

CNN LIVE EVENT/SPECIAL

New Hampshire Democratic Presidential Candidates Debate

Aired June 3, 2007 - 19:00 ET

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SCOTT SPRADLING, WMUR: Senator Obama, you get the first question of the night. It has been nearly six years since 9/11. Since that time, we have not suffered any terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. Just yesterday, the FBI arrested three men for a terror plot at JFK Airport.

Could it be that the Bush administration's effort to thwart terror at home has been a success?

SEN. BARACK OBAMA (D) ILLINOIS: No. Look, all of us are glad that we haven't had a terrorist attack since 9/11, and I think there's some things that the Bush administration has done well.

But the fact of the matter is that we live in a more dangerous world, not a less dangerous world, partly as a consequence of this president's actions.

Primarily because of this war in Iraq, a war that I think should have never been authorized or waged, what we've seen is a distraction from the battle to deal with Al Qaida in Afghanistan. We have created an entire new recruitment network in Iraq that we're seeing them send folks to Lebanon and Jordan and other areas of the region.

And so one of the things that I think is critical as the next president is to make absolutely certain that we not only phase out the war in Iraq, but we also focus on the critical battle that we have in Afghanistan and rout out Al Qaida.

If we do not do that, then we're going to potentially see another attack here in the United States.

WOLF BLITZER, CNN ANCHOR: Does the Bush administration, Senator, deserve any credit for the fact there has been no terrorist attack here in the United States for nearly six years?

OBAMA: You know, I think there are some things they've done well. I think they've cracked down on some of the financial networks. I think that is important.

They have, unfortunately, not strengthened our alliances with other countries. And one of the most important things that we're going to have to do to be successful in routing out these networks is to make sure that we have the cooperation of other nations.

That is not something that we've done. And the effort in Iraq has greatly weakened our efforts there. BLITZER: Senator Edwards, let me let you clarify what you said the other day. You said the war on terror is a bumper sticker, not a plan.

With the news yesterday, this alleged plot at JFK which could have done, supposedly, horrendous damage and caused an incredible number of casualties, do you believe the U.S. is not at war with terrorists?

JOHN EDWARDS, FMR SEN. (D) NORTH CAROLINA: I reject this bumper sticker, Wolf. And that's exactly what it is. It's a bumper sticker.

As president of the United States, I will do absolutely everything to find terrorists where they are, to stop them before they can do harm to us, before they can do harm to America or to its allies.

Every tool available -- military alliances, intelligence -- I will use.

But what this global war on terror bumper sticker -- political slogan, that's all it is, all it's ever been -- was intended to do was for George Bush to use it to justify everything he does: the ongoing war in Iraq, Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, spying on Americans, torture.

None of those things are OK. They are not the United States of America.

BLITZER: All right.

Senator Clinton, do you agree with Senator Edwards that this war on terror is nothing more than a bumper sticker; at least the way it's been described?

SEN. HILLARY CLINTON (D) NEW YORK: No, I do not. I am a senator from New York. I have lived with the aftermath of 9/11, and I have seen firsthand the terrible damage that can be inflicted on our country by a small band of terrorists who are intent upon foisting their way of life and using suicide bombers and suicidal people to carry out their agenda.

And I believe we are safer than we were. We are not yet safe enough. And I have proposed over the last year a number of policies that I think we should following.

BLITZER: Congressman Kucinich, you voted against the Patriot Act when it was first introduced. You've since voted again against it. But some would say yesterday's plot that was described by the FBI underscores the need for precisely that kind of tough measure to deal with potential terrorists out there.

REP. DENNIS KUCINICH (D) OHIO: Benjamin Franklin once said that those who would give up their essential liberties to achieve a sense of security deserve neither.

The Patriot Act has undermined civil rights in this country. And as president of the United States, one of my first acts in office will be to move forward to have the Justice Department overturn the Patriot Act as unconstitutional.

We have to remember that 9/11 led us down a cul de sac. Americans need to reconnect with our deepest sense of self here, Wolf. We have to remember that, you know, the courage that it took to form this country is still within us.

And I want to have what I call the 9/10 forum to recreate -- help us reconnect with the deeper sense of who we are as Americans.

BLITZER: We've got to move on to the next question. I want to go back to Scott.

Go ahead, Scott.

SPRADLING: Thanks, Wolf.

Senator Biden...

SEN. JOSEPH BIDEN (D) DELAWARE: Yes, sir.

SPRADLING: Question for you on Iraq: You are the only person standing on this stage tonight to recently vote to continue funding the troops in Iraq.

My question is this. Why were Senators Obama, Clinton, Dodd, and Congressman Kucinich wrong to vote against the funding?

BIDEN: I'm not going to make a judgment on why they were wrong. I'll tell you why I was right.

No one has fought harder to change this president's policy.

Matter of fact, the very language that was vetoed in the bill was language that I, along with Senator Levin, put in, and I've suggested over a year ago in a proposal I laid forward. That is to start to draw down troops immediately, have them all out by '08.

But, you know, the fact of the matter is: It's about time. We've not been told the truth about this war from the beginning by this president. And the fact is, we got to tell the truth now.

The truth now is, there are 160,000 forces in Iraq. They're in harm's way. Seventy percent of all the injuries are caused by land -- those IEDs.

We know that if we put in these mine-resistant vehicles, the V-shaped-hull vehicles, put them in now, we could save two-third of the lives and two-thirds of the injuries.

My colleagues joined me when I proposed fast-forwarding the funding for that so we could get 2,500 of them into the field by August. If we had voted no and stopped this, it would have delayed that. Lives are at stake.

And I knew the right political vote, but I tell you what: Some things are worth losing elections over.

BLITZER: Senator Biden, why are you reluctant to say now: They were wrong, and you were right?

BIDEN: Because I don't want to judge them. I mean, these are my friends. We have worked together. We've worked hard to try and end this war. We have people telling everybody: Just stop the war, Congress. We have 50 votes. We're busting our neck every single day. So I respect it.

But look, I cannot -- as long as there is a single troop in Iraq that I know if I take action by funding them, I increase the prospect they will live or not be injured -- I cannot and will not vote no to fund them.

BLITZER: Senator Clinton, you voted in favor of every funding for the U.S. troops since the start of the war until now. And some are accusing you and some others of playing politics with the lives of the troops.

What is your response?

CLINTON: Well, I have the deepest respect for my friend, Senator Biden, and he and I have agreed on much of what we have attempted to do.

Unfortunately, we don't have a president who is willing to change course. And I think it was time to say enough is enough.

I thought the best way to support our troops was to try to send a very strong message that they should begin to come home. That is the best way to support them. And I thought that vote was an opportunity to do so.

Everybody on this stage, we are all united, Wolf. We all believe that we need to try to end this war. In two nights you're going to have the Republican candidates here. They all support the war. They all support the president. They all supported the escalation. Each of us is trying in our own way to bring the war to an end.

BLITZER: Senator Obama, you did the same thing. Since you came into the Senate, you voted for the funding for the troops for this war until now.

What's your answer?

OBAMA: Wolf, look, everybody supports the troops. And everybody knows that.

To some degree, this was a vote that had to do with how we feel about a continuation of a plan that has not worked.

The president has now announced -- just the other day, he said that this was like Korea. Keep in mind, we've been there six decades in the Korean Peninsula. And the best way for us to support the troops is to ensure that we are not continuing to try to impose a military solution on what is essentially a political problem in Iraq.

And that's why I put forward a bill that would begin a phased redeployment and have all our troops out by March 31st of next year.

BLITZER: I'm going to come to Governor Richardson in a moment.

But, Senator Edwards, where, if at all, do you disagree with any of your Democratic colleagues -- Democratic candidates -- on this issue of the troops, the funding of the war, how to get out?

EDWARDS: Well, I think it's the difference between leading and following.

I think Hillary's right. All of us do want to end this war. But I have made very clear from the outset that the way to end the war is for the Congress to use its constitutional authority to fund. They should send a bill to the president with a timetable for withdrawal, which they did.

The president vetoed. And then it came back. And then it was the moment of truth.

And I said throughout the lead-up to this vote that I was against a funding bill that did not have a timetable for withdrawal, that it was critical for the Congress to stand firm. They were given a mandate by the American people.

And others on this stage -- Chris Dodd spoke out very loudly and clearly. But I want to finish this -- others did not. Others were quiet. They went quietly to the floor of the Senate, cast the right vote. But there is a difference between leadership and legislating.

BLITZER: You want to name names?

EDWARDS: No, I think it's obvious who I'm talking about.

BLITZER: It is to me, but it might not be to some of the viewers out there.

EDWARDS: Senator Clinton and Senator Obama did not say anything about how they were going to vote until they appeared on the floor of the Senate and voted. They were among the last people to vote. And I think that the importance of this is -- they cast the right vote, and I applaud them for that. But the importance of this is, they're asking to be president of the United States.

And there is a difference between making clear, speaking to your followers, speaking to the American people about what you believe needs to be done. And I think all of us have a responsibility to lead on these issues, not just on Iraq, but on health care, on energy, on all the other issues.

BLITZER: I'm going to give both of them a chance to respond to you.

Senator Obama?

OBAMA: Well, look, the -- I think it is important to lead. And I think John -- the fact is is that I opposed this war from the start. So you're about four and a half years late on leadership on this issue. And, you know, I think it's important not to play politics on something that is as critical and as difficult as this.

Now, the fact of the matter is, Joe has a legitimate perspective.

OBAMA: It is not easy to vote for cutting off funding, because the fact is there are troops on the ground. And I'll let Hillary speak for herself, but the fact of the matter is that all of us exercised our best judgment, just as we exercised our best judgment to authorize or not authorize this war. And I think it's important for us to be clear about that.

BLITZER: All right.

Senator Clinton?

CLINTON: And I think it's important particularly to point out: This is George Bush's war. He is responsible for this war. He started the war. He mismanaged the war. He escalated the war. And he refuses to end the war.

And what we are trying to do, whether it's by speaking out from the outside or working and casting votes that actually make a difference from the inside, we are trying to end the war.

And each of us has made that very clear. We have different approaches. I have a three-step plan to bring the troops home starting now, put pressure on the Iraqi government to take responsibility and cut off aid when they won't, and engage in intensive diplomacy, regionally and internationally.

BLITZER: All right.

CLINTON: The differences among us are minor. The differences between us and the Republicans are major. And I don't want anybody in America to be confused.

BLITZER: Let me let Senator Edwards respond. Are the differences minor between you and these Democratic candidates?

EDWARDS: There are differences between us. And I think Democratic voters deserve to know the differences between us.

I think there is a difference between making very clear, when the crucial moment comes, on Congress ending this

war, what your position is, and standing quiet. That's all I'm saying.

BLITZER: All right.

EDWARDS: They eventually voted the right way. I respect them for voting the right way. But there are important differences between us on this. And the voters are entitled to know that.

BLITZER: All right. Senator Dodd -- he voted against the funding as well.

Senator?

SEN. CHRISTOPHER DODD (D) CONNECTICUT; Well, first of all, let me thank John Edwards for the nice compliment. I appreciate that...

(LAUGHTER)

... in the midst of all this.

Wolf, the first responsibility, and the first priority of an American president is to keep our country safe and secure.

DODD: This policy in Iraq has failed. It is a civil war. Everyone who has looked at this issue has drawn the conclusion that there is no military solution to it.

It seems to me then it's incumbent upon us -- given the fact that we are less safe, less secure, more vulnerable, weaker today, not stronger as a result of this policy -- that we ought to try to bring it to a close.

So I thought the right thing to do was to pursue and push this issue of having a date certain or it tied to funding. It's very, very important, so that we have the ability to move beyond this.

