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Republican Candidates Debate in Sioux City, Iowa

December 15, 2011

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PARTICIPANTS:

Representative Michele Bachmann (MN);
Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (GA);
Former Governor Jon Huntsman (UT);
Representative Ron Paul (TX);
Governor Rick Perry (TX);
Former Governor Mitt Romney (MA); and
Former Senator Rick Santorum (PA)

MODERATOR:

Bret Baier (Fox News)

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich, since our last debate, your position in this race has changed dramatically. You are now physically at the center of the stage, which means you're at the top of the polls, yet many Republicans seem conflicted about you. They say that you're smart, that you're a big thinker. At the same time, many of those same Republicans worry deeply about your electability in a general election, saying perhaps Governor Romney is a safer bet.

Can you put to rest once and for all the persistent doubts that you are, indeed, the right candidate on this stage to go up and beat President Obama?

GINGRICH: Well, first of all, let me just say to you and to all of our viewers, Merry Christmas. This is a great time for us to be here. And I hope that everybody across the country has a very joyous Christmas season.

I've been around long enough that I remember at this exact time in 1979 when Ronald Reagan was running 30 points behind Bill Clinton -- behind Jimmy Carter. And if people had said, "Gosh, electability is the number-one issue," they wouldn't have nominated him.

What they said was: He believes what he's talking about. He has big solutions. He can get the economy growing. He understands foreign policy, and he's the person I want to have debate Jimmy Carter. He carried more states against Carter than FDR carried against Herbert Hoover in 1932.

I believe I can debate Barack Obama, and I think in seven three- hour debates, Barack Obama will not have a leg to stand on in trying to defend a record that is terrible and an ideology that is radical.

MODERATOR: Mr. Speaker, Governor Romney...[*applause*]

Governor Romney just yesterday said you're an unreliable conservative. Now, obviously, he's your opponent. He's your opponent. But even Iowa Governor Terry Branstad said today he respects you greatly, but he openly questioned whether you had the discipline and focus to be president.

GINGRICH: Well, those are two different questions. The first -- let me take them one by one, very quickly. I have a 90 percent American Conservative Union voting record for 20 years. I balanced the budget for four straight years, paid off \$405 billion in debt. Pretty conservative. The first wealth entitlement reform of your lifetime, in fact, the only major entitlement reform until now was welfare. Two out of three people went back to work or went to school. Pretty conservative. First tax cut in 16 years, largest capital gains tax cut in American history, unemployment came down to 4.2 percent. Pretty conservative.

I think on the conservative thing, it's sort of laughable to suggest that somebody who campaigned with Ronald Reagan and with Jack Kemp and has had a 30-year record of conservatism, is somehow not a conservative?

MODERATOR: And what about the concerns from Iowa governor Branstad?

GINGRICH: I think people have to watch my career and decide. I spent 16 years working to create the first Republican majority in 40 years. I spent years helping create the first balanced budgets. I am the longest serving teacher in the senior military, 23 years teaching one and two-star generals and admirals the art of war. I think it's fair to say that my commitment to disciplined, systematic work is -- is fairly obvious. You know, people just have to decide.

Part of the difference is, I do change things when conditions change. And part of the difference is I strive for very large changes and I'm prepared to really try to lead the American people to get this country back on the right track. And that's a very large change.

MODERATOR: Now to my colleague, Megyn Kelly.

MODERATOR: A similar question to you, Congressman Paul. You have some bold ideas. Some very fervent supporters and probably the most organized ground campaign here in Iowa. But there are many Republicans inside and outside of this state who openly doubt whether you can be elected president. How can you convince them otherwise? And if you don't wind up winning this nomination, will you pledge here tonight that you will support the ultimate nominee?

PAUL: Well, you know, fortunately for the Republican party this year, probably every -- anybody up here could probably beat Obama, so. [*laughter*] [*applause*]

PAUL: So the challenge isn't all that great on how we're going to beat Obama. I think he's beating himself. I think really the question is, is what do we have to offer? And I have something different to offer. I emphasize civil liberties. I emphasize a pro-American foreign policy, which is a lot different than policemen of the world. I emphasize, you know, monetary policy and these things that the other candidates don't -- don't talk about. But I think the important thing is the philosophy I'm talking about is the Constitution and freedom.

And that brings people together. It brings independents into the fold and it brings Democrats over on some of these issues. So, therefore, I see this philosophy as being very electable, because it's an America philosophy. It's the rule of law. And it -- it means that, you know, we ought to balance the budget. It opens up the door for saying -- supporting my willingness to cut \$1 trillion out of the budget the first year. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Senator Santorum, no one has spent more time in Iowa than you. You have visited every county in the state. And yet while we have seen no fewer than four Republican candidates surge in the polls, sometimes in extraordinary ways, so far your campaign and you have failed to catch fire with the voters. Why?

SANTORUM: Well I'm counting on the people of Iowa to catch fire for me. That's -- that's what this plan was all about from day one, is to go to all 99 counties and do already almost 350 town hall meetings here in Iowa. We're organizing. We have a very clear message. That's the thing that's going to pay off for us in the end. And we present a clear contrast that really nobody else in this race does.

We present the contrast of someone who's been a strong conviction conservative. You know where I stand. You can trust me because I've been there and I've done it. And I did it as a leader. When I was in the leadership, if you were a conservative and you had an issue that you wanted to get voted on or you wanted to get done in the United States Senate, you came to Rick Santorum. Because I was the guy fighting for the conservative cause when it was popular, and when it was unpopular.

The speaker had a conservative revolution against him when he was the speaker of the House. I had conservatives knocking down my door because I was the effective advocate for the principles that they believed in. That's the contrast. We have -- we need someone who's strong in their political and personal life to go out and contrast themselves with the president and make him the issue in this campaign. And that's why Iowans are beginning to respond. They like the accountability. They like the fact that I've been there and -- and met with them and believe in them to lead this country.

MODERATOR: Chris Wallace? [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Thank you Brett. Governor Romney, I want to follow up on Brett's line of questioning to the speaker. Because many of our viewers tell us that they are supporting Newt Gingrich because they think that he will be tougher than you in taking the fight to Barack Obama in next fall's debates. Why would you be able to make the Republican case against the president more effectively than the speaker?

ROMNEY: Well lets step back and talk about what's really happening in the country. What we're finding across America is a lot of people are really hurting. 25 million people out of work, stopped looking for work or in part-time work that need full-time jobs. A lot of people in the middle-class who have seen incomes go down as the cost of their living has gone up and up and up. The American people care very deeply about having a president who'd get America right again.

And all of us on this stage have spoken over the last several debates about the fact that government doesn't create jobs, but the private sector does. I spent my life, my career in the private sector. I understand, by the way from my successes and failures what it's going to take to put Americans back to work with high-paying jobs.

I can debate President Obama based upon that understanding. And I'll have credibility on the economy when he doesn't. My successes include some businesses that were successful, like Staples and Bright Horizons Children's Centers, and a steel mill in the middle of Indiana, some things I learned from.

And, by the way, some failures. I remember when founders of Jet Blue came to me and said, invest in us. I said, well, that will never work. Got it wrong. Now one of my favorite airlines.

I know what it takes to get this economy going. The president doesn't. The proof is in his record. It's terrible. My record shows that I can get America working again. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Congresswoman Bachmann, no one questions your conservative credentials, but what about your appeal to independents who are so crucial in a general election? If you are fortunate enough to become the Republican nominee, how would you counter the efforts by the Barack Obama campaign to paint you as too conservative to moderate voters?

BACHMANN: Well, it's very clear in the last five years I have won four elections as the first Republican woman ever to win out of the state of Minnesota. And I did that by attracting not only Republicans but also independents and Democrats as well.

Because people wanted to know, who could they trust? They knew that in me they may not always agree with me but they knew that I was a woman who said what she meant and meant what she said. And they respected that level of authenticity and sincerity.

And They also knew that I was an action person. That I wasn't just going to sit on my hands. I was going to work and serve them. And that is what I've done. I have worked very hard in the United States Congress in the brief time that I have been there.

I'm 55 years old. I spent 50 years as a real person. And now five years going toe-to-toe with Barack Obama, taking him on, on every issue from Dodd-Frank to cap and trade to illegal immigration to "Obama-care." And I will do that as president of the United States. That is my proven track record. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Neil Cavuto?

MODERATOR: Thank you, Bret. Governor Perry, by your own admission, you are not a great debater. You have said as much, and downplayed debating skills in general. But if you were to become your party's nominee, you would be going up against an accomplished debater in Barack Obama.

There are many in this audience tonight, sir, who fear that possibility. And don't think you are up to the fight. Allay them of their concerns.

PERRY: Well, I want to share something with you. That as each one of these debates -- I'm kind of getting where I like these debates. As a matter of fact, I hope Obama and I debate a lot. And I'll get there early. And we will get it on and we will talk about our differences, which are great.

I'll talk about what we have done in the state of Texas. I'll talk about passing a balanced budget amendment to the United States Congress. I'll talk about having the type of part-time Congress that I think Americans are ready for.

And, you know, there are a lot of people out there -- I understand it, you know, there are a lot of folks that said Tim Tebow wasn't going to be a very good NFL quarterback. There are people that stood up and said, well, he doesn't have the right throwing mechanisms, or he doesn't -- you know, he is not playing the game right.

And, you know, he won two national championships. And that looked pretty good. We're the national champions in job creation back in Texas. And so -- but am I ready for the next level? Let me tell you, I hope I am the Tim Tebow of the Iowa Caucuses. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman, your campaign has been praised by moderates but many question your ability to galvanize Republicans, and energize the conservative base of the party. They are especially leery of your refusal to sign on to a no-tax-hike pledge. How can you reassure them tonight?

HUNTSMAN: I think people, Neil, are coming around to finding that I am the consistent conservative in this race. They are coming around to find that I am not going to pander. I am not going to contort myself into a pretzel to please any audience I'm in front of. And I'm not going to sign those silly pledges.

And you know what else? I'm not going to show up at a Donald Trump debate. [*laughter*]
[*applause*]

HUNTSMAN: This nation has been downgraded. This nation is on the cusp of the third government shutdown. We have been kicked around as people. We are getting screwed as Americans. And I'm here to tell you, we are going to lead charge in doing what must be done in addressing the two deficits we have.

We have an economic deficit in this country, and is it going to shipwreck the next generation unless we can deal with it. And we have a trust deficit. People in this country don't trust the institutions of power anymore.

