiser, Reith said, Arkansas United's largely Hispanic members were "gravely disappointed."

"We've felt over the years fortunate for Republican support with the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) and immigration," she said. "Our sincerest hopes are that this is not indicative of a trend moving forward."

Trump was the keynote speaker at Friday's Reagan-Rockefeller Dinner in Hot Springs.

The party invited each declared Republican presidential candidate, and Trump was first to accept.

Trump started his presidential campaign with a June 16 speech in which he told supporters gathered at Trump Tower in New York City: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."

"By no means does this reflect an endorsement by the state party," Doyle Webb, the state's GOP chairman, told the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* earlier this month. "We're simply the conduit to allow education of the Arkansas populace so that they can make an informed decision on who they want the Republican nominee to be."

Webb said the party didn't have a take on Trump's statements or the controversy surrounding them.

The comments were denounced by Arkansas United Community Coalition and other Hispanic groups.

Most of the people who immigrate to Arkansas are from Mexico, according to a 2011 Pew Research Center demographic profile of Hispanics in the state.

Immigration is a complicated issue, Reith said. Trump's "hateful and racist" comments do nothing but hinder reform and positive social change, she said.

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About 20 members of youth-led immigrant rights organizations, including Arkansas United Community Coalition, from around the state held an immigration reform gathering Friday evening outside the Hot Springs Convention Center.

Sweat dripped down the face of Fayetteville resident Alan Rodriguez as he stood on a corner of the convention center's grounds.

Rodriguez raised his fist to the air and yelled: "The people united will never be divided."

Others around him, from Fort Smith, McGehee, De Queen and Hot Springs, among other places, took up the chant.

Rodriguez and his older brother were united as members of the Arkansas United Community Coalition when they joined more than a year ago. Now they are divided.

His brother, who he said is in the country legally, but did not elaborate, is in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center in Louisiana.

"It's been tough," said Rodriguez, squinting at the bright evening sun. He said a decision to deport his brother to Mexico may be made at a court date later this month.

Rodriguez said he protests for his brother and for other families forced apart because of deportation.

"After what Mr. Trump said, as an activist, I would feel irresponsible," Rodriguez said about the importance of being at Hot Springs.

Trump told reporters Friday at the state's GOP fundraiser that he and his Hispanic employees and customers are supportive of legal immigration.

Rodriguez and others will also protest Saturday outside Verizon Arena in North Little Rock, where Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton will be the keynote speaker at the Democratic Party of Arkansas' annual Jefferson-Jackson dinner.

"We want all the representatives to be held accountable," Rodriguez said.

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