This war has caused many casualties, not the least of which are our troops, obviously, but also the foreign policy. Your first question on terror has been directly affected because of this policy in Iraq.

BLITZER: Governor Richardson, I want Governor Richardson to weigh in because I know you have been very concerned about what is happening with the genocide in Darfur.

What if some of the critics, some of the supporters of this war, are right, and a unilateral, quick U.S. withdrawal from Iraq -- and you want troops out by the end of this year -- does lead not only to an increased civil war, but to genocide in Iraq?

What moral responsibility does the United States have to deal with that scenario?

GOV. BILL RICHARDSON (D) NEW MEXICO: I've spent a lot of time in this region. I was U.N. ambassador. Eighty percent of my time was spent on the Iraq issue. I've talked to the leaders there.

And there is a fundamental difference between my position and the position of my good friends here. I believe that it's a civil war. I believe that there is sectarian conflict already. There is enormous turmoil.

Seven Americans died today. This is what I would do. I would have a resolution under Article I to deauthorize the war, to move forward with a timetable, the end of this calendar year...

BLITZER: But what about genocide? What about the possibility of genocide?

RICHARDSON: ... no residual -- no residual forces.

I think there has to be pointed out a difference in our approach. Obviously, genocide is something in Darfur. You know, I have been involved in that issue.

RICHARDSON: I believe what we need to do there is stop this genocide. Why don't we care about Africa?

BLITZER: What about Iraq, if it were, God forbid, to happen?

RICHARDSON: Well, obviously, I would keep troops in Kuwait, where they are wanted. I would move them to

Afghanistan to fight Al Qaida.

But I believe that our troops have become a target. Our troops right now have done a magnificent job.

And so what -- the difference between all of us here is this: All of these resolutions, the funding -- supplemental appropriation on funding, on issues relating to timetables is not working because the president is vetoing.

BLITZER: All right...

RICHARDSON: Let me finish.

BLITZER: Hold on one second. We're going to get back to this. We're going to get back to this. I want to let Senator Gravel -- he hasn't had a chance to speak yet.

Senator Gravel, I know you've been outspoken on all of these issues. Where, very briefly, do you disagree with these other Democratic candidates?

MIKE GRAVEL, FMR SEN. (D) ALASKA: Totally. Totally. It's just that simple.

Four of these people here will say that it's George Bush's war. It was facilitated by the Democrats.

GRAVEL: They brought the resolution up. One of them authored, co-authored it here, standing here.

And so it's -- sure, it's George Bush's war. But it's the Democrats' war also.

Now that you want to end it, you're concerned about what's going to happen after we withdraw. Remember Vietnam. All the dominoes are going to fall. Southeast Asia's going to go -- is going to go Communist.

Well, how do we know what will happen? I do know this, that the insurgency is successful because the population sustains that insurgency, period.

BLITZER: All right.

Let's go to the next question from Tom.

Go ahead, Tom.

TOM FAHEY, UNION LEADER: Yes, thank you.

Congressman Kucinich...

CLINTON: It's hard to hear you.

FAHEY: OK.

I'll yell. I don't think the mike is working.

BLITZER: Go ahead.

FAHEY: The New Hampshire Union Leader asked readers to e-mail questions for the candidates...

KUCINICH: I can't...

BLITZER: I don't know if we're having trouble with his mike.

I'll read you his question.

KUCINICH: Yeah, go ahead.

BLITZER: The Union Leader, the main newspaper here in New Hampshire, asked readers to e-mail their questions.

Here's one from Michael Pelletier (ph), a major in the New Hampshire National Guard: "Can you tell me if the mission

we accomplished during our deployment in Iraq was worth our effort and sacrifice, or was it a waste of time and resources?"

KUCINICH: I honor the people who served. We all owe them a debt of gratitude. But those who sent those soldiers were wrong. They should have never been sent there in the first place, Wolf.

This war has been based on lies. And we could have a productive evening here right now if all of my colleagues on this stage or in the Congress would commit to telling the Democratic leadership not even to offer a funding bill, because that's really the way to end the war, Wolf.

Just say, no money. The war is over. You want to end it? Bring them home. Stop the funding. And this is where Senator Clinton says, well, this is George Bush's war. Oh, no. There's a teachable moment here. And the teachable moment is that this war belongs to the Democratic Party because the Democrats were put in charge by the people in the last election with the thought that they were going to end the war.

Well, they haven't. They have to stop the funding. And I certainly am urging all of my colleagues here, don't give him any more money. The money's in the pipeline right now, enough to bring the troops home. Let's end the war and let's make this a productive evening.

BLITZER: Senator Biden?

BIDEN: Wolf, look, the Republicans and this president have not told us the truth about this war from the beginning. The last thing we Democrats should do is not be telling the truth.

We have 50 votes in the United States Senate. We have less of a majority in the House than any time other than the last eight years.

Ladies and gentlemen, you're going to end this war when you elect a Democratic president. You need 67 votes to end this war.

I love these guys who tell you they're going to stop the war. Let me tell you straight up the truth. The truth of the matter is, the only one that's emboldened the enemy has been George Bush by his policies, not us funding the war.

We're funding the safety of those troops there until we can get 67 votes...

BLITZER: All right. Hold on, hold on. I want to bring Senator Clinton in.

Senator Clinton, do you regret voting to authorize the president to use force against Saddam Hussein in Iraq without actually reading the national intelligence estimate, the classified document laying out the best U.S. intelligence at that time?

CLINTON: Wolf, I was thoroughly briefed. I knew all the arguments. I knew all of what the Defense Department, the CIA, the State Department were all saying. And I sought dissenting opinions, as well as talking to people in previous administrations and outside experts.

You know, that was a sincere vote based on my assessment that sending inspectors back into Iraq to determine once and for all whether Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and using coercive diplomacy was not an unreasonable act.

What I did not count on, and what none of us did who voted to give the president authority, is that he had no intention to allow the inspectors to finish their job.

Now, we can argue about the past, or we can answer the question you asked about the National Guard. Our troops did the job they were asked to do. They got rid of Saddam Hussein. They conducted the search for weapons of mass destruction. They gave the Iraqi people a chance for elections and to have a government. It is the Iraqis who have failed to take advantage of that opportunity.

BLITZER: So let me just be precise, because the question was: Do you regret not reading the national intelligence estimate?

CLINTON: I feel like I was totally briefed. I knew all of the arguments that were being made by everyone from all directions. National intelligence estimates have a consensus position and then they have argumentation as to those

people who don't agree with it. I thought the best way to find out who was right in the intelligence community was to send in the inspectors.

If George Bush had allowed the inspectors to finish the job they started, we would have known that Saddam Hussein did not have WMD and we would not have gone and invaded Iraq.

BLITZER: Senator Edwards, you didn't read that national intelligence estimate either. Do you regret that?

EDWARDS: No, actually, I think that I would agree with some of what Hillary just said. I think it's true that I was on the Intelligence Committee -- and I don't think Senator Clinton was, but I was on the Intelligence Committee. I received direct information from that. I met with former high-level people in the Clinton administration who gave me additional information. And I read the summary of the NIE.

I think I had the information I needed. I don't think that was the question.

I think one difference we do have is I think I was wrong. I should never have voted for this war.

And this goes to the issue that Senator Obama raised a few minutes ago. He deserves credit for being against this war from the beginning. He was right. I was wrong.

(APPLAUSE)

And I think it is important for anybody who seeks to be the next president of the United States, given the dishonesty that we've been faced with over the last several years, to be honest to the country.

We have to re-establish trust between the American people and the president.

BLITZER: All right.

EDWARDS: And that's going to require any of us who want to be president to be open and honest with the American people.

BLITZER: Senator Obama, you didn't think the war was the right thing to do, even though you weren't in the U.S. Senate. You didn't have access to any intelligence information at the time. Do you think someone who authorized the use of force to go to war in Iraq should be president of the United States?

OBAMA: I don't think it's a disqualifier. I think that people were making their best judgments at the time.

I will say on the National Intelligence Estimate that Chairman Graham -- Bob Graham of Florida, who at the time was the head of the Intelligence Committee -- cited that specifically as one of the reasons that he voted against it.

So obviously there was some pertinent information there.

I appreciate John's compliment.

When I looked at the issue, what I saw was a weak case on the part of this administration, the sort of fear-mongering that I think, John, you've referred on this stage tonight.

And the critical thing for us moving forward is to recognize that we are not going to be able to continue to throw our troops at a civil war and be able to succeed.

And I just have to go back to what I said earlier. This is an enormous distraction from the battle that does have to be waged in Afghanistan in rooting out Al Qaida. That is something that we have failed to do. We have the opportunity to be successful there. But we have to finish the job.

BLITZER: Senator Gravel, do you think someone who voted to authorize the president to go to war should be president of the United States?

GRAVEL: Not at all, because it's a moral criteria.

And there's information coming out -- Senator Durbin, Mr. Shrum, in his book -- that really points out that these people knew that there was two sets of intelligence going on at the same time. And they made a political decision to

vote the way they voted, a political decision that cost -- stop and think. We have killed more Americans than was done on the 11th of September.

BLITZER: When you...

GRAVEL: More Americans died because of their decision. That disqualifies them for president. It doesn't mean they're bad people. It just means that they don't have moral judgment. And that's very important when you become president.

BLITZER: All right.

Senator Clinton, you want to respond?

CLINTON: Well, I have said repeatedly that if I had known then what I know now, I never would have voted to give the president authority. And in the last debate, I said that, you know, it was a mistake to trust George Bush that he would do what he told all of us he would do.

He made it in speeches, he told us in private that he would put the inspectors in to determine whether or not the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Clinton administration, many other countries who thought that there were stores of chemical and biological weapons were true or not.

Now, I do not think that that is a necessarily wrong judgment at the time.

What was wrong is the way this president misused the authority...

BLITZER: All right.

CLINTON: ... that some of us here gave him. And that has been a tragedy.

BLITZER: We have to move on to the next question. I want to go back to Tom.

Tom, hopefully you're microphone is working.

FAHEY: Yes, I'm hoping, too.

Governor Richardson, a question on immigration. Despite your doubts about the immigration bill that's now pending in the U.S. Senate, you support granting legal status to about 12 million people who have entered this country illegally.

Why is this not an amnesty program?

BLITZER: All right. I don't know if all the candidates could hear your microphone, so I'm going to re-read his question to make sure all of you heard it.

The question is directed to Governor Richardson.

Governor Richardson, despite your doubts about the immigration bill pending in the Senate, you support granting legal status to roughly 12 million people who entered the United States illegally.

Why is this not an amnesty program?

RICHARDSON: I'm a border governor. Two years ago, I declared a border emergency because of the tremendous flow of drugs and illegal workers coming into my state.

I deal with this issue every day.

Here's my position: I would not support legislation that divided families; I would not support legislation that builds a wall, a Berlin-type wall, between two countries the way the bill in the Congress exists today. Now, what are the essential components of any good, sensible immigration bill?

One, increases border patrols; double the size of border patrols and technology. That makes sense. Don't reduce the National Guard that's there.

Secondly, an earned legalization program -- yes, I support that -- one that is based on learning English, paying back taxes, passing a background check, getting behind those that are trying to get here legally, obeying laws, embracing American values.

And then, lastly, finding ways that we penalize employers that knowingly hire illegal workers. That is essential in an immigration bill.

BLITZER: Let me get back to the question. Almost all of these 12 million illegal immigrants who are here would qualify for this new Z visa, which would make them legal residents of the United States. So here is the question: Why isn't this amnesty?

RICHARDSON: It isn't an amnesty...

BLITZER: Why?