We need to go to Congress and we need to say, you need term limits. We need to go to Congress and say, we need to close that revolving door that allows members of Congress to file on out and lobby.

And we need to go to Wall Street and say, no trust there either, because we have banks that are "too big to fail." And I'm telling you, Neil, I'm the person who is going to leave the charge on all of the above and fix the economic deficit, but I'm going fix this country's trust deficit, because we're too good as people to be in the hole we're in and we deserve better. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: As Governor Huntsman just mentioned, there is a real drama playing out real-time in Washington right now with the threat of yet another government shutdown, the possibility that millions of Americans could see their payroll taxes go up. If you're president, as is the case now, and you are at loggerheads with one chamber of congress, how would you handle this situation?

30 seconds down the line. Start with Senator Santorum.

SANTORUM: Well, you do what leaders do. They go out and try to bring people together. They tell a narrative and remind Americans who we are and how we solve our problems. This country is a great country because we believe in free people.

In 2008, the American public were convinced by Barack Obama that they needed someone to believe in, that they could believe in. We now understand that what we need is some president who believes in them. That is the narrative. Go out and motivate the American public, have them talk to their representatives in Washington to pass solutions that believe in bottom up, how we built America, free markets, free people.

MODERATOR: Governor perry?

PERRY: After three years, you would think this president could learn how to work in Washington, D.C. If there has ever been a greater example of on-the-job training, this is it. Couldn't have been at a worst time for America.

We need a president who has that governing, executive experience, someone who understands how to work with both sides of the aisle. Frankly, we should never have gotten this point at all.

The idea that he walked away from the work at hand and we had a supercommittee, that was put in place, that was going to fail on its face, that is the type of leadership that this president has been an absolute failure at and the type that I have been working at as the governor of Texas for the last 11 years.

MODERATOR: Governor Romney?

ROMNEY: Bret, this is a question that ought to take longer than 30 seconds, even 60 seconds. This is the question of the presidency. What is leadership?

I had the disadvantage of some respects of becoming governor and a state with a legislature 85 percent Democrat. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise. To get anything done, I had to learn how to get respect of the speaker of the house and the senate president and Democratic leaders. I found a way to do that, to find common ground from time to time. And when crisis arose, we were able to work together. That is what has to happen.

There are Democrats who love America as Republicans do, but we need to have a leader in the White House, that knows how to lead. I have had four leadership experiences in my life where I have lead enterprises. I want to use that experience to get America right again. And I will do it as president.

MODERATOR: We will have many more questions about gridlock in Washington and this topic overall. But Speaker Gingrich?

GINGRICH: I want to start by reinforcing what Governor Romney just said. Leadership is the key. When you have a Sal Alinsky radical who is a campaigner in chief who doesn't do the job of president, because he's too busy trying to run for re-election, the constitution can't work. I helped Ronald Reagan when Tip O'Neil was speaker to get enough votes to pass the Reagan program despite a Democratic majority.

As speaker, one reason some people aren't happy with my leadership I worked things out with Bill Clinton to get welfare reform, a tax cut and four balanced budgets signed in a way that required bipartisanship, because you couldn't get anything done otherwise. So leadership matters immensely in getting this done.

MODERATOR: Congressman Paul?

PAUL: The main problem we have is the government is too big and the debt is too big and you have to cut spending so you have to get people to come together. They have been coming together to increase spending for decades. We have to get them to come together to do the opposite.

But there are two factions up there, one wants welfare and the other want warfare around the world and policing the world. So you go to people who like warfare you say give me half of the cuts that have to be in the welfare. Go to welfare people and say give me the cuts to cut the oversea warfare spending and bring people together and live up to what they say.

MODERATOR: Congresswoman Bachmann?

BACHMANN: As president of the United States I would have called all 535 members of congress to come sit down in Washington last summer looking at the debt ceiling crisis. And what I would have done is said there are three principles we are going to follow, because the first one needs to be no new taxes. We're taxed enough already.

The second principle needed to be that government can't spend any more money than what it is taking in.

And the third principle had to be that we were going to follow the constitution of the United States. What that would have meant we would have looked at \$15 trillion debt in the eye and said we are not going to add one more cent to it. We are going to prioritize our spending. And we're going to put the reform in these long-term programs now, not wait eight months or five months. We are going to reform right now.

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman.

HUNTSMAN: Leadership is action, not words. And I learned a very important lesson about this when I ran for governor in 2004. I promised the people of my state as governor that we would create the finest state in America for business. I ran on a flat-tax proposal. It took us two years; we got it delivered.

Flat -- I hear a lot of people talking about tax reform and a flat -- we actually got one done. The finest business in the United States, we delivered to our people. Health care reform without a mandate. The list went on and on and on.

I ran for re-election. I got almost 80 percent of the vote, not because I'm a great politician, but I learned some lessons in leadership, that people want to be told where you can take them, and then they want you to deliver.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We have many more interesting questions coming up. We have a new feature for you tonight, as well. How well are the candidates answering the questions? We're asking you to weigh in on Twitter. Tweet the candidate's last name and the hash-tag #answer if you think they're tackling the question or the hash-tag #dodge if you think they're avoiding the question. Then you can go to foxnews.com/debate to see those results.

Now, during the break, you can head there and check it out. And if you have a suggested question or a follow-up to something you've heard, tweet @bretbaier. We'll be using some of those suggested questions tonight.

MODERATOR: After the break, the candidates on the increasingly sharp tone of this campaign, the economy, and a topic that has not been raised in any of the debates so far. Stay with us.

[commercial break]

[begin video clip]

STRAWN: Good evening from Sioux City in northwest Iowa. I'm Matt Strawn, chairman of the Iowa GOP. Four years after repelling Barack Obama to the White House, Iowa has seen a surge of new Republican voters as Iowa Republicans have posted 33 straight months of voter registration gains. And as those Republicans prepare to vote in just 19 days, we understand the responsibility that comes with the privilege of being first in the nation.

And because the fight to reclaim the White House extends far beyond Iowa's borders, we want you to be the first to know. So text "Iowa" to 91919 to know the results and other updates. Thank you and now let's return to the final debate before the January 3 Iowa Caucus.

[*end video clip*]

MODERATOR: Thank you Mr. Chairman and welcome back to Sioux City Iowa and the Republican presidential debate. For the next round of questions, I turn to my colleague, Chris Wallace.

MODERATOR: Thanks Brett. Candidates, I'm going to call this section, for lack of a better word, D.C. Culture. Governor Romney, I'm going to begin with you. Speaker Gingrich says that you should give back the millions of dollars you made, in his words, "bankrupting companies and laying off employees." You respond that he has, in your words, "an extraordinary lack of understanding of how the economy works."

But his comments dovetail with arguments you hear from Democrats that your belief in, what's called, the creative destruction of capitalism, shows a hardheartedness. What do you think of what Speaker Gingrich had to say about you? And are you vulnerable to that kind of attack?

ROMNEY: I think it's a great opportunity for us. Because I think the president is going to level the same attack. He's going to go after me and say, you know, you -- in businesses that you've invested in, they didn't all succeed. Some failed. Some laid people off. And he'll be absolutely right. But if you look at all the businesses we invested in, over 100 different businesses, they added tens of thousands of jobs.

In -- in the real world that the president has not lived in, I -- I actually think he doesn't understand that not every business succeeds. That not every entrepreneur is lucky enough to do as well as the entrepreneurs that I described at Bright Horizons and Staples and that steel company and many, many others. I myself have had the chance of leading four different organizations. Each of those was highly successful, in part because of hard work and in part because of good luck.

In the real world, some things don't make it. And I believe I've learned from my successes and my failures. The president I'll look at and say, Mr. President, how -- how did you do when you were running General Motors as the president, took it over? Gee, you closed down factories. You closed down dealerships. And he'll say, well I did that to save the business. Same thing with us, Mr. President. We did our very best to make those businesses succeed. I'm -- I'm pleased that they did and I've learned the lessons of how the economy works.

This president doesn't know how the economy works. I believe to create jobs, it helps to have created jobs.

MODERATOR: Thank you. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich, on the Freddie Mac website in 19 -- in rather 2007 you said this, I like the GSE, or government sponsored enterprise like Freddy Mac model, making home ownership more affordable is a policy goal that I believe conservatives should embrace. Now in an earlier debate, a recent debate, you said that politicians like Barney Frank, who in your words, profited from the environment that led to the financial meltdown, should go to jail.

Now that it turns out that you were on the Freddie Mac payroll to the tune of more than \$1.6 million, how do you answer critics who say that you're being hypocritical.

GINGRICH: I think pretty straightforward. Barney Frank was in public office with direct power over Freddie Mac. He exploited that power just as Chris Dodd was in public office when he got special bargains from Countrywide, a firm that went broke. They were using power. I was a private citizen, engaged in a business like any other business. Now, if you read the whole thing that they posted, I said they need more regulations and I want to go back to my point about helping people buy houses.

I worked for years with Habitat for Humanity. I think it's a good conservative principle to try to find ways to help families that are right at the margin learn how to budget, learn how to take care of a house, learn how to buy a house. And I -- I'm not going to step back from the idea that in fact we should have as a goal, helping as many Americans as possible be capable of buying homes. And when you look for example at electric membership co-ops, and you look at credit unions, there are a lot of government sponsored enterprises that are awfully important and do an awfully good job.

MODERATOR: Congressman Paul you are -- and having been in this town for what 48 hours now, you are all over Iowa TV these days with a negative ad about Speaker Gingrich. You accuse him of selling access and playing the corrupt revolving door game. What about the explanation that you just heard, that he's in the private sector and this is free enterprise?

PAUL: Well he has a different definition of the private sector than I have. Because it's a GSE, government sponsored enterprise. That's completely different. It's -- it's a government agency. They get the money and the sponsorship. They get mixed up. It's -- it's the worst kind of economy.

You know, pure private enterprise, more closely probably to what Governor Romney is involved with, but if it's government-sponsored, it's a mixture of business and government. It's very, very dangerous. Some people say, if it goes to extreme, it becomes fascism, because big business and big government get together.

So, yes, they get money. And I was talking about that for a long time, the line of credit, the excessive credit from the Federal Reserve, the Community Reinvestment Act for 10 years or so. The Austrian economists knew there was a bubble. And at this time, nobody was listening or doing anything in the Congress.

