

Transcript: NPR Democratic Candidates' Debate

NPR.org, December 4, 2007 · Following is transcript of the 2007 National Public Radio Presidential Debate for the Democratic candidates. The debate took place at the Iowa State Historical Museum and was co-sponsored by Iowa Public Radio.

The candidates attending were Sen. Joseph Biden (DE), Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (NY), Sen. Christopher Dodd (CT), former Sen. John Edwards (NC), former Sen. Mike Gravel (AK), Rep. Dennis Kucinich (OH), and Sen. Barack Obama (IL).

The debate was moderated by Steve Inskeep, Michele Norris and Robert Siegel.

ROBERT SIEGEL: But the Democrats are here, and they are, from left to right on your radio dial, Senator Hillary Clinton, former Senator Mike Gravel, Senator Barack Obama, Senator Christopher Dodd, Senator Joseph Biden, former Senator John Edwards and Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

Governor Bill Richardson could not join us. He's attending the funeral of a Korean War soldier whose remains the governor recently helped repatriate from North Korea.

So we're going to get started with the debate, and let's stipulate in advance what I know many feel obliged to say. We're grateful that all of you are here, and we expect that you're grateful to the Iowa State Historical Museum, the people of Iowa, public radio in Iowa and NPR News. And we appreciate that and hope we can move on to the topic of Iran.

The new National Intelligence Estimate contains a major change. It says that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program in the fall of 2003. Today President Bush said that nothing's changed in light of the report. He said the NIE, the National Intelligence Estimate, doesn't do anything to change his opinion about the danger Iran poses to the world.

For all of you — and let's go left to right across the radio dial — do you agree with the president's assessment that Iran still poses a threat? And do you agree that the NIE's news shows that isolation and sanctions work?

Senator Clinton.

SEN. HILLARY CLINTON: Well, I'm relieved that the intelligence community has reached this conclusion, but I vehemently disagree with the president that nothing's changed and therefore nothing in American policy has to change.

I have for two years advocated diplomatic engagement with Iran, and I think that's what the president should do. He should seize this opportunity and engage in serious diplomacy, using both carrots and sticks. I think we do know that pressure on Iran does have an effect. I think that is an important lesson. But we're not going to reach the kind of resolution that we should seek unless we put that into the context of a diplomatic process.

SIEGEL: Thank you, Senator Clinton.

Senator — former Senator Mike Gravel.

MR. MIKE GRAVEL: Iran's not a problem, never has been, never will be.

What you're seeing right here is something very unique, very courageous. What the intelligence community has done is drop-kicked the president of the United States. These are people of courage that have watched what the president is doing, onrush to war with Iran.

And so by releasing this information, which is diametrically opposed to the estimate that was given in '05 by showing that there is no information to warrant what the White House has been doing, they have now boxed in the president in his ability to go to war. So, my hat is off to these courageous people within the bureaucrats — bureaucracy of the intelligence community.

SIEGEL: Thank you, Senator Gravel.

Senator Barack Obama.

SEN. BARACK OBAMA: Well, I think Iran continues to be a threat to some of its neighbors in the region, so they're still funding Hamas, they're still funding Hezbollah, and those are things we have to be concerned about. But it is absolutely clear that this administration and President Bush continues to not let facts get in the way of his ideology. And that's been the problem with their foreign policy generally. They should have stopped the saber-rattling, should have never started it, and they need now to aggressively move on the diplomatic front.

I have said consistently since the beginning of this campaign that it is important for the president to lead diplomatic efforts, to try to offer to Iran the prospect of joining the World Trade Organization, potential normalized relations over time, in exchange for changes in behavior. That's something that has to be pursued.

SIEGEL: Senator Chris Dodd.

SEN. CHRIS DODD: Well, again, this is 16 agencies that have drawn this conclusion, it wasn't just one. So it's a very compelling case that's been made here for exercising caution and pursuing what I've advocated, and others have as well, and that is, pursuing as much of a diplomatic solution to the problems that Iran poses. And there are some. It would be foolish to say otherwise here.