RICHARDSON: ...because what this bill does is it sets standards, the standards that I mentioned: learning English, passing background checks. There is a touch-back provision. The head-of-household has to go back and then apply. I believe that is unworkable, too. It divides families. But you don't immediately get an amnesty. You don't immediately get citizenship. It is a process that takes about 13 years.

Now, I commend the Congress for facing up to having a legalization plan, but I will not support a bill -- our immigration laws in this country always bring families together. together.

This separates families.

BLITZER: All right.

RICHARDSON: There's also a provision -- this is important -- that involves -- that involves guest workers. They should have labor protections.

BLITZER: All right.

RICHARDSON: We don't want to create a permanent underclass in those workers.

BLITZER: Senator Biden, let me let you weigh in. You voted last year to support this immigration legislation, including the construction of an approximately 700-mile fence along the border between the United States and Mexico.

Governor Richardson doesn't think there needs to be such a fence. Why is he wrong?

BIDEN: Well, he's not wrong. There doesn't need to be a 700-mile fence. But there does need -- look, we ought to start -- we all love this phrase: Start talking truth to power.

Fourteen million illegals: Now, you tell me how many buses, carloads, planes -- they're going to go out and round up all these people, spend hundreds of millions and billions of dollars to do it, with the whole world watching, while we send these folks back.

Rather than get a background check on all of them, take out the criminals, get them back, and provide for a means by which we allowed earned citizenship over the next decade or so.

BIDEN: Folks, being commander in chief requires you to occasionally be practical.

(LAUGHTER)

BLITZER: If you don't think there needs to be a fence, why did you vote for that legislation?

BIDEN: Well, that fence was -- the reason I voted for the fence was that was the only alternative that was there.

And I voted for the fence related to drugs. A fence will stop 20 kilos of cocaine coming through that fence. It will not stop someone climbing over it or around it.

And so -- but this bill has a much more reasonable provision in it. It has much -- a shorter fence. It does have the Border Patrol requirements. And it is designed not just to deal with illegals, it's designed with a serious drug trafficking

problem we have.

BLITZER: Let me bring back Senator Obama.

You also voted for that legislation, including the construction of that fence. And some say, to be even-handed, if you want to build a fence along the border with Mexico, you should also build a fence along the border with Canada.

OBAMA: Well, we should certainly do a better job patrolling the borders in Canada. In fact, this recent case with the young lawyer who had tuberculosis being waved through by a border guard because he said he looked OK is a problem. And we've got to strengthen our border patrols on both sides.

But let's go back to the essential issue here. We are a country of immigrants. We're also a country of laws. And the question is, how do we balance that appropriately?

I am hopeful that we can solve this problem constructively. I think Joe is exactly right, that we want to have a situation in which those who are already here, are playing by the rules, are willing to pay a fine and go through a rigorous process, should have a pathway to legalization. And I think most Americans will support that if they have some sense that the border is also being secured.

What they don't want is a situation in which there is a pathway to legalization and you've got another several hundred thousands of folks coming in every year.

And that, I think...

BLITZER: All right.

OBAMA: ... is a sensible position we should be able to arrive at.

BLITZER: We're going to move on to the next question. But before we do, one related question. And I'm going to periodically ask you to raise your hand if you agree or you -- if you agree with the question. And I want you to raise your hand if you believe English should be the official language of the United States.

The only hand I see is Senator Gravel.

GRAVEL: Yeah. We speak English. That doesn't mean we can't encourage other languages. I speak French and English. People speak Spanish and English. But the official language of the United States of America is English.

OBAMA: Can I just make a point, though?

BLITZER: All right.

OBAMA: I have to say that that kind of question...

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: All right, hold on.

OBAMA: ... this is the kind of question that is designed precisely to divide us. You know, you're right. Everybody is going to learn to speak English if they live in this country. The issue is not whether or not future generations of immigrants are going to learn English. The question is: How can we come up with both a legal, sensible immigration policy?

And when we get distracted by those kinds of questions, I think we do a disservice to the American people.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: All right. We're going to save our applause until the end, please.

Senator Clinton?

CLINTON: Wolf, let me add that we faced that in the Senate last year as to whether we would or would not vote for it.

The problem is that if it becomes official instead of recognized as national -- which indeed it is, it is our national language -- if it becomes official, that means in a place like New York City you can't print ballots in any other language. That means you can't have government pay for translators in hospitals so when somebody comes in with some sort of emergency there's nobody there to help translate what their problem is for the doctor.

So many of us -- I did, at least -- voted to say that English was our national language, but not the official language because of the legal consequences of that.

BLITZER: Senator Dodd, you know most of the polls show an overwhelming majority of the American public favors making English the official language of the United States.

DODD: Well, I think the points that were made by Barack Obama and Hillary are very, very important here. This is the kind of question that does divide us.

Just a related point here: We need to be encouraging more language training in our country. At the time of the 9/11 attacks here, we had advertisements running in national newspapers for anybody who could speak Arabic, here.

We have too few of our people in our country that can understand second languages. This is the 21st century. This is a global economy. We need to encourage more diversity in that.

BLITZER: All right...

DODD: Certainly, we have a national language here. I speak fluent Spanish, along with Bill Richardson.

BLITZER: All right...

DODD: I'm proud of the fact I speak two languages. But we ought to be encouraging more of that in the country and not talking about how we have one official language in our nation. That's not helping our country.

BLITZER: All right. We're going to go on to the next question because our time is obviously limited.

Scott, go ahead.

SPRADLING: Thanks, Wolf.

Senator Edwards, question for you, sir. I was struck by your conversation that you had a moment ago about dishonesty in politics, and wanting to make things clear.

This is a health care question for you, and really focusing on price tags here.

Governor Richardson, for example, says that you can fund health care meaningfully without raising taxes. Senator Clinton has said that she's not prepared to say she will raise taxes to reform health care. Your plan does raise some taxes to fund your universal health care program.

So I am wondering: From your perspective, are they being honest about the true costs of universal health care in America?

EDWARDS: Let me say, first, I think it's a very healthy thing that we have Democrats coming out with health care plans. This country's health care system is completely dysfunctional. I am proud of the fact that I was the first person to come out with a specific, truly universal health care plan.

Senator Obama came out with a plan just a few days ago, which I don't believe is completely universal, but he deserves to be credited because he laid out what the cost is, and exactly how he was going to pay for it.

I do believe that -- and by the way, you didn't say this, but my plan costs \$90 billion to \$120 billion a year.

I'd pay for it by getting rid of Bush's tax cuts for people who make over \$200,000 a year.

And I believe you cannot cover everybody in America, create a more efficient health care system, cover the cracks, you know, getting rid of things like pre-existing conditions and making sure that mental health is treated the same as physical health, I don't think you can do all those things for nothing. That's not the truth.

And I think people have been so sick of listening to politicians who come and say, "We're going to give you universal health care. We're going to change the way we use energy in America. We're going to strengthen the middle class, have middle class tax cuts, and, in the process, we're going to eliminate the federal deficit."

BLITZER: Thank you.

EDWARDS: That is not the truth. And we need to be honest with people about that.

BLITZER: Let me let Senator Obama weigh in, because you did release your plan, that Senator Edwards says is not really a universal health care plan because it isn't mandatory on everyone.

I wonder if you'd want to respond to that.

OBAMA: You just identified the basic disagreement with John and I.

By the way, I think John has a lot of good elements in his plan. And I think that as people release their plans, I think there's going to be a lot of overlap, which is a good thing.

But the main disagreement with John and I is John believes that we have to have mandatory insurance for everyone in order to have universal health care.

My belief is that most families want health care but they can't afford it. And so my emphasis is on driving down the costs, taking on the insurance companies, making sure that they are limited in the ability to extract profits and deny coverage; that we make sure the drug companies have to do what's right by their patients instead of simply hoarding their profits.

If we do those things, then I believe that we can drive down the costs for families. In fact, we've got very conservative, credible estimates that say we can save families that do have health insurance about a \$1,000 a year. And we can also make sure that we provide coverage for everybody else. And we do provide mandatory health care for children.

BLITZER: Senator Clinton, you've been involved in this issue -- as all of us remember -- for a long time.

What do you think of Senator Obama's plan?

CLINTON: Well, I'm thrilled that universal health care is back on the national agenda. You know, as we remember, back in '93 and '94 we tried to come forward with a plan. We weren't successful. I have the scars to show for that experience.

But I am convinced that now when the Democrats all are coming forward saying, "This has to be a national goal," we then can try to get the political will.

The most important thing is not the plan. Because there are only a few ways to do this. And we're all talking pretty much about the same things. From my perspective, we have to lower cost, improve quality and cover everybody.

What's important, and what I learned in the previous effort is you've got to have the political will -- a broad coalition of business and labor, doctors, nurses, hospitals -- everybody standing firm when the inevitable attacks come from the insurance companies and the pharmaceutical companies that don't want to change the system because they make so much money out of it.

BLITZER: Senator Clinton, you can do that without raising taxes?

CLINTON: Well, Wolf, here's the challenge. I have put forth approximately \$120 billion in savings from health care changes that can come; everything from electronic medical records to better management of chronic care. That is about in the ballpark of what all of us believe it will cost to cover everyone.

The challenge that I'm wrestling with is: How do we realize the savings? Now, I don't think there's any Democrat that is not going to let the Bush tax cuts on the wealthiest Americans expire. We're all going to do that. So that money will be available.

How, then, do we set forth the priorities that we want to address, including energy efficiency, dealing with global climate change and so much else?

BLITZER: All right. Governor Richardson, I want you to weigh in, and then I'll let Senator Dodd weigh in.

RICHARDSON: As governor of New Mexico, this is what we did. We insured every child under 5. My wife Barbara, who sits here, led an effort in the state to increase immunizations.

We got rid of junk food in schools. We brought mandatory phys ed...

BLITZER: But can you do national health care...

RICHARDSON: Yes, yes, you can. Here's how we do it.

BLITZER: ... universal health care, without raising taxes?

RICHARDSON: Yes. This is how we do it.

Number one: My plan is mandatory. You do have everybody sharing -- the employer, the employee -- you have the state and the federal government.

Secondly, I believe that we can have a plan where, if you were satisfied with your health care plan, you can keep it. No new bureaucracies. But, in addition to that, you focus on prevention. You allow everybody to get the congressional plan that every member here has.

BLITZER: Thank you.

RICHARDSON: You bring Medicare 55 and over...

BLITZER: All right.

RICHARDSON: That's what you do.

BLITZER: Thank you, Governor.

I promised Senator Dodd he could weigh in as well.

DODD: Well, listen, this is a -- there's not a person in this audience or who's watching this program who wouldn't tell you that they've encountered the problems of the health care system in this country.

It is shameful. We rank 42nd in infant mortality in the United States worldwide. We rank 45th in life expectancy.

It is shameful that in the 21st century we have 47 million of our fellow citizens without health care coverage; 9 million children. And the number's growing every single day.

Look, as we've said here, there's basic agreement about universality here, dealing with information technology, preventive care, chronic illnesses -- what's been missing in all of this is the ability to bring people together to get the job done.

BLITZER: All right... DODD: That's what I've done for 26 years. That's what you need to be able to do...

BLITZER: I'm going to...

DODD: ... because no one party is going to write this whole thing. It's going to take cooperation to get it done.

BLITZER: I'm going to move onto the next question.

EDWARDS: Can I just say -- just 15 seconds on it?

BLITZER: I'll let Senator Edwards, and then, Congressman Kucinich -- I've got a specific question for Congressman Kucinich. But go ahead.

EDWARDS: OK. I'll be very quick. I think it is very important, though, to understand -- I think Senator Obama was very honest just now.

We have a threshold question about whether we're going to have truly universal care. The New Republic has estimated that his plan will leave about 15 million people uncovered. He says he will do something about that later.