And then to go to work for them and get money from them, it literally is -- it's literally coming from the taxpayer. They went broke. We had to bail them out. So indirectly, that was money that

he ended up getting. They're still getting money from a government- sponsored enterprise. It's not a free-market enterprise.

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich, 30 seconds to respond?

GINGRICH: Well, let me just go back to what I said a minute ago. The term government-sponsored enterprise has a very wide range of things that do a great deal of good. Go across this state and talk to people in the electric membership co-ops. Go across this state and talk to people in the credit unions. There are a lot of very good institutions that are government-sponsored.

And, frankly, the idea that anything which in any way has ever touched government could raise questions about doctors dealing with Medicare and Medicaid and a whole range of other government activities. There are many things governments do. I did no lobbying of any kind for any organization. And that was -- that was a key part of every agreement we had.

MODERATOR: Well, let me pick up with that with you, Congresswoman Bachmann, because you accused Speaker Gingrich of peddling his influence with congressional Republicans to help the companies that paid him tens of millions of dollars since he's left office. Given his denial over time and again tonight that he's -- denies ever having lobbied, what is your evidence, hard evidence that he engaged in influence-peddling?

BACHMANN: Well, it's the fact that -- that we know that he cashed paychecks from Freddie Mac. That's the best evidence that you can have, over \$1.6 million. And, frankly, I am shocked listening to the former speaker of the House, because he's defending the continuing practice of Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae.

There's a big difference between a credit union and Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. And they were the epicenter of the mortgage financial meltdown. I was trying to see these two entities put into bankruptcy, because they, frankly, need to go away, when the speaker had his hand out and he was taking \$1.6 million to influence senior Republicans to keep the scam going in Washington, D.C. That's absolutely wrong. We can't have as our nominee for the Republican Party someone who continues to stand for Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. They need to be shut down, not built up. [applause]

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich?

GINGRICH: Well, the easiest answer is, that's just not true. What she just said is factually not true. I never lobbied under any circumstance. I never went in and suggested in any way that we do this.

In fact, I tried to help defeat the housing act when the Democrats were in charge of the House. And if you go back and talk to former Congressman Rick Lazio, he'll tell you, when we were passing housing reform while I was speaker, I never at any time tried to slow down the reform effort. In fact, I helped him pass the reform bill. And I think some of those people ought to have facts before they make wild allegations.

BACHMANN: Let me -- let me...

MODERATOR: Yes, go ahead. Congresswoman?

BACHMANN: Well, after the debates that we had last week, PolitiFact came out and said that everything that I said was true. And the evidence is that Speaker Gingrich took \$1.6 million. You don't need to be within the technical definition of being a lobbyist to still be influence-peddling with senior Republicans in Washington, D.C., to get them to do your bidding.

And the bidding was to keep this grandiose scam of Freddie Mac going. That's -- that is something that our nominee can't stand for. We have to shut down these government enterprises. And we've got to end them. And I think that's shocking that he's saying that.

GINGRICH: And let me just say two things...

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich, quickly. [*applause*]

GINGRICH: OK, I want to say two things. First, my policy is to break up both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. It is not anything like what she just described.

Second, I want to state unequivocally, for every person watching tonight, I have never once changed my positions because of any kind of payment. Because I -- the truth is, I was a national figure who was doing just fine, doing a whole variety of things, including writing best-selling books, making speeches. And the fact is, I only chose to work with people whose values I shared and having people have a chance to buy a house is a value I believe still is important in America.

MODERATOR: Now to Neil Cavuto with questions about the economy.

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich, not to make you a target, but you...

GINGRICH: It goes with being right here.

MODERATOR: You just responded this morning, sir, tweeted originally and with follow-up statements as a major break through of this plan on the part of Republican congressman Paul Ryan working with Democratic Senator Ron Wyden to find a sort of updated way to keep Medicare solvent. This would involve a choice, those who like the program as it is can stick with it. They will be a private option, et cetera.

But earlier on, this might have confused Congressman Ryan and others for whom you had said was the initial Medicare fix that it was right wing social engineering. Later on you backed off that comment, said there was much you could find in Mr. Ryan's plan to like.

Can you blame Governor Romney for saying you have a consistency problem on this issue?

GINGRICH: I'm not in the business of blaming Governor Romney. I'm in the business to try and understand what we can do as a policy. If you go back and look at the "Meet the Press" quote

I didn't want reference him. And I'll come back and say it again, a free society should make very big decisions with the support of the people.

Now you can earn that support. You can win a communications argument. Reagan was very, very good at that. But the only point I was making on "Meet the Press" is when you are going to have a major change, you have to communicate with the American people in order to ensure that they are for you.

Now Governor Romney came up, frankly, with a very good variation on the Ryan plan which allowed the maintenance of the current system. Paul has adopted that. And I think did a very brave act by Senator Ron Wyden, you now have a Democrat willing to co-sponsor the bill. I've endorsed the concept today. I think it is a big step forward. And I think Governor Romney deserves some of the credit for having helped figure out a way to make this thing workable.

So, I think it's a nice thing to actually have a bipartisan plan in Washington that we could actually look at in a positive way and hope would help save Medicare.

MODERATOR: Governor Romney do you want to respond to that compliment?

ROMNEY: Yeah. Thank you.

Yeah, I hope people understand just how big today is for this country. We all understand that the spending crisis is extraordinary with \$15 trillion now in debt, with the president that's racked up as much debt as all the other presidents combined.

But there is another problem we have, which is our national balance sheet. Which are the obligations that we have made, that we have no funding behind. And it adds up to \$62 trillion.

And today Republicans and Democrats came together with Senator Wyden and Congressman Paul Ryan to say we have a solution to remove that \$62 trillion. This is a big day for our kids and grand kids. It's an enormous achievement. It means we finally have the prospect of dealing with somebody which has the potential of crushing our future generations and a good Democrat and a good Republican came together.

This is the impact of people on both sides of the aisle that care about America at a critical time. And I applaud him. It's good news.

MODERATOR: Congressman Paul, as you have been warning, we are on the brink of another government shutdown because of the spending that you call out of control. But haven't you contributed to that spending problem yourself, sir, supporting over the years earmarks that have benefited your district and your state?

Back in 2009, you explained this by saying if I can give my district any money back, I encourage that. I don't think that the federal government should be doing it but if they are going to allot the money, I have a responsibility to represent my people.

Isn't that what they call a mixed message, congressman?

PAUL: Well, it's a mixed question is the problem, because the real message is you should include in your question also you have never voted once for an earmark.

No, it's a principle that I deal with, because if the government takes money from you and you fill out your tax form, you take your deductions. I look at that the same way in our communities. They take our money, they take our highway funds. and we have every right to apply for them to come back.

As a matter of fact, it's a bigger principle for me than that. I think this whole thing is out of control on the earmarks, because I think the congress has an obligation to earmark every penny, not to deliver that power to the executive branch. What happens when you don't vote for the earmarks it goes in to the slush fund, the executive branch spends the money then you have to grovel to the executive branch and beg and plead and say oh, please return my highway funds to me.

So if this whole principle of budgeting that is messed up, but I never vote, I never voted for an earmark. But I do argue the case for my -- the people I represent to try to get their money back if at all possible.

MODERATOR: But isn't that the same thing of having your cake and eating it too? You can complain about earmarks but then if there are provisions there that help your district or your state that's different? If 434 other members felt the same way, how would we ever fix the problem?

PAUL: Yes, but you're missing the point. I don't complain about earmarks, because it is the principle of the Congress meeting their obligation. But if everybody did what I did, there would be no earmarks. The budget would be balanced and we'd be cutting about 80 percent of the spending. So that would be the solution. [*applause*]

PAUL: But you also want to protect the process. You want to emphasize the responsibility of the Congress, and not delivering more power to the president. I would be a different kind of president. I wouldn't be looking for more power.

Everybody wants to be a powerful executive and run things. I, as the president, wouldn't want to run the world. I don't want to police individual activities and their lifestyle. And I don't want to run the economy.

So that is an entirely different philosophy, but it's very, very much in our tradition and in a tradition of our Constitution. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Governor Perry, you said the only way to stop our spending problem is to get Congress to stop spending. Quoting you, sir, you said: "I vetoed 82 bills in my first year as governor of Texas. I have a record of keeping spending under control."

But as Texas agriculture commissioner, you oversaw a loan guarantee program that, as The Austin American-Statesman reported at the time, had so many defaults that the state had to stop guaranteeing bank loans to start-ups in the agribusiness, and eventually bailed out the program with the tax-payer money.

So aren't you guilty of the same behavior you rail against as a presidential candidate?

PERRY: Well, two things. Number one, don't believe everything you read in The Austin American-Statesman. And the second side of it is, we had that program put in place and the state did not bail out, those programs worked as they were supposed to work. Just like in any bank or any business, you are going to have some that fail.

But I want to go back and talk about just a second the issue of where we had a big back-and-forth about whether Newt was involved in untoward activity or not. And I'll be real honest with you, the issue we ought to be talking about on this stage is how you really overhaul Washington, D.C.

And the idea that you can't tell the difference between lobbying and consulting, the idea that we have Congress staying there as many days as they do and the salary that they have, that is the reason I have called for a part-time Congress.

Cut their pay in half. Cut their time in Washington in half. Cut their staff in half. Send them home. Let them get a job like everybody else back home has and live within the laws of which they passed. [*applause*]

PERRY: We do that and you pass a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution, and the conversations that we've been having up here will be minor.

MODERATOR: By the way, Governor, they worked 151 days last year. How much more would constitute part-time?

PERRY: I would suggest to you maybe 140 days every other year like we do in Texas. [*laughter*] [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman, as you're probable familiar, sir, the Chinese have just left huge tariffs of up to 22 percent on imports of some American sport utility vehicles, larger American cars.

Now as a former ambassador to China and one who has argued for an adult conversation with Beijing, how would you respond to what some are calling a childish move on the part of a country that routinely flouts international trade rules?

HUNTSMAN: Well, it's a large and complicated relationship. It's part trade, it's part North Korea, it's part Iran, part Pakistan, part Burma, part South China Sea, party military-to-military engagement. You move one end of the relationship, it impacts the other.

The best thing to do, invite a few dissidents who are seeking freedom and want to expand democracy in China to the United States embassy, the kind of thing that I used to do. That is what matters to the Chinese people who are looking for change and looking for reform these days.

That is the kind of thing that over time is going to create enough swell of change and reform in that country that is going to make the U.S.-China relationship successful longer term.