But the important point is we can't do this unilaterally. And that's one of the dangers here. If we really try to impose sanctions by ourselves or other such efforts here, they will fail. It's very important to understand the linkage, obviously, not only between Iran, but Iraq and Iran, and our ability to build this kind of international support for efforts to convince Iran on a variety of issues to move in a different direction is being seriously compromised by our continued military presence in Iraq.

So there needs to be not only understanding what's written in this report, but simultaneously understanding that that more multilateral approach is going to be hobbled and difficult as long as we find ourselves bogged down in the Iraq situation.

SIEGEL: Thank you, Senator Dodd.

Senator Joseph Biden.

SEN. JOSEPH BIDEN: With all due respect with anybody who thinks that pressure brought this about, let's get this straight. In 2003, they stopped their program.

You cannot trust this president. He is not trustworthy. He has undermined our security in the region. He has undermined our credibility in the world. He has made it more difficult to get cooperation from the rest of the world. He has caused oil to go up roughly \$25 a barrel with a security premium because of his threat of war.

It is outrageous, intolerable, and it must stop. The president of the United States — it was like watching a rerun of his statement on Iraq five years earlier. This — Iran is not a nuclear threat to the United States of America. Iran should be dealt with directly with the rest of the world at our side, but we've made it more difficult now because who is going to trust us? Who in Europe, who in China, who in Russia? It's outrageous.

SIEGEL: Thank you, Senator Biden.

Senator John Edwards.

MR. JOHN EDWARDS: Thank you.

What — what I believe is that this president, who just a few weeks ago was talking about World War III, he, the vice president, the neocons have been on a march to possible war with Iran for a long time. We know that they've prepared contingency plans for a military attack. My view is that the — this has been going on since the famous "Axis of Evil" speech, and the United States Senate had an important responsibility in standing up to him and stopping him on the vote on whether to declare the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization. The president says we're in a global war on terror, and then he declares the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization and also a proliferator of weapons of mass destruction. It's absolutely clear and eerily similar to what we saw with Iraq, where they were headed — and there's a different approach, a smart approach using our friends in Europe and the European banking system to deal with this.

SIEGEL: Thank you, Senator Edwards.

And Congressman Kucinich.

REP. DENNIS KUCINICH: Just as five years ago I warned that there was no evidence that would merit war against Iraq and warned this country not to do it, so for the past few years I've been saying that there's no evidence that Iran had a nuclear weapons program. And unfortunately, the president, just as he was able to convince some of my colleagues here to vote for the war against Iraq, despite the fact there wasn't any real evidence, so he has been able to get some of my colleagues here — Senators Clinton, Obama and Edwards — to say of Iran "all options are on the table." As a matter of fact, he's still saying that. So we really need to switch to not just diplomacy, but my candidacy offers the American people someone for president who was right the first time.

SIEGEL: Thank you, Congressman Kucinich.

A question from Steve Inskeep.

STEVE INSKEEP: Senator Clinton, as some of your opponents have noted, in September you voted on a resolution involving the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which, among other things, called them proliferators of mass destruction. In view of this latest intelligence estimate, which says Iran's nuclear program was stopped in 2003, do you believe that's still true?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, there were other purposes for that resolution. It does label the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization, and there is evidence that they do support Hamas and Hezbollah, as Senator Obama just said, and in addition have, until recently, been supplying weapons and technical advisers to various factions within Iraq.

Since that resolution passed — which was non-binding and did not in any way authorize the president to take any action that would lead to war — our commanders on the ground in Iraq have announced that we've seen some progress from the Iranians backing off, no longer sending in weapons and materiel, and beginning to withdraw their technical advisers.