I believe that unless we have a law requiring that every man, woman and child in America be covered, we're going to have millions of people who aren't covered.

Secondly -- secondly -- all the savings that Senator Clinton just talked about are in my plan, and they're in Senator Obama's plan.

And both of us have recognized that it's going to cost significant money and we've talked about how we're going to pay for it.

BLITZER: Senator Obama?

OBAMA: Wolf, since John referred to me, I agree with him on the second point, which is, we've got these savings and we're still going to have to do a little bit more, partly because you've got to invest up front in, for example, information technology, so that rural hospitals that don't have computers are able to buy them -- and they're going to need some help.

But on this issue of mandatory versus nonmandatory (OFF-MIKE) going around trying to avoid buying health care coverage. And, in fact, if you look at auto insurance, in California, there's mandatory auto insurance -- 25 percent of the folks don't have it. The reason is because they can't afford it.

So John and I, we're not that different in this sense, that I am committed to starting the process. Everybody who wants it can buy it and it is affordable.

If we have some gaps remaining, we will work on that. You take it from the opposite direction, but you're still going to have some folks who aren't insured under your plan, John, because some of them will simply not be able to afford to buy the coverage that they were offered.

EDWARDS: Children cannot make that decision.

OBAMA: And that's why I've got mandatory...

EDWARDS: The decision he is talking about people making cannot be made by children, and that's why you have to require that they be covered.

OBAMA: John, I've got mandatory insurance for children for exactly that reason.

BLITZER: Hold on one second. I promised Congressman Kucinich...

KUCINICH: I reject this whole approach.

And the American people should know that with half the bankruptcies in the country connected to people not being able to pay their doctor bills or hospital bills, premiums, co-pays and deductibles are going so far through the roof, 46 million Americans with no health care, another 50 million underinsured, there is only one way to get health care coverage for all Americans. And that is to have a universal, single-payer, not-for-profit health care system, Medicare for all.

Wolf, I have written the bill. It is H.R. 676, with John Conyers, supported by 14,000 physicians.

And you know what? What Senator Clinton, Senator Edwards, Senator Obama are talking about, they're talking about letting the insurance companies stay in charge. They're talking about continuing a for-profit health care system. And I think...

BLITZER: All right, hold on...

(APPLAUSE)

KUCINICH: ... we need a president who is ready to challenge that.

(APPLAUSE)

And I'm ready to challenge the insurance companies.

BLITZER: All right, let's go to the next question.

Tom?

FAHEY: Let's try this now.

(LAUGHTER)

This is my voice. Senator Clinton, you've said that it's time to allow gays and lesbians to serve openly in the U.S. military and end the "don't ask/don't tell" policy that was implemented when your husband was president.

Was President Clinton's policy of "don't ask/don't tell" a mistake?

CLINTON: It was a transition policy and it was an effort to try to deal with the reality that -- probably since the very beginning of our nation we've had gays serving in our military with distinction and honor on behalf of our country, as we do today.

And yet I have watched how "don't ask/don't tell" has been implemented. And I've concluded that it is not the best way for us as a nation to proceed.

It has been in many instances implemented in a discriminatory manner. You know, after the first Gulf War there was a big flood of discharges of gays and lesbians because they let them serve and then after they finished the war, then they discharged them.

In this particular time period, we've had Arabic linguists discharged under "don't ask/don't tell" when we are unfortunately so short of having people who speak the very language that our men and women in uniform have to understand in the streets of Baghdad.

So I believe we could change the policy to let gays and lesbians serve in the military and be covered by the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

So just like those who are not gays and lesbians, if there were conduct problems, then the conduct problems we looked at. But people would not be judged on who they are.

BLITZER: All right.

CLINTON: And I just want to end by saying Barry Goldwater once said you don't have to be straight to shoot straight. And I think he was right.

(APPLAUSE)

CLINTON: And I believe we should open up our military.

BLITZER: Senator Clinton, the question was: Was your husband's decision to allow this "don't ask/don't tell" policy to go forward -- he was president of the United States; he could have changed it -- was it a mistake?

CLINTON: No, it was an important first step, Wolf. I mean, you know, there's a certain -- I want to go back to my friend Joe Biden...

BLITZER: All right.

CLINTON: Because he's been around longer than any of us have in the Congress.

(LAUGHTER)

CLINTON: And you know, talking -- he's a young man. He started young. But talking about this as though there is a reality out there that a president or a Congress can change with a snap of a finger does a grave disservice to the American people.

We have a political process. There are checks and balances. And Joe remembers very well, the Congress was adamantly opposed at the time to letting gays and lesbians serve openly.

"Don't ask/don't tell" was the compromise policy.

BLITZER: But you know, Senator Biden, there are still a lot of military commanders out there, including the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, who say keep the current policy, "don't ask/don't tell," it would be demoralizing, it would be bad for military readiness to change that policy and let gays and lesbians serve openly in the U.S. military.

BIDEN: Peter Pace is flat wrong. I've been to Afghanistan, I've been to Iraq seven times, I've been in the Balkans, I've been in these foxholes with these kids, literally in bunkers with them.

Let me tell you something: Nobody asked anybody else whether they're gay in those holes, those foxholes, number one.

Number two, our allies, the British, the French, all our major allies, gays openly serve.

I don't know the last time an American soldier said to a backup from a Brit, "Hey, by the way, let me check, are you gay, you straight?"

This is ridiculous.

And by the way, we got a war on our hands we're trying to end. In the meantime, we're breaking the military. Nine thousand of these people have been kicked out.

BLITZER: Senator?

BIDEN: This is not a rational policy.

BLITZER: Let me just do a show of hands. If you think it's time to get rid of the "don't ask/don't tell" policy in the U.S. military, raise your hands.

(APPLAUSE)

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: All of you agree on this.

Governor Richardson, go ahead. RICHARDSON: I love all this parsing and senatorial courtesy and "on the one hand, on the other hand."

Here's what I would do. I would do what I did as governor of New Mexico. One, I would move in the Congress for a hate crimes law. I would have domestic partnerships. I would have civil unions. I would initiate laws that practice nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

I would get rid of "don't ask/don't tell." I voted against it as a congressman.

A president has to show leadership. And this country should not be asking a person who is giving up their life for this country and the military should not...

BLITZER: Thank you, Governor.

RICHARDSON: ... should not giving lecture on sexual orientation.

BLITZER: Senator Edwards, I want you to weigh in on a related question. The governor of New Hampshire is here with us tonight. He just signed legislation into law in this state allowing civil unions.

There are...

(APPLAUSE)

All right. Let's try to keep the applause down.

The question is this: Is it time to move beyond that and let gays and lesbians get married?

EDWARDS: Well, first of all, I think what the governor did and what New Hampshire's done is a great example for the rest of the country. Not only civil unions, but all the partnership benefits, including, Senator Clinton talked about getting rid of this "don't ask/don't tell" policy.

I don't think the federal government has a role in telling either states or religious institutions, churches, what marriages they can bless and can't bless. I think the state of New Hampshire ought to be able to make that decision for itself, like every other state in the country. I think every church ought to be able to make that decision for itself.

And I think it's very important that we stand up against intolerance and against discrimination.

But I want to add one thing on something that Governor Richardson said, because it's been a tone of everything that's been discussed here today. The place that I differ with Senator Biden, Senator Clinton, and I guess, to some extent, Senator Obama, and I agree with Governor Richardson -- it is the job of the president of the United States not to legislate but to lead.

BLITZER: All right.

EDWARDS: And voters need to ask themselves who's most likely to end the war in Iraq; who's most likely to lead on health care...

BLITZER: All right...

EDWARDS: ... who's most likely to lead on immigration, which is what you just asked about.

BLITZER: All right. We've got to move on to the next question. Let me throw it back to Scott.

SPRADLING: Senator Gravel, if you are elected president, how if at all would you use former president Bill Clinton in your administration?

(LAUGHTER)

GRAVEL: How would I use him?

Well, I'd send him as a roving ambassador around the world. He'd be good. He could take his wife with him, who will still be in the Senate.

(LAUGHTER)

... and -- but, you know -- but I'd be careful with the president, former president, because I know he wimped out with respect to gays in the military.

I'd only wished that he had been like Harry Truman who stood up to Omar Bradley when he integrated the services, which made possible for Colin Powell to now stare down the president of the United States when the president should have demanded immediate integration.

GRAVEL: That's what can we do.

But under supervision, I think he'll do OK.

(APPLAUSE)

(LAUGHTER)

BLITZER: Governor Richardson, if you were president of the United States, the question is, what would you do with former President Bill Clinton?

(LAUGHTER)

RICHARDSON: Well, the ideal job for President Clinton would be secretary general of the United States. But that's probably not doable.

What I would do is -- President Clinton gave me, although I don't think he's very happy with me now -- President Clinton gave me two great jobs. He gave me ambassador to the United Nations, secretary of energy.

I believe he is needed in the Middle East. This administration has not had a Middle East peace envoy as other bipartisan administrations have had.

We have serious problems in the Middle East. Our great ally Israel, which I think needs buttressing, right now is less safe than it was when President Bush came in.

We need a constant Middle East peace process. President Clinton gave me two good jobs. I want to pay him back and make a Middle East peace envoy.

BLITZER: What about you, Senator Obama?

Arguably, Bill Clinton might be the most popular Democrat out there among Democrats. If you were elected president, what would you have him do?

OBAMA: Well, I think both answers reflect one of the former president's enormous strengths. And that was his capacity to build alliances and relationships around the world. And I have no doubt that Hillary played an enormous role in helping that happen.

But what we've seen over the last six years is the effort to replace bluster and belligerence and saber-rattling for solid diplomacy and strategy and foresight.

One of the things that we're going to have to do is to return to that recognition that we can't simply lead with our military. The strength of our military has to be matched with the power of our diplomacy, the strength of our alliances.

That's how we are going to deal with the crisis in the Middle East. That's how we're going to end a genocide in Darfur, and I think that President Clinton's vision of our interdependence globally is something, and obviously Senator Clinton may have something to say about how I use Bill Clinton, so in fairness she should be able to respond.

BLITZER: Let her tell us -- if you were president, Senator Clinton, what would your husband do?

CLINTON: This is a fascinating question.

They asked the Republicans, they asked the Democrats. And I think from -- irrespective of what you've already heard, I believe in using former presidents.

I think we should have everybody helping us to repair the damage of the last, by then, eight years. And when I...

(APPLAUSE)

CLINTON: ... when I become president, Bill Clinton, my dear husband, will be one of the people who will be sent around the world as a roving ambassador to make it very clear to the rest of the world that we're back to a policy of reaching out and working and trying to make friends and allies and stopping the alienation of the rest of the world.

There's not a problem we face, from global terrorism to global warming or HIV/AIDS or bird flu or tuberculosis...

BLITZER: All right.

CLINTON: ... where we don't need friends and allies.

BLITZER: Thank you.

CLINTON: And he would be a tremendous help in our country's effort to redo that again.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

Let's go back to Scott for another question.

SPRADLING: Thanks, Wolf.

Senator Dodd, gas prices are at record high levels. Granite Staters are frustrated. Americans are frustrated. What would you do to reduce gas prices?

DODD: Well, this is a major crisis issue, obviously. Energy, related problems, obviously, problems with global warming, the dependency on the Middle East for so much of our energy supplies.

It's a national security issue. It's a health care issue.

The problems are profound here and require some very strong answers.

I also think this issue provides incredible opportunities for us to grapple with and deal with here, if we have the kind of strong leadership in the country. I believe we can make a difference here on reducing our dependency on those sources of energy while simultaneously rolling back the problems of global warming -- of global warming.

Today we have the solar -- polar caps melting, we have greenhouse gases that are accumulating at record levels way beyond expectations.