Because eventually, we need more than just a transactional relationship. We need shared values infused into this relationship. Let's face it, the 21st Century will only have two relationships that matter: the United States and China.

For that to succeed, we need shared values. That is democracy. That is human rights. That is recognition of the role of the Internet in society. That is greater tolerance toward religion, and so much more.

As president of the United States, I would drive that home. And I would make it a relationship that worked.

MODERATOR: Senator Santorum, right now American companies have trillions parked overseas because of the very high tax rates here. Would you support a tax holiday to bring that money back, but only under, as some Democrats have suggested, the condition that these companies hire workers with that money?

SANTORUM: Yes, what I proposed in the "Made in the USA" plan is that if money has been made overseas, that it can come back at 5.5 percent rate, which is what we did back in 2004, and it did cause a lot of money to come back. But I put a special rate, zero, if they bring it back and invest it in plant and equipment in America.

We need to rebuild the manufacturing base of this country. When I traveled around to all of these counties in Iowa, I went to a lot of small towns, like Sidney and Hamburg down in Fremont County, and I was in -- the other day in Newton, where they've lost jobs to overseas. Why? Because we're not competitive.

We need to have our capital be competitive and -- and come here free so they can invest it. We need to cut the corporate tax on manufacturers to zero. Why? Because there's a 20 percent cost differential between America and our nine top trading partners. And we -- and that's excluding labor costs.

We need to get our taxes down. We need to repeal regulations. I promise to repeal every single Obamacare regulation. Every single Obama regulation that cost businesses over \$100 million, I can repeal it. I can't repeal laws, but as a president, you can repeal -- excuse me, regulations. And I will repeal every single one of them so business can get going in this country. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Thank you, Neil.

This question is from Twitter. And it is for you, Governor Romney. @LeonJamesPage tweets, "Over the next 10 years, in what sector or industries will most of the new jobs be created?"

ROMNEY: The great thing is, the free market will decide that. Government won't. And we have in a president someone who, again, doesn't understand how the economy works and thinks that, as a government, he can choose, for instance, which energy sector is going to be successful. So he invests as a venture capitalist in certain car companies that have electric battery power, not understanding that perhaps Toyota and G.M. could do a better job than Tesla and Fisker.

The president decides to go into Solyndra because he thinks that solar power is going to be the future. Look, let markets determine what the future course of our economy will be.

What do I happen to think will be the future? I think manufacturing is going to come back. I think manufacturing, for some of the reasons Rick just indicated, it's going to come back to the U.S. I also think, of course, that high-tech is going to be an extraordinarily source -- extraordinary source of growth for a long time in this country.

And energy. We have extraordinary energy resources in this country. Opening those up -- our president holds them off, doesn't give them the permits to start drilling and getting the natural gas and oil -- those are some of the areas that are extraordinarily powerful. This economy has every potential to continue to lead the world. Our president thinks America is in decline. It is if he's president. It's not if I'm president. This is going to be an American century. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Thank you, Governor Romney.

Now to Megyn Kelly with the next round of questions. And this is a new topic, the judiciary.

MODERATOR: This is something we have heard pressure little about in this election, but something that's an important issue for a lot of voters.

Speaker Gingrich, let me start with you. You have proposed a plan to subpoena judges to testify before Congress about controversial decisions that they make. In certain cases, you advocate impeaching judges or abolishing courts altogether. Two conservative former attorneys general have criticized your plan, saying it alters the checks and balances of the three branches of government. And they used words like "dangerous," "outrageous," and "totally irresponsible." Are they wrong?

GINGRICH: Well, the first half is right. It alters the balance, because the courts have become grotesquely dictatorial, far too powerful, and I think, frankly, arrogant in their misreading of the American people. [*applause*]

There's an entire paper at newt.org -- I've been working on this project since 2002, when the Ninth Circuit Court said that "one nation under God" is unconstitutional in the Pledge of Allegiance. And I decided, if you had judges who were so radically anti-American that they thought "one nation under God" was wrong, they shouldn't be on the court. Now, we have... [*applause*]

I taught a short course in this at the University of Georgia Law School. I testified in front of sitting Supreme Court justices at Georgetown Law School. And I warned them: You keep attacking the core base of American exceptionalism, and you are going to find an uprising against you which will rebalance the judiciary.

We have a balance of three branches. We do not have a judicial dictatorship in this country. And that's what the Federalist papers promised us. And I would -- just like Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln and FDR -- I would be prepared to take on the judiciary if, in fact, it did not restrict itself in what it was doing.

MODERATOR: What of the former attorney general? *[applause]*

These are conservative former attorneys generals who have criticized the plan, as I say, dangerous, ridiculous, outrageous, totally irresponsible.

GINGRICH: Sure. I'd ask, first of all, have they studied Jefferson, who in 1802 abolished 18 out of 35 federal judges? Eighteen out of 35 were abolished.

MODERATOR: Something that was highly criticized.

GINGRICH: Not by anybody in power in 1802. *[laughter]* *[applause]*

Jefferson himself was asked, is the Supreme Court supreme? And he said, that is absurd. That would be an oligarchy. Lincoln repudiates the Dred Scott decision in his first inaugural address in 1861 and says, no nine people can make law in this country. That would be the end of our freedom. So I would suggest to you, actually as a historian, I may understand this better than lawyers. And as lawyers those two attorneys general are behaving exactly like law schools, which have overly empowered lawyers to think that they can dictate to the rest of us. *[applause]*

MODERATOR: Congresswoman Bachmann. *[applause]*

MODERATOR: You heard Speaker Gingrich -- you heard Speaker Gingrich reference the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and that is one of the courts that he has suggested abolishing. It is a left-leaning court and as he points out, as he has done before, he believes it's an activist court because in part it was the court that -- that issued a ruling striking down "under God" in the pledge years ago. A decision that was reversed by the Supreme Court leader.

Do you agree that the Ninth Circuit should be abolished? And if so, what would then happen if a Democratic president came into office and we had a democratically controlled Congress that later took aim at the right-leaning federal courts. Where would it end?

BACHMANN: Well where it needs to end is under the Constitution of the United States. That's the real issue. Are the courts following the Constitution or aren't they following the Constitution? It isn't just Congress that gets it wrong, it's the courts that get it wrong as well.

MODERATOR: But what do you do about it?

BACHMANN: Well what we need to do about it is have the -- both the president and the United States Congress take their authority back and I would agree with Newt Gingrich that I think that the Congress and the president of the United States have failed to take their authority. Because now we've gotten to the point where we think the final arbitrator of law is the court system. It isn't. The intention of the founders was that the courts would be the least powerful system of government.

And if we give to the courts, the right to make law, then the people will have lost their representation. They need to hold onto their representation. That's why I commend Iowans, because they chose not to retain three judges that decided that marriage would be... [applause]

BACHMANN: ...and Iowans decided to take their Constitution back. That's what the American people need to do, take the Constitution back and as president of the United States, I would only appoint judges to the Supreme Court who believe in the original intent of the Constitution.

MODERATOR: Congressman Paul let me ask you, do you believe in -- in what the two candidates have said? That it would potentially be OK to abolish courts like the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals entirely, or judges, impeach them if Congress and the president don't decide -- decide they don't like their rulings?

PAUL: Well the Congress can get rid of these courts. If -- if a judge misbehaves and is unethical and gets into trouble, the proper procedure is impeachment. But to subpoena judges before the Congress, I'd really question that. And if you get too careless about abolishing courts, that could open up a can of worms. Because it -- you -- there -- there could be retaliation. So it should be a more serious -- yes we get very frustrated with this. But the whole thing is, if you just say, well we're going to -- OK there are 10 courts, lets get rid of three this year because they ruled a -- a way we didn't like.

That -- that to me is, I think opening up a can of worms for us and it would lead to trouble. But I really, really question this idea that the -- the Congress could subpoena judges and bring them before us. That's a real affront to the separation of the powers.

MODERATOR: Governor Romney, many people believe that the way to reign in, so-called activist judges is to be careful in appointing or nominating the judges in the first place. As governor of Massachusetts, you passed over Republicans for three quarters of the judicial vacancies you faced, instead nominating Democrats or Independents. With that track record, why should Republicans believe that you will appoint conservatives to the bench if you become president?

ROMNEY: Well I have to let you know that in Massachusetts, I actually don't get to appoint the judges. I get to nominate them. They go before something known as the Governor's Council. It consists of, I believe, seven members, all of whom are elected Democrats. And so to be able to get my appointments through, I had to have people of both parties. And the people I put forward, all were individuals who I vetted very carefully to make sure they would follow the rule of law.

These were largely people going into criminal courts. I chose overwhelmingly people who had been prosecutors in their prior experience. And so we had that kind of justice. Now, let -- let me note that the key thing I think the president is going to do, is going to be with the longest legacy. It's going to be appointing Supreme Court and justices throughout the judicial system. As many as half the justices in the next four years are going to be appointed by the next president.

This is a critical time to choose someone who believes in conservative principles. Now I -- I don't believe that it makes a lot of sense to have Congress overseeing justices. The -- the -- the only group that has less credibility than justices perhaps is Congress. So let's not have them be in charge of overseeing the -- the justices. [applause]

ROMNEY: However -- however, we don't call it we the judges. We call it we, the people. And we do have the ability to remove justices that need to be impeached. We also have the ability to pass new amendments if we think a justice is taken the nation in the wrong direction. And where a statute has been misinterpreted, congress can write a statute that clarifies that point. We have ability to rein in excessive judges.

MODERATOR: All right. And I just want to go quickly down the line. With just a name, favorite Supreme Court justice. Senator Santorum -- current.

SANTORUM: I have to say of these folks over here have been talking about taking on the courts. I have done it. I actually campaigned in Iowa against those justices and I was the only one on this panel that did it, number one.

Number two, when the partial birth abortion status struck down by the Supreme Court, George Bush got elected we actually went back and I worked with Henry Hyde and we passed another bill, told the Supreme Court they were wrong. Passed it, George Bush signed it and it was overturned.

We can talk about reform and doing something to confront the courts, or you can actually go out and make it happen. I made it happen. And it's tops.

MODERATOR: And quickly down the line, favorite current Supreme Court justice.

PERRY: I'll be as quickly as I can, but when I talk about overhauling Washington, D.C., one of the things I talk about besides a part-time congress is no longer having lifetime terms for the federal bench. I think that is one of the ways that you keep these unaccountable legislators from rogues to try to dictate to the rest of us. And I would say, you know, you pick Alito, Roberts, Thomas, pick one.