INSKEEP: Forgive me, are the Revolutionary Guards proliferators of mass destruction?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, many of us believe that. You know, earlier this year, Senator Edwards told an audience in Israel that the nuclear threat from Iran was the greatest threat to our generation. Back in 2004, Senator Obama told the *Chicago Tribune* Editorial Board that he would even consider nuke — surgical strikes by missiles to take out Iran's nuclear capacity. So there was a very broadly based belief that they were pursuing a nuclear weapon.

INSKEEP: Let's hear from people you've just mentioned. Senator Edwards, do you remember saying that?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, first of all, Senator Clinton and I just have an honest disagreement about this, but a very strong disagreement. I think it's very clear that Bush and Cheney have been rattling the saber about Iran for a very long time, and I said very clearly when this vote took place on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard that it was important for us to stand up to them.

INSKEEP: But your remarks in Israel that Senator — that Senator —

MR. EDWARDS: Well, everyone — everyone at the table would acknowledge that Iran represents a serious issue for the Middle East and for us —

REP. KUCINICH: No, I do not acknowledge —

INSKEEP: Congressman Kucinich does not, but —

MR. EDWARDS: Let me finish, if I can.

REP. KUCINICH: Let me characterize my own remarks.

MR. EDWARDS: If I can just finish, Dennis, for just a second.

But I do want it to be clear that, especially on an issue as big as Iran, it's very important for voters in Iowa — caucus-goers in Iowa and New Hampshire voters — to understand the differences. And I do believe very strongly that it was important for us to stand up because what Bush and Cheney did after the vote in the Senate is they declared the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization and a proliferator of weapons of mass destruction.

SIEGEL: Senator Obama.

SEN. OBAMA: Well, Senator Clinton's mention of the *Chicago Tribune* article back in 2004, I think, is a little bit misleading. Because what I was specifically asked about was if Iran was developing nuclear weapons, how could we respond? And in those situations, what I said is we should keep options on the table. But what I've been consistent about was that this saber-rattling was a repetition of Iraq, a war I opposed, and that we needed to oppose George Bush again. We can't keep on giving him the benefit of the doubt, knowing the ways in which they manipulate intelligence.

SIEGEL: Senator Obama, we're going to have to take a break here, and we'll continue with our debate. We'll continue discussing Iran in just one minute.

You're listening to special coverage from Iowa Public Radio and NPR News.

(Announcements)

INSKEEP: Welcome back to the NPR News debate. We're with the Democrats in Des Moines, Iowa, along with Michele Norris. I'm Steve Inskeep.

SIEGEL: And I'm Robert Siegel. We're discussing Iran, the lessons learned from the war in Iraq.

A moment ago when Congressman Kucinich objected to or interrupted the statement from Senator Edwards that everybody agrees Iran is a threat, you say, Congressman Kucinich, I misinterpreted your earlier remarks that Iran is not a threat.

REP. KUCINICH: All I did was raise my hand. I wanted a chance to respond.

SIEGEL: Yes.

REP. KUCINICH: Thank you.

The point that Senator Clinton made was a valid point with respect to the comments of Senator Obama and also the comments of Senator Edwards at the Herzliya conference. See, when people say all options are on the table, as the three senators have, they actually encouraged President Bush and licensed his rhetoric. And what I'm saying is that I'm the only one here who in Congress repeatedly challenge, in every chance and every legislation, repeatedly challenge this mind-set that said all options are on the table and that Iran had nuclear weapons programs.

SIEGEL: OK. Cleared up.

REP. KUCINICH: I'm the only one who can make that claim.

SIEGEL: Clarified.

Senator Chris Dodd, are all options on the table, should they be on the table?

SEN. DODD: Well, certainly under — what circumstances we're talking about here. I think the vote in September was very important. We're all seeking to be the nominee of our party, seeking the presidency.

SIEGEL: You're talking about the vote on the Kyl-Lieberman resolution — amendment.