We really have the dual responsibility here of reducing the polluting effects of depending upon fossil fuels and also allowing us to develop the alternative technologies that would allow us to move beyond this issue.

I've introduced a plan here that would require a by the year 2017 50 miles per gallon standard for our automobiles. I believe that can be done. We ought to do it immediately, in my view.

And a carbon tax, in my view, so that you make the polluting dependencies, the polluting fuels, more expensive and encourage them through the use of revenues collected, to move aggressively on developing the alternative technologies of solar and wind and other sources of energy we could use.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator, but the question is: What would you do right now to reduce the price of gasoline?

DODD: Well, what we've offered already, in fact, and that is, of course, we ought to be saying here that when the price of a barrel of oil gets beyond \$40 a barrel, where there's plenty of profit here, that those dollars ought to be returned to the consumers in a rebate or plowed back into the research that would allow us to develop alternative technologies.

But the real way to get away from this here, our dependency on that kind of fuel is causing us serious problems across the board. So it isn't just a price of fuel issue here, it's also depending upon polluting technologies that are going to cost us so much.

BLITZER: Senator Gravel?

GRAVEL: Well, I join him on the carbon tax. And, of course, that will raise the price of gasoline; let's be candid about that. There's nothing I would do as president to lower the price of gasoline right now.

We Americans have to grow up. If we want to get off of the dependency on the Middle East we have to own up to the problem. These things cost money. They're controlling our society.

And the sooner we stop fighting these wars -- here, stop and think: You only see \$3. Just watch those wheels turn. There's another \$4 -- which is what we spend to keep American troops around the world to keep the price.

So you're paying more than \$7 a gallon, you just don't know it.

BLITZER: Senator Edwards?

EDWARDS: The first thing we got to do is find out what's happening with these oil and gas companies. Because we know they're making record amounts of money. We know that the same people that are refining the oil are selling it at the gas pump. So there's a huge vertical integration in this operation.

I think there ought to be an investigation of the oil and gas companies by the Justice Department. I think if the laws that presently exist don't deal with this problem and price manipulation, there should be some change in the anti-trust

laws. I think we need states to enforce clean air laws against these refineries.

And then I guess last but not least in the short term -- Chris is exactly right about the things we need to be doing in the long term. But in the short term, can America finally stop spending \$3 billion a year of taxpayers' money subsidizing oil and gas companies that already make billions of dollars? That's what we ought to be doing.

BLITZER: Governor Richardson, you're a former secretary of energy.

Are the oil companies -- the big oil companies engaged in price-gouging of the American consumer?

RICHARDSON: Well, I was energy secretary and my state -- we call it the Clean Energy state. We have incentives for solar, wind, biomass, biofuels. We require renewable technologies, 20 percent of our electricity.

Here's my answer: What would help in the short term, give us -- the states -- the authority to engage in serious price-gouging investigation. That doesn't happen. But this is not the answer. The answer...

BLITZER: Do you believe they are?

RICHARDSON: No, they're not.

The answer is this. We need an Apollo program, Apollo, led by a president, asking every American to sacrifice, to conserve, that would reduce our dependence on foreign oil, which is 65 percent imported, to 10.

I have the most aggressive plan, according to the League of Conservation Voters.

BLITZER: All right.

RICHARDSON: It would go to 80 percent, 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

BLITZER: Thank you...

RICHARDSON: ... by the year 2040. But it takes...

BLITZER: Hold on, Governor.

RICHARDSON: ... an effort by every American.

BLITZER: I'm going to let Senator Biden weigh in as well.

What would you do specifically, Senator Biden -- give it to us briefly -- to reduce, if you want to reduce, the price of gasoline in the United States?

BIDEN: Take away the subsidy which I've introduced legislation to do. It's about \$6 billion, \$2.7 directly to the oil companies, number one.

Number two, investigate, as president of the United States; use the Justice Department to go in and investigate this whole issue of price-gouging.

Number three, we have to do what we all said here, but, first and foremost, significantly raise the mileage automobiles get and mandate it. BLITZER: All right. I want everybody to stand by, because we're only getting started. We're going to continue all of this, but we're ready to shift into part two of tonight's debate, where voters from New Hampshire here will start asking specific questions. We have some work to do on the stage while we move in some of the chairs, move out the podiums.

While we watch that unfolding, you will see it, viewers of WMUR are going to go back to their studios. The rest of you are going to go and see our colleague, Anderson Cooper, and the best political team on television, who are going to give us a sense of this debate so far.

Our debate will resume here in about three minutes. We'll be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

VAUGHN: Jenny, what is your question for the candidates tonight?

QUESTION: My question is: What is your vision on ending major military operations and how do you plan on rebuilding the military after such many years of conflict?

BLITZER: All right. Let me throw that question to Congressman Kucinich, because he's been outspoken on a lot of these issues.

KUCINICH: Thank you very much, Wolf.

First of all, thank you and your family for serving.

This country has to end its occupation of Iraq. And as I mentioned earlier, the Congress, the Democratic Congress has a very serious responsibility in this regard. We should simply not provide any bill at all. It's one thing to say you don't have the votes. It's another thing not to even offer a bill and tell the president he has the money now that's in the pipeline to bring the troops home.

Now, with respect to this war, this war has degraded our service ability, and we need to have certainly a strong army, but I believe that peace is the way we reflect our strength. So I want to see an American military that will be a strong peacekeeping force, not one that is being misused, like the one in this administration -- misuses our military.

And we need a commander in chief who wants to link peace with security and who wants to see America's role working with the world community in cooperation.

BLITZER: But her question was: Specifically, what would you do to rebuild the military, which seems to be pretty stretched right now? What -- do you have a plan?

KUCINICH: Well, the first thing we need to do is cut -- first of all, there's a couple different dimension to this. One is, we need to cut military spending over all by about 25 percent. There's a lot of waste here we're talking about. Money hasn't been focused on the troops per se. This \$97 billion that went for this war isn't going to the troops. A small fraction goes to the troops.

So we need to have a strong military. We need to encourage people to be serving in our country's military, but we've got to end the United States' commitment to war as an instrument of diplomacy.

BLITZER: All right. I'm going to bring everybody in.

But, Senator Obama, you want to increase the size of the U.S. military by almost 100,000 troops. That's going to cost billions and billions of dollars.

What do you say to Congressman Kucinich, who says he wants to cut the size of the U.S. military?

OBAMA: Well, keep in mind that there's a difference between the Pentagon budget and the size of the military. So it may be that, for example, there are weapons systems that Dennis and I would agree are outmoded relics of the Cold War.

But what I want to make certain of is that our troops are not going on these repeated tours, lengthy tours, that we are providing them with all the support they need when they are on the ground, and we can't do that currently.

We also need -- and I want to make sure that this is emphasized -- that, when they come home, we are treating them with the dignity and honor that they deserve.

And that's something whether you were for the war or against the war, we can all agree to. And this administration has not done that because they tried to do it on the cheap.

Folks who have post-traumatic stress disorder, folks who have disability payments that are due are not getting the kinds of services they deserve. I have some specific plans to address that.

BLITZER: Senator Dodd, are there relics of the Cold War, big- ticket military items that you would cut?

DODD: Well, first of all, thank you for your service as well.

And, by the way, whatever other disagreements there are about policy, all of us here on this dais applaud immensely the work being done by our men and women in uniform. I think a round of applause for...

(APPLAUSE)

And that's the right issue, I think. We're not listening to our senior military people, by the way, who tried to engage in a transformation of our military needs here, recognizing that there are different threats we face today than we did during the Cold War.

And clearly, there needs to be a reassessment of what those priorities are, what those systems are so that we're strong enough.

We all need to say this, by the way. I think it's very, very important. No one's going to be elected president, ought to be president that's not going to have as their primary priority keeping us safe and secure. That is the principal responsibility of an American president.

BLITZER: All right.

DODD: But to do that, to do that you've also got to make sure that we're going to be prepared to use that force not as the first arrow we draw out of the quiver, but rather utilizing the other resources we have as a nation to advance our interests. That has not happened here under this administration. We need to get back to that as a nation.

BLITZER: But is there a specific military program...

DODD: Absolutely. Clearly, we've got systems here -- the F-22 we're looking at, for instance, other things that ought to be reassessed in terms of whether or not they fit into a 21st-century military needs of our nation.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

Jennifer, back to you.

VAUGHN: OK, Wolf. Thank you very much.

Carol Kilminster (ph) is with us tonight.

Carol, you live in Merrimack, New Hampshire. You're a social worker. Your son is serving in Iraq.

QUESTION: That's correct.

VAUGHN: Can you tell us his name?

QUESTION: James.

VAUGHN: What is your question for the candidates tonight?

QUESTION: My question is: Why is it that veterans cannot receive medical services at the hospital of their choice?

VAUGHN: Senator Obama, let's have you answer this question. You serve on the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

OBAMA: Well, first of all, obviously, we thank James for his service.

And I know that here in New Hampshire, as I've been traveling around, there are some deficiencies in the V.A. We don't have a full service V.A. system here so a lot of troops that have been injured are having to travel elsewhere. And that's something that I think we have to address. There are important efficiencies that we can obtain by having a V.A. hospital system -- for example, prescription drugs.

We've talked about the price gouging that takes place in other systems, in the private health care system. The V.A. actually has done a very good job at negotiating prescription drug prices so that they're lower for V.A. veterans who are going through their system than they are if they were going through another hospital system.

Of course, part of that has to do with the fact that, with the Medicare prescription drug bill, for example, the Congress

specifically exempted Medicare from being able to negotiate for the cheapest available price. And that was a profound mistake.

But just to make sure that you're clear, we have to a V.A. that serves everybody. And in some rural communities that don't have access to services that are -- the veterans don't have access to the services that are needed, we've got to make sure that they do have the option for a private hospital that is more -- that is closer by.

BLITZER: So what you're saying is they should be allowed -- veterans -- not just to have to go to Veteran's Affairs hospitals but to go to regular hospitals as well?

OBAMA: I think they should be able to go to -- they should be going to V.A. hospitals unless they have difficulty accessing...

BLITZER: All right.

OBAMA: ... and it places a hardship on the family. Then they should be exempt and be able to go to other hospitals.

BLITZER: Governor?

RICHARDSON: Well, I disagree. Under my health care plan, if you have served this country -- enlisted, a veteran -- I would give you under my health care plan, your husband, a hero's health card so that your husband could get health care anywhere they want, with any doctor, with any hospital.

(APPLAUSE)

Our system right now, our V.A. system, is good, but we have to offer our veterans that choice. Some have to go 150 miles, especially in rural areas.

I would also do something else in terms of veterans health care. What we have in our V.A. system is cost-of-living increases for other benefits, but not for V.A. health care. And today a lot of our vets coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan, PTSD, mental health. We cannot do enough to help them. And it's critically important that we have a well-funded V.A. system.

BLITZER: All right.

RICHARDSON: As president, I would make sure that the V.A. health system is funded and we say thanks to those that have served our country.

BLITZER: Thank you, Governor.

Senator Gravel, you served in the military during the Korean War. Have you had any experiences with the Veterans Affairs Department as a veteran yourself?

GRAVEL: I get my meds from the V.A., so I know the situation quite well.

BLITZER: Are you satisfied or unsatisfied?

GRAVEL: I'm satisfied, very much so. I think they do a good job. But I think it is really somewhat appalling because the government has always, always waged war against the veterans.

I would suggest that Senator Obama, who's on the committee -- did they do any oversight work to find out before they read in The Washington Post that there was a scandal up the street at Walter Reed? I mean, what about that? Did they all get informed of that, or did you know it before?