MODERATOR: All right. Would you pick one, please.

ROMNEY: Yes. Roberts, Thomas, Alito, and Scalia.

MODERATOR: All right. Speaker Gingrich.

GINGRICH: I think that is a pretty darned good list. And I would sign up for those guys. Scalia is probably the most intellectual of the four. They're all four terrific judges.

I mean, if we had nine judges as good as those four we would be happy with the Supreme Court.

MODERATOR: Congressman Paul?

PAUL: From my point they're all good and they're all bad, because our country a long time ago split freedom up to two pieces -- personal liberty and economic liberty. And the judges, as is congress and as is nation, think it's two issues. It's but one issue. So therefore, congress is on this issue as well as our judges.

MODERATOR: Last chance to say a name.

PAUL: No, I'm not going to -- all of them are good and all of them are bad. How is that?

MODERATOR: Congresswoman Bachmann?

BACHMANN: Well, I do think that there are good justices. And I would put Antonin Scalia at the top of the list. I would also include Clarence Thomas and John Roberts and Alito. I think they are all marvelous. It could be easy to pick any one of them.

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman?

HUNTSMAN: One of the reasons I'm optimistic about the future of this country is because we have rule of law. Let's face it. One of the great things that this country has that very few other countries have. So the Judiciary is critically important.

It's also important to note that governors actually some experience appointing judges. You got to make those hard decisions. And as I reflect on those who today serve I've got to say Justice Roberts and Justice Alito fit the bill very, very nicely.

MODERATOR: Thank you, all.

MODERATOR: That was a valiant effort.

MODERATOR: I tried. I tried.

MODERATOR: Coming up, there is a lot of ground to cover in this next hour. The threat from Iran and other foreign policy hot spots, up- and-down oil prices, immigration and border issues, and controversial social issues. Stay with us. Remember, tweet @bretbaier with a question or followup. We'll be right back.

[commercial break]

MODERATOR: Welcome back to Sioux City, Iowa, and the Republican presidential debate.
[applause]

Fired-up crowd, they're ready for hour number two. And we begin hour number two with an important topic, foreign policy.

Congressman Paul, many Middle East experts now say Iran may be less than one year away from getting a nuclear weapon. Now, judging from your past statements, even if you had solid intelligence that Iran, in fact, was going to get a nuclear weapon, President Paul would remove the U.S. sanctions on Iran, included those added by the Obama administration. So, to be clear, GOP nominee Paul would be running left of President Obama on the issue of Iran?

PAUL: But I'd be running with the American people, because it would be a much better policy. For you to say that there is some scientific evidence and some people arguing that maybe in a year they might have a weapon, there's a lot more saying they don't have it.

There's no U.N. evidence of that happening. Clapper at the -- in our national security department, he says there is no evidence. It's no different than it was in 2003. You know what I really fear about what's happening here? It's another Iraq coming. There's war propaganda going on.
[applause]

And we're arguing -- to me, the greatest danger is that we will have a president that will overreact and we will soon bomb Iran. And the sentiment is very mixed. It's -- it's very mixed even in Israel. You know, there -- the -- a head of the security for Israel, who just recently retired, said that it wouldn't make sense to do this, to take -- to take them out, because they might be having a weapon. So I would say that the greatest danger is overreacting. There is no evidence that they have it. And it would make more sense -- if we lived through the Cold War, which we did, with 30,000 missiles pointed at us, we ought to really sit back and think and not jump the gun and believe that we are going to be attacked. That's how we got into that useless war in Iraq and lost so much in Iraq. [applause]

MODERATOR: Congressman Paul, the -- the question was based on the premise that you had solid intelligence, you actually had solid intelligence as President Paul, and yet you still at that point would -- would pull back U.S. sanctions and again, as a GOP nominee, would be running left of President Obama on this issue?

PAUL: Yes. All we're doing is promoting their desire to have it. Ehud Barak, the defense minister for Israel, said that -- that, if he were in -- in Iran, he would probably want a nuclear weapon, too, because they're surrounded, for geopolitical reasons. So that's an understanding.

So the fact that they are surrounded, they have a desire. And how do we treat people when they have a nuclear weapon? With a lot more respect. What did we do with Libya? We talked to them. We talked them out of their nuclear weapon. And then we killed them.

So, it makes more sense to work with people. And the whole thing is that nuclear weapons are loaded over there. Pakistan, India, Israel has 300 of them. We have our ships there. We've got to get it in a proper context. We don't need another war. [*cheering and applause*]

MODERATOR: Understood. And you make that point quite a lot. I'm going to -- I'll try one more time. Iran is reportedly running exercises on closing the Strait of Hormuz, a key passage, as you know, for global trade. Now what should the U.S. response be if Iran were to take that dramatic step?

PAUL: This is -- the plans are on the book. All they talk about is, when are we, the West, going to bomb Iran? So why wouldn't they talk about -- they don't have a weapon, they don't have a nuclear weapon, why wouldn't they try to send out some information there and say, you know, if you come and bomb us, we might close the Straits of Hormuz down.

So already the president, and I think he is wisely backing off on the sanctions, because it's going to be an economic calamity if you take all the oil out of Europe. So I think that makes sense.

He knows these sanctions are overreaching. Sanctions are an act of war when you prevent goods and services from going into a country. We need to approach this a little differently. We have 12,000 diplomats in our services. We ought to use a little bit of diplomacy once in a while. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: OK. Just a reminder again, that little friendly beep is when you wrap up. Senator Santorum, you have a very different thought about the threat from Iran. For several years, according to the U.S. military leaders, Iran has provided training, funding, and lethal arms to jihadists killing American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Are those acts of war?

SANTORUM: They have been continually. They just tried to plan an attack here in this country, killing the Saudi ambassador. They have been at war with us since 1979. The IEDs that have killed so many soldiers, they are manufactured in Iran.

This is -- Iran is not any other country. It is a country that is ruled by the equivalent of al Qaeda on top of this country. They are a radical theocracy. The principle virtue of the Islamic Republic of Iran, according to President Ahmadinejad, is not freedom, opportunity, it's martyrdom.

The idea, Ron, that mutual assured destruction, like the policy during the Cold War with the Soviet Union would work on Iran when their principle virtue is martyrdom, is -- mutual assured destruction with respect to Iran would not be any kind of, you know, idea of preventing a war. It would be an inducement to a war.

This is what their objective is. Their objective is to in fact create a calamity. This is what their theology teaches. They believe that it is their mission to take on the West. They don't hate us because of what we do or the policies we have. They hate us because of who we are and what we believe in.

And we need to make sure that they do not have a nuclear weapon. And we should be working with the state of Israel right now. We should use covert activity. And we should be planning a strike against their facilities and say, if you do not open up those facilities and not close them down, we will close them down for you. [*cheering and applause*]

MODERATOR: Governor Romney, this week President Obama said the U.S. asked Iran to give our downed high-tech drone back. As you know, the Iranians have it on display. They claim they are extracting data from it and they have no intention of giving it back.

Yesterday you called the president's response, quote, "extraordinarily weak and timid." Now in your book you write, quote, "weakness invites challenges, acts of intimidation, acts of aggression, and sometimes war."

So in this case, are President Obama's actions inviting war?

ROMNEY: Absolutely. Does timidity and weakness invite aggression on the part of other people? Absolutely. A strong America, a strong America is the best ally peace has ever known. This is a president with -- the spy drone being brought down, he says pretty please? A foreign policy based on pretty please? You have got to be kidding.

This is a president who fundamentally believes that this next century is the post-American century. Perhaps it's going to be the Chinese century. He is wrong. It has to be the American century. America has to lead the free world. [*applause*]

ROMNEY: And the free world has to lead the entire world. The right course under President Obama's plans is to shrink our military, thinking somehow if we appease or accommodate the tyrants of the world, that the world will be safer. He's wrong.

The right course for America is to strengthen our economy, our values, our families, and our military. We need to rebuild our Navy and go from nine ships a year to 15. We need to modernize our Air Force. We need 100,000 new additional troops in our military. We need to take care of our veterans in the way they deserve.

It is time for us to recognize once again a strong military does not create war. A strong America prevents people from trying to test us around the world. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Congresswoman Bachmann, today is the official end of the U.S. military operations in Iraq, and there is real concern, as you know, about growing Iranian influence inside Iraq. Also, the deputy prime minister there has expressed concerns about the country possibly slipping into civil war. Are there any circumstances as president where you would send U.S. troops back in to Iraq?

BACHMANN: Well, I think clearly the biggest mistake that President Obama has made -- and there are many when it comes to foreign policy -- has been the decision that he made regarding Iraq. He was essentially given on a silver platter victory in Iraq, and he's choosing intentionally to lose the peace.

And we all know what's going to happen. We know that Iran is going to be the hegemon and try to come into Iraq and have the dominant influence. And then Iraq will essentially have dominance from the Persian Gulf all the way to the Mediterranean through its ally, Syria.

And with all due respect to Ron Paul, I think I have never heard a more dangerous answer for American security than the one that we just heard from Ron Paul. And I'll tell you the reason why. [*applause*]

And the reason -- the reason -- the reason why I would say that is because we know, without a shadow of a doubt, that Iran will take a nuclear weapon, they will use it to wipe our ally, Israel, off the face of the map, and they've stated they will use it against the United States of America.

Look no further than the Iranian constitution, which states unequivocally that their admission -- their mission is to extend jihad across the world and eventually to set up a worldwide caliphate. We would be fools and knaves to ignore their purpose and their plan. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Congressman Paul?

PAUL: Obviously, I would like to see a lot less nuclear weapons. I -- I don't want Iran to have a nuclear weapon. I would like to reduce them, because there would be less chance of war.

But to declare war on 1.2 billion Muslims and say all Muslims are the same, this is dangerous talk. Yeah, there are some radicals, but they don't come here to kill us because we're free and prosperous. Do they go to Switzerland and Sweden? I mean, that's absurd.

If you think that is the reason, we have no chance of winning this. They come here and explicitly explain it to us. The CIA has explained it to us. It said they come here and they want to do us harm because we're bombing them.