SEN. DODD: I am. That's very important, because it was a — there are only about 20 of us here — Senator Biden and myself are the only two on this table here when confronted with that vote that voted against it, along with Senator Lugar, I might point, Senator Chuck Hagel and others, Jim Webb, who felt that this was — the language of the Resolved clause in that resolution, that non-binding resolution, specifically eliminated any option except a military one. And that kind of framework is exactly the thing you're going to hear back again, in my view. And the danger involved — those critical moments come periodically, but it demonstrates leadership on a critical issue such as this one —

SIEGEL: Thank you, Senator Dodd.

SEN. DODD: — where there's enough information to reach a different conclusion.

SIEGEL: Senator Clinton — you voted for it, Senator Clinton.

SEN. CLINTON: Oh, I did, along with many others, including strong opponents of the Iraq war and the use of military force, like Senator Dick Durbin and Senator Carl Levin. And all of us have said that if we thought that anything in that resolution gave even a pretense of legitimacy to President Bush taking any action, we

wouldn't have voted that way. In fact, a number of the Democrats worked furiously to clarify the meaning of that resolution.

The specifics about designating the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization, I believe, fits into a broader diplomatic effort. I believe in aggressive diplomacy when it comes to Iran, and when you engage in aggressive diplomacy, you need both carrots and sticks. And I think the designation provides one of those sticks that will give us a chance to make progress to where we could have a resolution.

SIEGEL: I want you to hear what one of the sponsors of that resolution, Senator Joseph Lieberman, said about Iran and about the Revolutionary Guard, explaining that resolution, when he spoke one month ago on "All Things Considered."

SEN. JOSEPH LIEBERMAN (I-CT): (From tape.) Iran has crossed a red line. I mean, they are responsible for the killing of hundreds of American soldiers. And right now, all that we, the United States, has done is to tell them — show them the evidence that we have that they're doing it and tell them they got to stop; and they haven't. So now we have economic sanctions. If that doesn't work, we really have to consider military action to stop them from doing it, perhaps by striking the bases around Tehran, where we know they are training these Iraqi terrorists who go back to kill Americans.

SIEGEL: Senator Edwards, why not?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, first of all, diplomacy. Declaring a military group sponsored by the state of Iran a terrorist organization, that's supposed to be diplomacy? And I would add, this has to be considered in the context that — Senator Clinton has spoken about me, let me just respond — this has to be considered in the context that Senator Clinton has said she agrees with George Bush terminology that we're in a global war on terror, then she voted to declare the military group in Iran a terrorist organization. How — what possible conclusion can you reach other than that we are at war? And —

SIEGEL: Senator Clinton may reply, and then we'll hear from Senator Gravel.

MR. EDWARDS: — I have very — a very different view about what you need to do to stand up to Bush.

SIEGEL: We'll have a response from Senator Clinton and then Mike Gravel. Yes.

SEN. CLINTON: Well, you know, I understand politics and I understand making outlandish political charges, but this really goes way too far. In fact, having designated the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization, we've actually seen some changes in their behavior. There is absolutely no basis for a rush to war, which I oppose and have opposed for two years.

But there is also a recognition that the Iranians were supplying weapons that killed Americans. They were supplying technical assistance from the Qods Force, which is their special operations element. So I think we've actually seen the positive effects of having labeled them a terrorist organization, because it did change their behavior.

SIEGEL: Mike Gravel, then Joe Biden.

MR. GRAVEL: There is no evidence. There is no evidence, and they've produced none. Our military has no evidence and they've not produced any.

But let's — I want to touch something that they're all giving license to, that there's something wrong with Iran supporting Hamas and Hezbollah. These are two elected organizations, and — and why can't they give support to those organizations? Israel doesn't want it, so why do they buy hook, line and sinker that they

can't give aid to Hamas and Hezbollah? We give unlimited aid to Israel. These people are fighting for their rights.

SIEGEL: You believe —

MR. GRAVEL: Is there something wrong with that?

SIEGEL: We'll come back to your points in a moment.