OBAMA: Actually, we have done a lot of oversight trying to consistently force this administration to put money into the system that it has refused.

(CROSSTALK)

Let me finish, Mike.

The first year that I was on the V.A., myself, Senator Patty Murray, Senator Rockefeller and others tried to tell the

administration you need an additional \$2 billion in order to provide services to troops who were coming home.

The administration said, "No, you don't need it. We don't need it. Everything's covered."

Six months through, they had to come back and say, "You know what? It turns out we did need it after all."

And part of the reason is because they have been trying to keep the costs down of this war and have not fully factored in the sacred obligation that I think we have to make sure that every single veteran has the services that they need.

BLITZER: But the question he asked specifically was, did you know about the problems at Walter Reed...

OBAMA: No.

BLITZER: ... before you read about them in The Washington Post?

OBAMA: No, we didn't. And I visited Walter Reed repeatedly.

Typically, what would happen is we would go to visit troops in the medical facility. And people will acknowledge that the medical facility at Walter Reed does great work.

Unfortunately, what it turned out was the outpatient facilities were disastrous. And that's why we now have legislation moving forward to make sure not only that we're just painting over some of the mold that was in there. But we're also making it easier for families and veterans to negotiate the system once they're outpatients.

BLITZER: All right.

Let's go back to Jennifer for another question.

VAUGHN: Wolf, thank you.

Hi, Polly (ph). You live in Hancock, New Hampshire. You're a retired legal secretary.

You have a question about Iran tonight. You lived there in the late '60s.

QUESTION: Yes. That's particularly the reason why I have the question about Iran.

I'd like to ask: How would you approach solving the problem we have Iran today? Would you use force or would you use diplomacy? And if you used diplomacy, what would you do?

BLITZER: All right, let's let Senator Clinton first respond to that.

CLINTON: Well, I am very concerned about Iran. And I believe that we should have been using diplomacy for a number of years now.

I am, I guess, pleased that the administration is starting to talk to the Iranians, but it is way overdue. We have allowed the Iranians to begin their nuclear program, to imprison Iranian Americans as they are now, to send weapons across their borders to be used against our young men and women.

And we need a process of engagement. You know, the president's policy has been, we don't talk in this administration to people we don't agree with or that we think are bad. All during the Cold War, we always talked to the Soviet Union.

They had missiles pointed at us. They had leaders who said they would bury us. They waged wars around the world. We never stopped talking.

In my administration, diplomacy, patient, careful diplomacy, the kind of diplomacy that Bill Richardson did for my husband, that really gets people to stay with it over time.

CLINTON: Are you always going to get good results? No. But you've got to start the process.

However, we still have to make it clear that Iran having a nuclear weapon is absolutely unacceptable. We have to try

to prevent that at all costs.

(APPLAUSE)

But we need to start with diplomacy in order to see what we can accomplish.

BLITZER: So what happens, Senator, if diplomacy, when all is said and done, fails?

CLINTON: Wolf, I'm not going to get into hypotheticals, because we've had an administration that doesn't believe in diplomacy. You know, they have every so often Condi Rice go around the world and show up some where and make a speech, and occasionally they even send Dick Cheney -- and that's hardly diplomatic in my view.

So from what I...

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

We won't know until we get a president who is committed to diplomacy and will do things like use the great diplomats that have come up through our country -- use former presidents, use people like Bill Richardson. Only then will we be able to make a clear assessment.

I just hope we have enough time. Because, unfortunately, we have many months to go before this administration is done.

BLITZER: Senator Edwards, how far would you go, if necessary, to stop Iran from building a nuclear bomb?

EDWARDS: Well, let me -- can I be more specific?

I think that, beyond just talking about diplomacy, if you lived in Iran, you know that the Iranian people actually rallied for America on the streets of Tehran, after September the 11th.

And there's a long history of pro-American sentiment in Iran. There is an extraordinary opportunity available to us on Iran. And there's a very clear path, from my perspective.

They have a president who's politically unpopular. The people are in a different place. He hasn't done what he promised to do, Ahmadinejad, when he was elected president.

We don't have economic leverage over the Iranians. But the Europeans do. The European banking system does. We should put two options on the table. One, carrots: we'll make the nuclear fuel available to you, the international community, but we'll control it; you can't nuclearize -- you can't weaponize it.

Second, we're going to put a clear set of economic incentives on the table.

EDWARDS: And the Iranian people need to hear this.

BLITZER: All right.

EDWARDS: It needs to be not behind closed doors.

Just 10 more seconds.

And then the alternative -- the stick -- is if they don't do that, there are going to be serious economic sanctions.

We need to drive a wedge between the Iranian people and this radical leader.

BLITZER: But you're saying only economic sanctions, not a military threat that should be on the table. Is that what you're saying?

EDWARDS: I think this is the clear path. I think no president -- no responsible president -- would ever take any option off the table.

BLITZER: What about that, Senator Biden? You're the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. If you got word from the U.S. intelligence community that Ahmadinejad and his government were on the verge of having a nuclear bomb capable of hitting targets in the region on missiles, what would you do?

BIDEN: Well, first of all, I would do away with the policy of regime change. What we're saying to everybody in Iran is: Look, by the way, give up the one thing that keeps us from attacking you and after that we're going to attack you, we're going to take you down.

It's a bizarre notion, number one.

Number two, understand how weak Iran is. They are not a year away or two years away. They are a decade away from being able to weaponize with exactly what the question was, if they put a nuclear weapon on top of a missile that can strike. They are far away from that.

Number three, in fact, we have to understand how weak that government is. They import almost all of their refined oil. By 2014, they are going to be importing their crude oil. There are much better ways if we had to get to the point of real sanctions of doing economic sanctions on them forcefully that way. But at the end of the day, if they posed a missile, stuck it on a pad, I'd take it out.

BLITZER: Senator, thank you for that.

Let's go back to Jennifer.

VAUGHN: OK, well, thank you.

Matthew Mazer (ph), how are you?

QUESTION: Fine, thank you. VAUGHN: You're faculty here.

QUESTION: Yeah, I'm a professor of history.

VAUGHN: And you live in Concord, New Hampshire?

QUESTION: I do.

VAUGHN: What is your question tonight?

QUESTION: A number of the candidates have talked about alliance- building. I want to ask about a specific country. The U.S. has had close relations with Pakistan as part of the war in Afghanistan and part of the war on terror.

How do you reconcile our security interests with Pakistan with our interest in promoting liberal democracy? Pakistan is not a democratic country.

BLITZER: Let's ask -- let's throw that question to Senator Clinton.

CLINTON: Well, it's a really important question, because we have been supporting Pakistan through President Musharraf now for a number of years. And it is clear that he has not moved toward democracy, but has solidified his rule and become quite anti-democratic, with his removal of the chief justice and many of the other moves that he's taken.

At the same time, we depend upon him to try to control the tribal areas out of which come the resurgent Taliban and Al Qaida fighters who cross the border into Afghanistan.

Again, this is an area where I think the United States needs to be just focused, like the proverbial laser.

When I was in Pakistan and Afghanistan in January, I met with both President Karzai and President Musharraf.

CLINTON: And I asked them if it would help to have a high-level presidential envoy working with both of them to try to figure out how we can move toward what are American interests and how we can keep Pakistan from undermining the war against the Taliban and Al Qaida.

BLITZER: All right.

CLINTON: And unfortunately when I got back and I called the White House and I made this suggestion, it fell on deaf ears.

So there's a lot we need to do. And it's a very difficult, thorny problem how to address it.

BLITZER: Congressman Kucinich, if you were president of the United States and the intelligence community said to you, "We know where Osama bin Laden is. He's in Pakistan. We've got the specific target. But he's only going to be there for 20 minutes," you've got to give the order yes or no to take him out with a Hellfire missile, but it's going to kill some innocent civilians at the same time: What would be your decision?

KUCINICH: I don't think that a president of the United States who believes in peace and who wants to create peace in the world is going to be using assassination as a tool.

Because when you do that, it comes back at your country. And I think that Osama bin Laden, if he's still alive, ought to be held to account in an international court of law. And so should any other person who's been involved in a violation of international law which has resulted in the deaths of many people.

And so, I think that an America which has a strong stand morally in the world is an America that shows a way to get to peace. And an America that stands for peace is a strong country. So I would say to answer that question, I don't believe in assassination politics, and when you do that, you inevitably bring the assassination of our own leaders into play.

BLITZER: All right.

Senator Obama, you want to respond?

OBAMA: Well, I think Dennis is right. I don't believe in assassinations, but Osama bin Laden has declared war on us, killed 3,000 people, and under existing law, including international law, when you've got a military target like bin Laden, you take him out. And if you have 20 minutes, you do it swiftly and surely.

And it's unfortunate that I think during the initial push into Afghanistan that we let him slip away because we were distracted.

One thing that I want to talk about with respect to both Pakistan and the various problems in the region, including Iran: Our presence in Iraq is weakening our capacity to deal with these issues and fanning anti-American sentiment in such a way that it makes it more difficult for Musharraf to work with us effectively.

If people in Pakistan believe that the U.S. is an occupying force, it makes us more subject to the kinds of difficulties that we're seeing in Pakistan today.

BLITZER: I want everybody to raise their hand and tell me: If you agree that if the U.S. had intelligence that could take out Osama bin Laden and kill him, even though some innocent civilians would die in the process, would you, as president, authorize such an operation?

If you would, raise your hand.

BIDEN: It would depend on how many innocent civilians...

CLINTON: Yes, I mean, part of this is one of these hypotheticals, Wolf...

EDWARDS: There's not information, not enough information. CLINTON: ... that is very difficult to answer in the abstract.

You know, my husband actually tried to take out bin Laden. You know, he did fire missiles at a training camp that we had intelligence that that's where bin Laden was.

Because, by that time, bin Laden had already bombed our embassies; bin Laden had already demonstrated his hostility toward the United States.

But you can't just -- you have to be very careful about how you proceed.

So, you know, yes, if we could do it without a tremendous amount of collateral damage, I think, maybe with one or two exceptions, we would give the order to do it, knowing what a weighty responsibility that is.

BLITZER: All right. We're going to go on to the next question, from Jennifer.

Senator Edwards, you really want to weigh in.

EDWARDS: I just wanted to answer the original question that was asked, which was, how do you reconcile Musharraf being in power with our ideas of a liberal democracy?

And I think one of the things we have seen, during the course of the Bush administration, is America is not for any possible kind of democracy, we're for democracies that respect the rights of minorities, that actually respect civil rights and individual liberties.

And one danger that anyone has to recognize with the possible taking down of Musharraf as the president of Pakistan -- and I met with him also in Islamabad a few years ago -- one of the things we have to recognize is if he goes out of power, given the power of radical Islam in Pakistan, there's absolutely no way to know what kind of government will take its place.

BLITZER: And Pakistan's a nuclear power also.

Jennifer, go ahead.

VAUGHN: Jeff Turiel (ph) is here with us tonight.

You are a psychologist at Nashua High School. Would that be Nashua North?

QUESTION: Nashua North; that's correct.

VAUGHN: What's your question tonight?

QUESTION: I would like to address the crisis in Darfur. At this time, as many as 400,000 people have been killed, millions or more are without food and shelter. If you were elected president, would role do you think the United States should play in addressing this terrible tragedy?

BIDEN: Wolf?

BLITZER: Yes?

BIDEN: I just was there.

BLITZER: Go ahead, Senator.

BIDEN: You know, we have to stop talking about it. A lot of talk goes on about it. The United Nations has already said they're prepared to put in a 21,000 force, including the African Union.

In fact, you have in the capital of Sudan the government saying, "We're not going to allow that to happen." They have forfeited their sovereignty by engaging in genocide.