What is the whole world about the drone being in Iran? And we're begging and pleading, and how are we going to start a war to get this drone back? Why were we flying the drone over Iran? Why do we have to bomb so many countries? Why are we in -- have 900 bases, 130 countries, and we're totally bankrupt? How are you going to rebuild the military when we have no money? How are we going to take care of the people? [*applause*]

So I think -- I think this wild goal to have another war in the name of defense is the dangerous thing. The danger is really us overreacting. And we need a strong national defense. And we need to only go to war with a declaration of war, and just carelessly flouting it and starting these wars so often.

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich, is Congressman Paul...

[*crosstalk*]

BACHMANN: And the point would be -- can I respond to that? Can I...

MODERATOR: Go ahead.

BACHMANN: Can I respond? And the problem would be the greatest under-reaction in world history if we have an avowed madman who uses that nuclear weapon to wipe nations off the face of the Earth. And we have an IAEA report that just recently came out that said, literally, Iran is within just months of being able to obtain that weapon. Nothing could be more dangerous than the comments that we just heard.

[*crosstalk*]

MODERATOR: All right, 30 seconds, Dr. Paul.

PAUL: There is no U.N. report that said that. It's totally wrong on what -- what you just said.

BACHMANN: It's an IAEA report.

PAUL: That -- that is not -- that is not true. They -- they produced information that led you to believe that, but they have no evidence. There's no -- been no enrichment of these bombs.

BACHMANN: And if we agree with that...[*booing*]... if we agree with that, the United States' people could be at risk of our national security.

PAUL: OK. She took my time, so I'd like -- I'd like to finish. If she thinks we live in a dangerous world, she ought to think back when I was drafted in the 1962 with nuclear missiles in Cuba. And Kennedy calls Khrushchev and talks to them, and talks them out of this so we don't have a nuclear exchange.

And you're trying to dramatize this, that we have to go and -- and treat Iran like we've treated Iraq and kill a million Iraqis, and 8,000-some Americans have died since we've gone to war. You cannot solve these problems with war. You can solve the problems if we follow our constitution and go to war only when we declare the war, win them and get them over with instead of this endless fighting and this endless attitude that we have enemy all around the world.

BACHMANN: But as president, I stand on the side of...

MODERATOR: Thank you -- we have been liberal with our friendly ding.

Mr. Speaker, you have been openly critical of the United Nations. For example on the topic of Palestinian efforts for statehood at the U.S. you said, quote, "we don't need to fund a corrupt institution to beat up on our allies."

In a Gingrich administration would the United States leave the UN?

GINGRICH: No, but we would dramatically reduce our reliance on it. And we'd confront certain realities. People talk about a peace process. 11 missiles were fired in Israel last month, last month. Over 200 missiles fired at Israel this year. You think if we had 11 missiles fired in

the United States we -- well, this president anyway would say gee, maybe we could communicate and you would like us more.

But I don't think there is -- you know, I think most of us, most Americans would say you know if you are firing missiles at me, that may not be a good gesture. OK? The United Nations camps that we have helped fund have been training grounds for terrorism.

As Congressman Bachmann pointed out the last time we debated, she was over there with textbooks that are clearly teaching terrorism that are indirectly funded by the United States through the UN.

We have no obligation to lie and every obligation to tell the truth about how bad the UN bureaucracy is and why it ought to be fixed or we ought to radically cut what we're paying.

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman, do you agree?

HUNTSMAN: I think the United Nations serves a useful purpose in the area of peacekeeping and some humanitarian work. Beyond that, I hate the anti-Americanism. I hate the anti-Israel sentiment.

But let me tell you what this nation needs and what it is going to get under a Huntsman administration. It needs a new foreign policy. We need to update it a little bit. We are still trapped a little bit in the Cold War, George Tenet mind set.

I want to make sure that first and foremost we have a foreign policy, and a the national security strategy that recognizes that we have to fix our core here at home. We are weak. This economy is broken. When we are strong, we project values of goodness that transform and change people like no military can -- liberty, democracy, human rights and free markets.

We have got to fix this core first and foremost if we are going to be effective overseas. And that is what i want to focus on.

Second of all, I want to make sure that...

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman, that is the time.

HUNTSMAN: Let me just get the second point.

Second of all, I want a foreign policy -- I want a foreign policy that is driven by economics first. Let me just tell you, its used to break my heart sitting in embassy in Beijing the second largest embassy in the world looking at Afghanistan with 100,000 troops. We are securing the place, the Chinese go in and they win the mining concession. There is something wrong with that picture.

We need to change the way we're doing business.

MODERATOR: OK. Two dings in that one.

Governor Perry, given the grim details of the recent United Nations report on the Syrian regime killing and torturing its own people, thousands of people said to be killed at the hands of the Assad regime. At what point should the U.S. consider military intervention there?

PERRY: Well, I have already called for a overfly zone -- no fly zone over Syria already. They are Iran's partner. They are attached at the hip. And we have to stand firm with our ally in that region, Israel. There needs to be no space between the United States and Israel. And this administration has absolutely bungled.

It is the most muddled foreign policy that I can ever remember in my lifetime whether it was in '09 when we had the opportunity either covertly, overtly or other ways of helping the Iranian citizens as they were trying to overthrow that repressive regime, whether it was working with Mubarak, and trying to have a moderate to come in and replace him, whether it was leading from behind, as we have seen in Libya, and now we have seen this president, as Mitt and Newt have both talked about, asking the Iranians to give us back that drone.

What we should have done is one of two things -- we either destroy it or we retrieve it. He took a third route, which was the worst and the weakest, and that is to do nothing.

MODERATOR: Now to my colleague Neil Cavuto -- Neil?

MODERATOR: Candidates, I want to move on if we can to energy issues. And Speaker Gingrich, I would like to begin with you. As you know, the president, sir, has rejected any efforts to tie a payroll tax cut extension with the Keystone pipeline and to reopen it and to explore reopening it as well.

He says that any other way to connect the two would be akin to adding an extraneous issue. Given his opposition and -- and the likelihood that the Keystone issue could be up in the air for a year or more, how do you recommend Republicans deal with this to force the issue?

GINGRICH: You know, Neil, I sometimes get accused of using language that's too strong, so I've been standing here editing. *[laughter]*

I'm very concerned about not appearing to be zany. And...*[laughter]*

But -- but I want to paint a picture for all of us. The Iranians are practicing closing the Straits of Hormuz. The Canadian prime minister has already said to the American president, if you don't want to build this pipeline to bring -- create 20,000 American jobs and bring oil through the United States to the largest refinery complex in the world, Houston, I want to put it straight west in Canada to Vancouver and ship the oil direct to China, so you'll lose the jobs, you'll lose the throughput, you'll lose 30 or 40 years of work in Houston.

And the president of the United States cannot figure out that it is -- I'm using mild words here -- utterly irrational to say, I'm now going to veto a middle-class tax cut to protect left-wing environmental extremists in San Francisco, so that we're going to kill American jobs, weaken

American energy, make us more vulnerable to the Iranians, and do so in a way that makes no sense to any normal, rational American. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: No offense, sir, but you didn't answer my question. [*laughter*]

What would -- what would you do to try to move on this within a year?

GINGRICH: What -- what should the congressional Republicans do? They should attach it to the middle-class tax cut, send it to president, force him to veto it, send it a second time. We had to send welfare reform to Bill Clinton three times. He vetoed it twice. By the third time, the popular outrage was so angry, 92 percent of the country wanted to have welfare reform, he decided to sign it. It happened to be an election year.

I'd say to the president, you want to look like you are totally out of touch with the American people? Be my guest, but I'm not backing down when we're right and you are totally wrong. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman, on the same issue [*inaudible*] the delay, as you've pointed out, stands to threaten thousands of jobs, in a recent speech, you said potentially up to 100,000 jobs. But the president's supporters say a rushed decision could cost the environment a great deal more. What I'd like to ask you, Governor, is there any condition under which a President Huntsman would say the need to protect our land trumps the need to provide more jobs?

HUNTSMAN: It's always going to be a balancing act. We've got land that everybody respects and appreciates, but the job we've got to undertake as American people is to fuel our future.

We have no choice. I mean, our economy has hit the wall. I want to get rid of that heroin-like addiction we have based on imported oil. Three hundred billion dollars transfers every year from this country to a lot of unpredictable and relationships that are no more than transactional.

In order to get to where this country needs to be, we need a relationship with Canada from which we can draw raw materials. But I also want to make sure that I'm able as president to disrupt the oil monopoly. There's a one-product monopoly in terms of product distribution in this country. If we're going to achieve real energy independence, we're going to have to be able to draw from a multiplicity of products like natural gas.

We wake up to the reality [*inaudible*] in this country that we have more natural gas than Saudi Arabia has oil, I say, how stupid are we? When are we going to get with the picture and start converting to transportation, converting to manufacturing, converting to electricity and power generation? It is completely within our grasp.

It's going to require a president who understands that -- that delicate balance and who's going to be able to go out with an aggressive plan toward energy independence -- independence that gets it done for this country. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Congresswoman Bachmann, you -- you were very critical, Congresswoman, of the extended shutdown after the BP oil spill that I believe lasted upwards of five, six months, in terms of a moratorium. I was wondering, though, Congresswoman, if you were president and there were such a disaster again, what would be an acceptable period for oil drilling to cease, for you to get to the bottom of a problem?

BACHMANN: Well, what we needed to do was find out what the true cause of the problem was. And the Obama administration wasn't willing to have a true and thoughtful investigation to get to the bottom of it.

President Obama jumped to conclusions, and he put a moratorium on accessing American oil in the Gulf region that actually hurt the economy more than the original disaster. But I wanted to add something on Keystone. Keystone is extremely important, the pipeline.

This pipeline is one that would have brought at least 20,000 jobs, at least \$6.5 billion worth of economic activity. And if I was president of the United States, I wouldn't have taken the decision that President Obama did. His entire calculus was based upon his reelection effort. Because quite frankly, the radical environmentalists said to President Obama, you pass Keystone, we're not going to do your volunteer door-to-door work.

That's what Barack Obama has done to this country. He's put his reelection over adding jobs and making the United States energy independent. I would have made the decision as president of the United States, we would put Keystone online immediately. *[applause]*

MODERATOR: Governor Perry, you -- you have railed against the special treatment of Ford and Solyndra as have the other candidates here tonight. And particularly the tax code incentives for green technologies and allowances that have been made for this industry. But it's nexus, governor you have afforded the same attention to the oil industry. Back in 2003, you signed a bill that reduced the tax paid by some natural gas companies that have helped them reap since, better than \$7 billion in tax savings. So I -- I guess what I'm saying is, are you guilty of the same behavior as governor, favoring an industry, that you claim this president has, favoring the green industry?

PERRY: Today is the 220th anniversary of the signing of the Bill of Rights. And one of those, the Tenth Amendment, I like a lot. And the reason is because that's how our founding fathers saw this country set up. Where we had these laboratories of innovation. It -- it should be in the purview and the decision making process of a state. If they want to put tax policies in place that helps make them be more competitive.

PERRY: We did it not only for the oil and gas industry, but we also did it for the alternative industry -- alternative energy industry. And the wind industry. They came in droves, made Texas the number one wind energy producing state in the nation. But government shouldn't be picking winners and losers from Washington, D.C. That's the difference. If in the states -- I'll promise you Terry Branstad in this state, he knows how to put tax policy, regulatory policy in place to make his state be more competitive. And you need 50 states out there competing with each other and Washington out of their hair. *[applause]*

MODERATOR: Thank you Neil. And a reminder, go to Foxnews.com/debate to see how well the candidates are answering the questions with your votes. Coming up, we'll ask about border issues, immigration and a topic that got a lot of attention on Twitter, plus some controversial social issues as well. Stay tuned. [*applause*]

[*commercial break*]

MODERATOR: Welcome back to Sioux City, Iowa. And our Republican presidential debate here in northwestern Iowa.

These people tend to like it I think so far. I think they do. You have to next round of questions on board issues and immigration.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Bret.

The question is for you, Governor Perry. This topic received traffic on Twitter. You have joined the 57 House Republicans who have called for the attorney general of the United States, Eric Holder, to resign in the wake of the failed federal gun tracking program Operation Fast and Furious.

So far, there is no clear proof that Mr. Holder knew about the controversial aspects of this operation. And he points out that he actually helped stop it when it came to his attention. Are you and other Republicans politicizing this issue as General Holder claims?

PERRY: If I'm the president of the United States, and I find out that there is an operation like Fast and Furious and my attorney general didn't know about it, I would have him resign immediately. You cannot, the president of the United States comes to El Paso, Texas, earlier this year and proclaims that the border of Texas and Mexico, the U.S. border with Mexico is safer than it's ever been.

Well, let me tell you, I've been dealing with this issue for 11 years. I've sent Texas Ranger recon teams there. Our law enforcement men and women face fire from across the border or in the U.S. side from these drug cartels. It is not safe there. Our country is at jeopardy.

If we are going to be able to defend America, from Iran, from Hezbollah, from Hamas, that are using Mexico as a border, as a way to penetrate in the southern part of the United States. Venezuela has the largest Iranian embassy in the world there. We know what is going on. It is time for this country to have a real conversation about a Monroe Doctrine again like we did against the Cubans in the 60s.

MODERATOR: Senator Santorum, what say you to the attorney general's claim that the Republicans are politicizing this issue?

SANTORUM: I would agree with Governor Perry that if he was the attorney general under me, I would have him -- I would fire him. I wouldn't have him resign, I'd fire him. This is something

he should have been aware of, something that should have been stopped, it shouldn't have started in the first place.

I think Governor Perry is also right. And this is something I've been saying now for many years, which is we need to pay much more attention to what is going on in our own hemisphere, not only do they have the largest embassy in Venezuela, there are flights from Tehran, from Damascus to Caracas. And those flights stop at a military base before they come into the civilian base.

There are training camps, jihaddist training camps in Central and South America. They're working with the drug cartels. And they are planning assaults on the United States. That is what we know is going on right now. And we are doing -- this president has ignored that threat. Has insulted our allies like Honduras and Colombia, deliberately. Has embraced -- as he has the other scoundrels in the Middle East, has embraced Chavez and Ortega and others in Central and South America, not promoting our values and interests.

We need a brand new initiative, an initiative that says that we will promote our values in this region and we will stop the spread of terrorism in Central and South America. [*cheering and applause*]

MODERATOR: Governor Romney, last week you said that the 11 million illegal immigrants now in this country must return to their countries of origin before they can apply for legal status.

You also said that we are not going to go around and round up the 11 million. Why would these illegal immigrants voluntarily leave America just to apply for a chance at legal status, especially when they have your assurance that if they stay put we are not going to round them up?

ROMNEY: Let me tell you how that works. We are going to have an identification card for people who come here legally. The last campaign, actually, Rudy Giuliani talked about this time and time again.

We would have a card, a little plastic card, bio-information on it. Individuals who come here legally have that card. And when they apply for a job, they are able to show that to the employer. The employer must then check it with E-Verify or a similar system.

Newt Gingrich points out, let Federal Express -- or not Federal Express, American Express or MasterCard or Visa process that, immediately determine if the card is valid or not.

So people come here legally, they've got that card. If employers hire people without that card, the employer gets sanctioned just like they do for not paying taxes. Very serious sanctions.

So you say to people who are here illegally today, you are not going to be able to work here unless you register, unless -- and we will give you transition period of time, and then ultimately you have got to go home, apply for permanent residency here or citizenship, if you want to try and do that, but get in line behind everyone else.

My view is, people who have come here illegally, we welcome you to apply but you must get at the back of the line, because there are millions of people who are in line right now that want to come here legally. I want those to come here legally. Those that are here illegally have to get in line with everybody else. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich, is that realistic?

GINGRICH: Well, let me start and say that Congressman Steve King has just introduced the IDEA act, which would in fact reinforce this model. Because it would take away all tax deductibility for anyone who is employed illegally, and once you have something like E-Verify effectively working, you really build a big sanction.

We disagree some on what you do with very, very long-term people here. I think somebody who has been here 25 years and has family here and has local family supporting them ought to have some kind of civilian certification.

But let me say on this whole issue of immigration. On day one, I would drop all the lawsuits against Arizona, South Carolina, and Alabama. It is wrong for the government. [*cheering and applause*]

GINGRICH: I would propose -- I would propose cutting off all federal aid to any sanctuary city that deliberately violated federal law. [*cheering and applause*]

GINGRICH: And I would begin the process of completing control of the border by January 1st, 2014. Those steps would begin to fundamentally change the entire way of behavior towards getting control of legality in the United States. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman, a recent FOX News poll showed that 66 percent of voters believe that the government should allow a pass to citizenship for the illegal immigrants who are already here in this country.

Nearly three-quarters of Latinos agree. Given these majorities and given the growing importance of the Latino vote in the general election, does the Republican presidential candidate need to take a more moderate approach on this issue if he hopes to defeat President Obama?

HUNTSMAN: Well, I think the Republican candidate has to speak based on our values, the values of the Republican Party. Limited government, pro-growth, these are the things that the Hispanic and the Latino populations are going to be looking for.

You don't need to pander. You just need to be -- we need to be who we are. But in terms of immigration, and illegal immigration, this president has so screwed up this economy, nobody is coming anymore. There is nothing to come for. I mean, there's not a problem today. Just take a look at the numbers coming across.

I mean, the numbers, it was posted the other day, lowest in four decades. So I say, you know, we have got to secure the border, of course. We have got to deal with the 11, 12 million people who are here.

But let's not lose sight of the fact that legal immigration is an engine of growth for this country. Half of the Fortune 500 companies in this country today were founded by immigrants.

We have lost probably -- well, our market share of travel and tourism has gone from 7 percent to 12 percent because our visa system is so screwed up in this nation. So you've got to look at the Department of Homeland Security.

You've got to completely remake the way that people are moving back and forth, our H1-B visa system, how we are dealing with the movement of people, how we are dealing with immigration. This is an economic development opportunity and we are missing it. [applause]

MODERATOR: Chris Wallace has the next round of questions.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Bret. Governor Romney, you have changed your position in the last 10 years on abortion, on gay rights, on guns. You say keeping an open mind is a strength, but some of your critics say that every one of these moves has been to your political advantage. When you were running in Massachusetts, you took liberal positions. Running now as president, you take more conservative positions. Is that principle or is it just politics?

ROMNEY: Well, I'll begin by taking exception with your list there. I did change my...

MODERATOR: Which -- which one?

ROMNEY: Gay rights.

MODERATOR: Well...

ROMNEY: I'm firmly in support of people not being discriminated against based upon their sexual orientation. At the same time, I oppose same-sex marriage. That's been my position from the beginning.

With regards to abortion, I changed my mind. With regards to abortion, I had the experience of coming in to office, running for governor, saying, you know, I'm going to keep the laws as they exist in the state. And they were pro-choice laws, so effectively I was pro-choice.

Then I had a bill come to my desk that didn't just keep the laws as they were, but would have created new embryos for the purpose of destroying them. I studied it in some depth and concluded I simply could not sign on to take human life. I vetoed that bill. [applause]

I went to the -- to the Boston Globe. I described for them why I am pro-life. Every decision I took as governor was taken on the side of life. I am firmly pro-life.

I've learned over time, like Ronald Reagan and George Herbert Walker Bush and others, my experience in life over, what, 19 -- 17, 18, 19 years has told me that sometimes I was wrong. Where I was wrong, I've tried to correct myself.

MODERATOR: If I may just pick up, you say the one issue which I was wrong on was gay rights. Correct, sir?

ROMNEY: Mm-hmm. What was the -- what was the -- I don't recall the whole list, but I...

[*crosstalk*]

MODERATOR: It was abortion, gay rights, and guns.

ROMNEY: You know, I've always supported the Second Amendment. And -- and we had a piece of legislation that came to our desk that would have -- that provided an assault weapon ban. The gun lobby favored it because it also did things that the gun lobby wanted. Working with them, we decided to sign the bill. So you can say, well, I've changed my position on that, but I've been pro-gun and continue to be pro-gun.

MODERATOR: If I may, sir, in 1994, when you were running for the Senate, you wrote a letter to the Log Cabin Republicans in which you said, "I am more convinced than ever before that, as we seek full equality for America's gay and lesbian citizens, I will provide more effective leadership than my opponent," who was Ted Kennedy.

In 1994, you also said you supported not only an assault weapons ban, but also a five-day waiting period. And in 2002, when you were running as governor, you said that you supported the tough gun control laws in Massachusetts. And then as you say in 2004, you also signed an assault weapons ban.

So you are still more of a champion of gay rights than Ted Kennedy was?

ROMNEY: I think -- I think -- I think you just said exactly what I said, which is this.

MODERATOR: I...