We should impose a no-fly zone if the U.N. will not move now. We should impose a no-fly zone, and we should commit 25,000 -- 2,500 NATO troops. You could take out the Janjaweed tomorrow.

I went there. I sat in the borders. I went in those camps. They're going to have thousands and thousands and thousands of people die. We've got to stop talking and act.

BLITZER: All right.

BIDEN: That's why last Monday I went to see the president of the United Nations at the General Assembly, as well as the secretary general, to make that point.

BLITZER: Raise your hand if you agree with Senator Biden that the United States should use military force to stop the genocide in Darfur.

CLINTON: Are we talking about a no-fly zone...

EDWARDS: Wolf...

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Hold on. Hold on.

(LAUGHTER)

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: This is an important issue. This is an important issue.

(CROSSTALK)

CLINTON: Absolutely...

EDWARDS: Because you're talking about American troops.

CLINTON: ... an apology.

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: ... no-fly zone, but very often, Senator Clinton, that could move on to other operations.

CLINTON: Well, but, we're not going to engage in these hypotheticals. I mean, one of the jobs of a president is being very reasoned in approaching these issues. And I don't think it's useful to be talking in these kind of abstract, hypothetical terms.

RICHARDSON: Well, I was there...

(APPLAUSE)

CLINTON: I think that's...

RICHARDSON: But I was there.

BLITZER: Governor, would you use force to save people in Darfur?

RICHARDSON: No, what I would do -- and I was there. I got a very fragile cease-fire put together there, three months ago.

And we made things a little better. I want with the Save Darfur Coalition.

This is what I would do. Number one, more U.N. peacekeepers. The government is refusing to make this happen.

Secondly, economic sanctions. We've imposed them, but they're weak. We need European countries to make them happen.

Third, we need China, to lean on China, which has enormous leverage over Darfur. And if the Chinese don't want to do this, we say to them, maybe we won't go to the Olympics. And lastly, what we need is a country, a foreign policy that cares about Africa, that cares that 300,000 human beings have died, have been massacred, that over 2 million have lost their homes.

BLITZER: All right.

RICHARDSON: Gender-based violence, rape. America should care about Africa, and we don't.

(CROSSTALK)

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Hold on one second. What about that idea, Senator Dodd, about possibly boycotting the Beijing Summer Olympic games if China doesn't use its influence to stop the genocide in Sudan?

DODD: I think that goes too far, Wolf. Here, look. This is a major issue. There are ways of dealing with this. We're not only going to elect a president in November of 2008. We're going to elect, arguably, the most important, if not the most important, leader in the world.

And it's going to be critically important that we use the tools available to us to exercise the influence we'd like on China, on Russia and other nations to be more cooperative and participate in solving some of these problems here.

That's going to require real leadership based on experience that knows how to bring people together -- certainly, reminding the Chinese of the importance of this issue -- utilizing those tools that are available to us.

But the idea that you go in and stop the Olympics from happening I don't think gets you there. I think that's more likely to delay the kind of influence and support China ought to be providing.

BLITZER: Senator Edwards?

EDWARDS: Actually, I disagree with my friend, Chris Dodd, about that. I think that we should use whatever tools available to us.

And I have to say to Senator Biden, Governor Richardson, I applaud their being so vocal and out there on this issue. It's enormously important.

But I think all of us recognize that this is a piece of a bigger puzzle, which is America no longer has the moral authority to lead in the world.

EDWARDS: Watching a genocide continue has contributed to that, but it is not the only thing. The spread of HIV/AIDS, I think America ought to actually lead an effort to make primary school education available to 100 million children in the world who desperately need it, including in Africa...

BLITZER: We're going to go back to Jennifer.

But go ahead, Senator Obama, very quickly.

OBAMA: Two things -- one, we are going to continue to see some of these problems in ungoverned spaces. We've got a security interest and a humanitarian interest in dealing with this. We've got to work internationally to figure out how we can get forces to stop genocides like this.

Second point, our legitimacy is reduced when we've got a Guantanamo that is open, when we suspend habeas corpus. Those kinds of things erode our moral claims that we are acting on behalf of broader universal principles, and that's one of the reasons why those kinds of issues are so important.

(CROSSTALK)

DODD: ... cancel the Olympics.

That's not a bad question. You asked the question.

(CROSSTALK)

DODD: I'd like to know how my colleagues would feel about it.

BLITZER: If you agree that the U.S. should consider boycotting Asian Olympics...

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Senator Dodd says he doesn't think that's a good idea. If you agree that it might be a good idea, raise your hand -- if necessary.

BIDEN: Wolf, the reason we have no moral authority is we're not acting. I heard the same argument with Milosevic. I went over there, found out there was genocide going on, came to your husband. I said, "We must act."

Now, look, we acted. Not an American was killed. We saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

By the time all these guys talk, 50,000 more people are going to be dead. They're going to be dead. And I tell you, I guarantee you, we have the capacity by setting up a no-fly zone to shut down the Janjaweed. That's our moral authority. Exercise it.

(APPLAUSE)

OBAMA: Nobody disagrees with the no-fly zone...

BLITZER: I want to go back to Jennifer, but I have to ask Governor Richardson, you're a former ambassador at the United Nations, and what I hear you saying, what you're saying is that you would consider the United States boycotting the Summer Olympic Games in China unless China starts getting tough with the government in Sudan.

RICHARDSON: Yes, I would. Because China purchases a lot of their oil -- most of it, a good part of it -- from Sudan.

And my view is that they are a leverage point. And they have not been strong on the Sudan.

We don't need, Joe -- with all due respect -- another military involvement. Iraq is enough. And we must get out of Iraq.

What we need to do is move forward with the toughest options. Am I for a no-fly zone? Yes. I think we need strong economic sanctions. And we lack the moral authority to build international coalitions, to fight genocide in Darfur. We should shut down -- I would as first day as president, I would shut down Guantanamo. I would shut down Abu Ghraib and secret prisons. That is the moral authority that we don't have.

BLITZER: Hold on one second.

The audience is anxious for another question from out here.

Jennifer?

VAUGHN: Tim O'Connor is anxious.

You're about to graduate from high school.

QUESTION: Yeah.

VAUGHN: Are you eligible, now, to vote, for the first time, in the New Hampshire primary?

QUESTION: I am. I'm 18 now.

VAUGHN: What's your question tonight?

QUESTION: Well, on a little bit lighter note, I spent last summer in Germany with a family whose oldest son was completing his one-year mandatory service to his country.

I was wondering if you think we should have that; and if so, how you plan to make it happen?

BLITZER: All right.

Senator Gravel, let me ask you that question.

GRAVEL: And obviously, I filibustered to force the end of the draft. I don't think we need it back.

If you want to volunteer for the military, you're entitled to do it.

I would like to see a voluntary program where young people would have an opportunity to render public service, whether it's in the military, whether it's the Peace Corps, whether it's the AmeriCorps, or all of the above; and therefore, every year that you serve, we'll give you four years of school free.

(APPLAUSE)

That will give you an incentive to move forward and do something about education in this country.

BLITZER: Congressman Kucinich, should there be mandatory service for young people after they finish high school?

KUCINICH: I would take the approach that John F. Kennedy took when he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country," and inspire young people to want to serve.

And want to serve not only in the military, which is honorable service, but also to serve in helping to clean up our environment. Also to serve in tutoring children and helping the elderly and working in hospitals.

There are so many different ways that we can encourage you to serve. To make it mandatory loses the point. People want to love America again. And when you have a president who will inspire the young people, they'll want to get involved.

BLITZER: Is it time, Senator Dodd, as Congressman Charlie Rangel recommends, to bring back the military draft?

DODD: I don't think so, Wolf, at all. I served as a Peace Corps volunteer back in the 1960s, an American -- of course, I've been asked a million times why did I join the Peace Corps. And I did so because an American president asked me to. He asked a generation of us to be part of something larger than ourselves.

Some went off to join Vista; some got out into the civil rights movement; others went into the military; others went to the Justice Department. It was a very exciting time to be alive.

But today, in the world we're living in today, I don't think we need to go a draft at all. We don't need the numbers of people in the service.

But I like the idea, what we've tried to do with AmeriCorps and other things, to provide the kind of financial relief.

This young man is finishing high school. He's assumably going to go on to higher education.

I hope you are.

Looking at the staggering costs, the ripoffs that are occurring with people manipulating through deceit and fraud the student loan programs, I'd like to see us offer some real opportunities to you financially to give something back to your country. In return, we make it possible for you to get that higher education without incurring a lifetime of debt. That would be a valuable way of doing it in my opinion.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

Jennifer, go ahead with the next question.

VAUGHN: What is your question?

QUESTION: Well, good evening, everyone.

My wife and I have two daughters, middle school age. And we do reasonably well financially, but the vast majority of our spare income goes toward funding our retirement, putting aside money for their college education. And we don't have tax shelters.

We hear an awful lot about new spending -- all wonderful-sounding programs -- with the answer for funding being elimination of tax cuts that were geared toward the rich.

And I was wondering what the definition of rich is on the part of the candidates, but using, perhaps, an income level.

BLITZER: Senator Obama, what is a definition of rich?

OBAMA: Well, the definition that I'm using with respect to paying for my health care plan is those making over

\$250,000 a year.

Keep in mind that all we're talking about is going back to the tax levels, the marginal tax rates that existed when Bill Clinton was in office. So we're not talking about going back to huge marginal rates.

But you tell a larger story that I hear as I travel all across the country. And that is that folks are feeling hit from all sides. They're trying to save for the next generation's education. They're trying to save for their own retirement. In some cases, they're looking after an aging parent. Gas prices are hitting them.

And one of the things that we've seen in our economy is that the burdens and benefits of this new global economy are not being spread evenly across the board. And that's why as the next president, one of my first priorities is to make sure that we institute some fairness in the system. We institute in our tax code.

BLITZER: All right.

OBAMA: We institute it with respect to making sure that Social Security is preserved.

We institute it in giving working people an opportunity to save where they don't have it right now.

And we make sure that, as Chris said -- I think Chris made an excellent point -- that college education is simply too expensive at this point.

BLITZER: So give us a number, Senator Obama. At what number would you tell us that there is lower taxes, at what number people can afford higher taxes?

OBAMA: I'm sorry. I don't understand the question.

BLITZER: Income at \$200,000 a year? \$150,000 a year?

OBAMA: As I said before, I would roll back the Bush tax cuts for those making over \$250,000. In some cases, I'd like to see lower taxes. When I was in the state legislature, one of the things that I introduced was a state earned income tax credit that provided millions of dollars of tax breaks to folks who can least afford it.

Keep in mind, my starting point is not how do I tax people. My starting point is are we spending the money that we have wisely, which we are not always doing. If you are progressive, you should be just as concerned by the huge spike in earmarks that have been taking place under the Bush administration as any so-called fiscal conservative is.

BLITZER: What is a "rich person," Senator Edwards?

EDWARDS: I don't know if I know what a rich person is. What I do for my health care plan is roll back the tax cuts for people who make over \$200,000 a year. So \$200,000 is the figure I use.

But I want to go to a piece of this question that you ask, which is, you talked about saving for your kids to be able to go to college. And we really haven't talked about that tonight. Just a quick idea.

College for everyone is something we've actually, Elizabeth and I, put in place in eastern North Carolina, in a small community in eastern North Carolina, and the idea is really simple. The idea is, if a kid graduates from high school qualified to be in college and they commit to work when they're there at least 10 hours a week, their tuition and books are paid for.

And the idea is, we want to make it simple for kids to go to college. They have to work for it. We don't just give it to them. And then, on top of that, so many young people are faced with this crushing burden of debt when they graduate from college. I think it's something we shouldn't just be doing -- we've done this privately in this small area of eastern North Carolina...