ROMNEY: Let me -- let me go back and say that. I do not believe in discriminating against people based upon their sexual orientation. There are some people that do. I had a member of my administration, my cabinet who was -- who was gay. I didn't ask justices that I was looking to appoint -- rather, people who are applicants for jobs -- what their sexual orientation was.

I believe as a Republican, I had the potential to fight for antidiscrimination in a way that would be even better than Senator Kennedy, as a Democrat, was expected to do so.

At the same time, Chris, in 1994 -- and throughout my career -- I've said I oppose same-sex marriage. Marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman. My view is -- let me tell you --

protects -- protect the sanctity of marriage, protect the sanctity of life. That's my view. I've had it for many years.

Thank you. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Senator Santorum, you have campaigned on social issues as much or perhaps more than any other candidate on this stage. Are you persuaded that Governor Romney has made these changes or what he says in some cases are not changes, based on principle and not political expedience?

SANTORUM: Governor Romney, when he was governor of Massachusetts, was faced with a Supreme Court decision that said that same-sex -- that traditional marriage was unconstitutional. In that court decision, the court said that they did not have the power to change the law in Massachusetts and rule same-sex marriage legal. Why? Because in the Massachusetts constitution, it states specifically that only the governor and the legislature can change marriage laws.

Governor Romney -- the court then gave the legislature a certain amount of time to change the law. They did not. So Governor Romney was faced with a choice: Go along with the court, or go along with the constitution and the statute. He chose the court and ordered people to issue gay marriage licenses, and went beyond that. He personally as governor issued gay marriage licenses. I don't think that is an accurate representation of his position of saying tolerance versus substantively changes in the laws.

I've had a strong, consistent track record of standing up for the values of this country, not discriminating. It had a no-discrimination policy in my office. But we're not talking about discrimination. We're talking about changing the basic values of our country.

MODERATOR: Governor Romney, 30 seconds to respond, sir. [*applause*]

ROMNEY: That is a very novel understanding of what our Supreme Court of Massachusetts did. I think everybody in Massachusetts and the legal profession in Massachusetts and my legal counsel indicated that the Supreme Court of Massachusetts determined that under our constitution, same-sex marriage was required. And the idea that somehow that was up to me to make a choice as to whether we had it or not is a little unusual. We got together with our legislature and I fought leading an effort to put in place a constitutional amendment in Massachusetts to overturn the court's decision to make marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman.

This is something I battled in the year I had after their decision. I fought it every way I possibly could. I went to Washington, testifying in favor of a federal amendment to define marriage as a relationship between man and a woman.

Let me tell you, I want to make it very clear, I have been a champion of protecting traditional marriage that continues to be my view. If I somehow missed somewhere I'm happy to get corrected. But that is something I feel very deeply.

MODERATOR: All right. Congresswoman Bachmann, you say that Speaker Gingrich has a quote, "inconsistent record on life" and you singled out comments he made recently that life begins with the implantation of a fertilized egg, not at conception. What is your concern?

BACHMANN: Well, my concern is the fact that the Republican Party can't get the issue of life wrong. This is a basic part of our party. Just last night we gathered in Des Moines to talk about this issue, because it's that crucial to our party. And one of the concerns that I had is that when Speaker Gingrich was Speaker of the House he had an opportunity to de-fund Planned Parenthood. And he chose not to take it. That is a big issue.

And also I think even more troubling when he was in Washington, D.C., he made an affirmative statement that he would not only support but he would campaign for Republicans who are in support of the barbaric procedure known as partial birth abortion. I could never do that.

And as a matter of fact, George Wilt asked the question of Speaker Gingrich. he said this: he said, "is it a virtue to tolerate infanticide?" This is a seminal issue and something we can't get wrong. As president of the United States, I will be 100 percent pro- life from conception until natural death.

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich?

GINGRICH: Sometimes Congressman Bachmann doesn't get her facts very accurate. I had ad 98.5 percent right to life voting record in 20 years. The only ...

MODERATOR: Go ahead. I'm...

GINGRICH: The only difference was that they didn't like the initial welfare reform bill, which every other conservative group had said had nothing in it on abortion. Period. That's the only one in 20 years.

I believe that life begins at conception. The conversation we're having which is an ABC interview, I was frankly thinking about proposing a commission to look at fertility, because I think there is a challenge with what happens to embryos, who I think should be regarded as life because by definition they have been conceived. I am against any kind of experimentation on embryos. And I think my position on life actually has been very clear and very consistent.

MODERATOR: Let me just ask you -- no. I want to ask you a direct question, if I may, speaker. That was your rebuttal to Congresswoman Bachmann.

BACHMANN: Can I rebuttal, because have a rebuttal for getting my facts wrong?

MODERATOR: Absolutely, congresswoman.

BACHMANN: Because this isn't just once, I think it's outrageous to continue to say over and over through the debate that I don't have my facts right. When as a matter of fact, I do. I'm a serious candidate for president of the United States. And my facts are accurate.

Speaker Gingrich said that he would actively support and campaign for Republicans who got behind the barbaric practice of partial birth abortions. This is not a small issue. This is a big issue.

I think George Will was right when he asked that question. What virtue is there in tolerating infanticide?

MODERATOR: We are way over time. So I'm just going to ask you for 30 seconds to respond on the that specific issue.

GINGRICH: Well, first of all, what I said on that particular issue is I wouldn't go out and try to purge Republicans. Now, I don't see how you are going to govern the country if you are going to run around and decide who you are going to purge. The fact is, twice when I was speaker we moved the end of partial-birth abortion. Clinton vetoed it. We worked very hard. And Rick Santorum has been a leader on this issue.

I have consistently opposed partial birth abortion. I, in fact, would like to see us go much further than that and eliminate abortion as a choice. And I said as president I would de-fund Planned Parenthood and shift the money to pay for adoption services to give young women a choice of life rather than death.

MODERATOR: Thank you, speaker.

GINGRICH: Thank you, Chris. Candidates, Ronald Reagan famously espoused his 11th Commandment: Thou shall not...

PROTESTER: *[off-mike]*

MODERATOR: I'm sorry. Thank you. Thank you very much.

PROTESTER: *[off-mike]*

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Well -- well, let me just finish this question. We're running out of time.

Ronald Reagan famously espoused the 11th Commandment: Thou shall not speak ill of another Republican. Yet to varying degrees, during this campaign, you've all broken that one way or another, broken that vow. So I guess the question is, how do you balance on the one hand trying to win the nomination with on the other hand not weakening the eventual nominee to the point where he or she is less electable than President Obama?

Down the row, Senator Santorum?

SANTORUM: We have a responsibility to vet the candidates. That's what -- look, I've been at 350 town hall meetings. I've been kicked pretty hard by a lot of Iowans about the positions I hold, and that's what -- that's the process. The process is, let's find out who can stand up. Let's

find out who has the best record, who's the most -- who's the person that can have that -- the consistency of -- of going out there and finding for the principles that we believe in.

Because I -- let me assure you, the other side's going to kick very, very hard, and we have to have someone who can stand up for it, fight, and holds those convictions deep so they can fight the good fight in the fall and win this presidency.

MODERATOR: Governor Perry?

PERRY: Yeah, there's a -- there's an -- as a matter of fact, I think that was the Republican chairman, not Ronald Reagan, that actually said that.

MODERATOR: Well, he espoused it. That's what I said.

PERRY: Right, indeed he did. But there's an NFL player -- his name doesn't come to mind -- but he said, if you don't get your tail kicked every now and then, you're not playing at a high enough level. And I just want to give all of you all credit for letting me play at a high enough level and for training me the way that you have. [*laughter*]

MODERATOR: Governor Romney?

ROMNEY: Yeah, we can handle it. And -- and there's nothing -- there's nothing that's been said by -- by these folks on this stage about me that I'm not going to hear 100 times from -- from President Obama. He's going to have a -- what, \$1 billion to go after me or whoever our nominee is? We're -- we're going to give each other what we need to for people to understand who we are.

But let's not forget this. Let's every day remember that, time and time again, this -- it's President Obama we've got to be talking about. He has unveiled himself as a president that's not -- not the right person to lead this country. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Speaker Gingrich?

GINGRICH: Well, I think it's pretty clear, if you look at my ads, if you look at my website, if you look at what -- how I've operated in the debates, that while I reserve the right to correct attacks against my -- against me, overall I've tried very hard to talk about very big solutions to be -- to go to the American people with the communication about, what do we need to do?

And I've said consistently, these are all friends of mine. Any of these folks would be better than Barack Obama in the White House. Any of them would be great in the next administration. [*applause*]

Our only opponent is Barack Obama. And we need to come out of this process remembering: Beating him is what we collectively have to do. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Congressman Paul?

PAUL: You know, the media has a responsibility and we have a responsibility, and I think exposing our opponents to what they believe in and their flip-flop, I think the reason maybe that we had to do more this year is maybe the media is messing up and they haven't asked enough questions, that we have to fill in and ask these questions and get this information out.

So, no, I think it's a responsibility on us. I think there should be lines drawn. I think there are some things below the belt. I don't think -- but I don't like the demagoguing, the distortion, and taking things out of context. I don't like that. But when they disagree on an issue, important issues, then we should expose it.

MODERATOR: Congresswoman Bachmann? [*applause*]

BACHMANN: Ronald Reagan also brought clarity to the -- his opponents that he had in his primaries, as well. And he famously asked the question, in 1980, are we better off today than we were four years under Jimmy Carter? And I think the republic is in far worse shape today under Barack Obama's leadership.

That's what we're exposing now. Who will be -- who will continue that legacy of Ronald Reagan? And who will take Barack Obama on toe to toe and hold him accountable? And I think that I'll be the best one to do that on the stage.

MODERATOR: Governor Huntsman?

HUNTSMAN: I actually worked for Ronald Reagan. And I think he would have been the first to stand up and say: Debate is good. It must be respectful, and it must be rigorous.

A rigorous debate will lead to greater trust. And the one thing this nation needs desperately today is heightened trust, in our institutions, in our tax code, in our wars abroad, in Congress, toward Wall Street.

And I'm here to tell you that this kind of debate over time is going to elevate the trust level in whomever makes it out as the nominee. That will allow us to beat Barack Obama.

Thank you. [*applause*]

MODERATOR: Well, that is it for our debate tonight. Thank you all very much. Our thanks to the candidates, their staffs, the Iowa Republican Party, and to all the great people here in Sioux City, and, of course, in Iowa. They could not have been more hospitable.

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