BLITZER: All right.

EDWARDS: ... but it's something we ought to be doing all across this country, college for everyone.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

Jennifer, go ahead.

VAUGHN: This is Gregory Camann (ph), and Gregory lived in Bedford, and he used to own a hair salon. I'm going to reach around you and have you ask your question.

QUESTION: Our country's now running huge federal deficits again. I'm wondering, one, do the candidates have a problem with that? And if they do, what policies would they pursue, if they became president, to alleviate that problem?

And if you could be somewhat specific. Would you be looking for the income side, and what would those policies be, or would you be looking to the spending side, and talk a little bit about those policies. Thank you.

BLITZER: Governor Richardson?

RICHARDSON: Well, I'm a governor. I have balanced five budgets. I have to as a governor. In the Clinton administration -- I want to thank the senator for her nice words -- we had a balanced budget and created 20 million jobs. This is what I would do: \$100 million from the war in Iraq spent on domestic needs. Number two, I am for a constitutional amendment to balance the budget, a line-item veto and pay-as-you-go policies. I would get rid of the close to \$30 billion earmarks that the Congress has.

I would also get rid of corporate welfare, close to \$70 billion. For instance, if you're a company, you get a tax credit -- a runaway tax credit -- to take jobs overseas.

I would also find ways to let insurance companies have cost controls, strong cost controls to reduce the deficit.

I would also take other steps and say that it is critically important that we also grow the economy. I'm a pro-growth Democrat. I believe if we grow the economy, for instance, this -- the two daughters of the young man, the young father over there. If we grow the economy 1.8 percent instead of the 1.3, the solvency of Social Security in the year 2045 would be resolved.

And I would be a president who would give incentives to companies that bring jobs over the prevailing wage, rural tax credits...

BLITZER: Thank you.

RICHARDSON: ... ways that we help the economy grow in the technology sector.

BLITZER: Thank you, Governor.

Congressman Kucinich, you know the Republicans will say what they're hearing, by and large, tonight is more Democrats suggesting raise taxes, raise spending, more of the same, the big tax, big spending party.

What do you say to them?

KUCINICH: I'm saying that we should not be borrowing money from China to run a war in Iraq. We need to change our spending policies in many ways.

First of all, stop war. Most of the people on this stage voted consistently to fund a war we should have never gotten into in the first place.

Change our trade laws. We need to get out of NAFTA and the WTO and go back to bilateral trade, conditioned on worker's rights, human rights and the environment and stop driving an \$800 billion trade deficit.

We need to have health care for all, all Americans, in a not-for-profit health care system.

That's going to help the gentleman with his beauty salon and his small business, when you have a chance to have health care at a fraction of what you're paying now and everything's covered.

And then finally, environment: I say we can create millions of new jobs with a new WGA (ph), inspiring technologies for wind and solar and insulation on a domestic basis.

We can create new wealth. I want to create new wealth and I want to stop wasting the money where we're wasting it or losing the wealth in our trade policies.

BLITZER: Thank you, Congressman.

Jennifer, you have an e-mail question.

VAUGHN: Yes, Wolf, if I may. This e-mail question is from our WMUR gather.com blogger.

The question is: Democrats have vowed to weed out corruption in the federal government. A major source of corruption for both Democrats and Republicans are bribes in spending bills, sometimes referred to as earmarks.

Would you vow, if elected president, to veto all bills containing earmarks?

And, Wolf, earmarks -- the pork spending that sometimes gets added to legislation without anybody really knowing about it.

BLITZER: Well, let's ask Senator Dodd. What about that? Would you agree to give up earmarks for Connecticut if you had your way?

(LAUGHTER)

DODD: Thanks, Wolf...

(LAUGHTER)

Well, listen, first of all, as president, we ought to be discouraging that behavior, because it is a problem. Clearly, the budget is getting out of control as a result of those practices.

But I wouldn't want to have a blanket approach to that. There may be some critical issues that occur -- events like Katrina and other events -- where the Congress needs to respond, you haven't gone through the process before. I wouldn't want to put us in that kind of a rigid straitjacket.

But, clearly, when you're going beyond that, we need to have more discipline in the process.

I've been a long-time supporter -- offered the first, one of the first pay-as-you-go budgets back some 23 years ago in the United States Senate -- the question that came up earlier about specific policies and ideas.

I think, with rare exceptions you ought to be able to have accounting for either the tax cut or the spending program and pay for them.

We've gone on too long allowing for these things to build and grow, and the deficits are a problem. Dennis is right: \$2.2 trillion of public debt being held outside the country.

The good news is that the Chinese are buying it. The bad news is the Chinese are buying it, because it puts us in a very disadvantageous position when it comes to arguing against currency manipulation. So getting better control of our fiscal policies -- our fiscal policies ought to reflect our moral values. Our fiscal policies ought to be fair. They ought to be practical. They ought to be pro-growth. And they ought to be responsible.

BLITZER: Senator...

DODD: That's not happening when you have earmarks year-in and year-out and not having the kind of influence that would eliminate them except in those rare circumstances where you may need to have them.

BLITZER: Is it time to do away with these earmarks?

GRAVEL: Totally, totally. It's abominable, and the only way you're going to get rid of it is to give the president the line-item veto. Of course, they're not going to give the president a line-item veto. What we need to do is change the entire tax structure.

I want to point out that the comptroller general of the United States invited all the presidential candidates to come in for a briefing. I went in for a briefing. He said there was only two other people that came in for a briefing. What the briefing he told us is that we have a fiscal gap on the order of \$50 trillion. And you're hearing all this money's going to be spent to do all these great things? My God, don't believe a word of it. Follow the money.

You can't get all this money coming at you, millions of dollars from all the special interests, and think that they're now going to deal with solving the problems with special interests. Won't happen.

BLITZER: All right.

Senator Clinton?

CLINTON: Well, I think it's important to remember that six years ago we had a balanced budget and a surplus.

(APPLAUSE)

And we did that the old-fashioned way, by cutting spending and raising revenues. There is no free lunch. We're going to have to do that hard work again.

Now, my point is, when it comes to the tax questions that were asked, the benefits from the Bush tax cuts have gone disproportionately to a very small percentage of Americans. And 10 percent of Americans have realized about 50 percent of the increase in wealth that has happened in this country in the last six years.

We need to deal with the burden on the middle class. The alternative minimum tax has to be reformed, hopefully eventually eliminated.

But I think it's important to point out that we have done this before -- not in ancient history, but within our memory. And we can do it again once we have a Democratic president.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

(APPLAUSE)

We're going to go back to Jennifer in a second. But I know Congressman Kucinich really wants to weigh in.

GRAVEL: Listen, they've been raiding the Social Security trust fund to \$200 million a year, and they're all involved in this.

Now what do they say about -- you balanced the budget by raiding the Social Security fund to \$200 million a year. And they're doing it now.

BLITZER: Congressman Kucinich, you want to respond to him?

KUCINICH: I do.

Because we're looking at a process here in Washington that most of the American public isn't aware of. And that is, these interest groups have such a hold on our country that right now they're headed to grab the oil of Iraq, using our troops. Right now, they're keeping a not-for-profit health-care system in its place. Right now, they're keeping NAFTA in its place. I'm talking about a real change here that gives the American people a chance to recover their country totally and by moving away from the interest groups...

BLITZER: All right.

KUCINICH: ... that unfortunately support some of my dear friends.

BLITZER: Senator Biden?

BIDEN: Ten seconds. If you want to do away with the interest groups, go to public financing of elections. Let's cut through all this malarkey.

(APPLAUSE)

That is the bottom line. As long as there are massive contributions pouring into the system, you're going to get these earmarks in the middle of the night that have nothing to do with the people's interest.

So you want to do this, reform the system. Make a public financing system. That will change the earmarks.

BLITZER: Thank you, Senator.

Let's go back to Jennifer. VAUGHN: OK, Wolf.

We have Ivy Merrill with us tonight. You are a substitute elementary schoolteacher.

QUESTION: Yes, I am.

VAUGHN: What's your question tonight?

QUESTION: Well, thank you for being here.

Given that the circumstances in this country and in our world were essentially the same when you take office, what would be your top priority for your first 100 days?

BLITZER: Senator Edwards?

EDWARDS: To travel the world, re-establish America's -- I think my mike just came on -- re-establish America's moral authority in the world, which I think is absolutely crucial. The other things become less important and subservient.

We have huge issues here at home. We've talked about some of them tonight -- energy, global warming, what we do about the issue of health care in America, the poor, which we haven't talked about, unfortunately.

But, the single greatest responsibility of the next president is to travel the world, speak to the world about what real American values are -- equality, diversity -- and to lead an effort by America to re-establish our alliances around the world, which is going to require time and focus.

And then, third, to lead in taking action that demonstrates that America is strong but that America is also moral and just. And we're going to help other people in the world and we're going to demonstrate our commitment to humanity.

All those things...

BLITZER: All right.

EDWARDS: ... are crucial to re-establishing our moral authority.

BLITZER: I want to go very quickly to everyone.

What would be, Senator Clinton, your top priority in the first 100 days?

CLINTON: Well, if President Bush has not ended the war in Iraq, to bring our troops home. That would be the very first thing that I would do.

(APPLAUSE)

BLITZER: All right. Senator Obama?

OBAMA: That would be the number one priority, assuming nothing has changed. The second priority is getting moving on health care because that's something that we can get done, I think, very quickly.

BLITZER: All right.

Governor Richardson?

RICHARDSON: Nobody's talked about your profession, education.

I would upgrade our schools. I would have preschool for every American, full-day kindergarten.

I would pay our teachers what they deserve. I'd have a minimum wage for our teachers, \$40,000. I did that in New Mexico. We went from 49th to 29th.

I would bring science and math academies to get America more competitive. I would emphasize the arts. I would emphasize civics. Again, science and math.

I would have universal education...

BLITZER: Thank you.

RICHARDSON: ... available for every American.

BLITZER: Thank you, Governor.

Senator Biden, your top priority in the first 100 days?

BIDEN: I would end the war in Iraq and immediately move to defuse the possible war in Iran and immediately defuse what's going on, on the Korean Peninsula.

They're the three most important things that the next president is going to have to deal with.

And by the way, when power is handed from this president to the next, the next president is going to be left with no margin for error. They better be smarter than their advisers.

BLITZER: Congressman Kucinich, what would be your top priority?

KUCINICH: Keep in mind, we could stop that war in Iraq now by not providing any funding. But what I intend to do is to be a president who helps to reshape the world for peace -- to work with all the leaders of the world in getting rid of all nuclear weapons, rejecting policies that create war as an instrument of diplomacy, making sure that we cause the nations of the world to come together for fair trade, cancel NAFTA, cancel the WTO, go back to bilateral trade conditioned on workers rights and human rights, create a not-for-profit health care system (inaudible) a Congress.

BLITZER: Very quickly, Senator Gravel and then Senator Dodd, but very quickly: Your top priority?

GRAVEL: Top priority is to turn to these people and say they are part of the leadership right now in the Congress. They could end the war if they want to. All they've got to do is show the leadership and they will...

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Senator Dodd, very quickly. We've got five seconds.

DODD: Well, I'd kind of restore the constitutional rights in our country. This administration has done great damage to them. I would do that on the first day. I wouldn't wait 100 days on those issues.

BLITZER: We've got to leave it right there. We're going to leave it right there. This brings to an end our debate. Be sure to join us Tuesday right here on this same stage for a debate involving the Republican candidates for president of the United States.

Our next Democratic debate, by the way, will be a revolutionary approach to campaign debates. It will be held on July 23 from Charleston, South Carolina, in partnership with YouTube and Google. You're going to want to see that debate as well.