Senator Biden, you wanted to talk about the al-Qods Brigade.

SEN. BIDEN: No, I wanted to talk about this issue.

As chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, I'm the only one at this table for the last four years who've been laying out concrete alternatives to the Bush administration's policy. The vote — what everybody misunderstands, in my humble opinion, is the vote to declare the Qods Force and the Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization was not a view that could be established without question, number one.

Number two, it is self-defeating. The moment that declaration was made, oil prices jumped over \$18 a barrel. The moment that declaration was made, every one of our friends, from Iraq to Pakistan, felt they had to distance themselves from us because it appears to be a war on Islam.

My — with all due respect to my colleagues, with the exception of Senator Dodd, they're not connecting the dots here. This matters, and there's no evidence — none, zero —

SIEGEL: Thank you.

SEN. BIDEN: — that this declaration caused any change in action on the part of the Iranian government.

SIEGEL: Senator Barack Obama.

SEN. OBAMA: There was another problem with the resolution that we haven't spoken about, and that was that it suggested that we should structure in some way our forces in Iraq with the goal of blunting Iranian influence in Iraq.

Now, this is a problem on a whole bunch of fronts, but number one, the reason that Iran has been strengthened was because of this misguided war in Iraq. We installed — helped to elect a government in Iraq that we knew had connections with Iran. And so the notion somehow that they're not going to have influence and that we may be using yet another justification for a continuing mission in Iraq I think is an extreme problem and one of the reasons why this was a bad idea.

SIEGEL: Senator Edwards.

MR. EDWARDS: I just want to be clear to the listeners that we have a real division here. I mean, among the Democratic candidates, there's only one that voted for this resolution. And this is exactly what Bush and Cheney wanted.

Second, there is a clear path for America on Iran. They've got a president, Ahmadinejad, who's unpopular in his own country.

We have the capacity to work with our European allies and the European banking system to put a proposal of sticks and carrots on the table that actually will help influence their behavior. The Iranian people in many

ways do not support this guy, and they're looking for a path. We need to help provide that path by making a serious proposal, with our friends in Europe, of sticks and carrots to help them with their economy.

SIEGEL: Senator Clinton and then another question.

SEN. CLINTON: Well, I think, first of all, it's important to recognize that Ahmadinejad does not control the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. They are directly controlled from the clerical leadership and the supreme leader. And in fact because we have not engaged in diplomacy, we are quite unsure about what exactly goes on inside of Iran, which is one of the reasons why I've advocated diplomatic efforts for two years.

If we were to engage in such diplomatic efforts, because of the enmeshment of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in the economic activity of Iran, I believe these economic sanctions, as part of diplomacy, would be an advantage going into those diplomatic efforts.

I have the greatest respect for my friend and colleague Joe Biden. He and I just respectfully disagree about this.

But I think that the important issue is that this is something that we have strong feelings about, but none of us is advocating a rush to war. I have been against that. I was the first of anyone at this table to go to the floor of the Senate, speak against the possibility that Bush could take us to war in Iran, back in February. And I think that we have two different ways of approaching this. Our goals are the same: diplomatic engagement with Iran.

SIEGEL: Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, thrives on anti-Americanism. One of our listeners, Ray Conrad (ph) from Keosauqua, Iowa, who incidentally has made campaign contributions to Senator Edwards and also to Senator Biden, sent us a question about that, and he put it this way: "Clearly, many Muslims hate the U.S. enough to want to do us grievous harm. Would you speculate on the reasons for their hatred of us?"

Senator Biden, why?

SEN. BIDEN: By the way, terminology matters. I'm a great admirer of Senator Clinton. It's not about not advocating a rush to war. I'm advocating no war. A rush to war means that war, taken slowly, going slowly, is possible. I'm advocating no war, no justification for war.

SIEGEL: Take military off the table, you say.

SEN. BIDEN: Number two, the reason why — the reason why we are disliked so much is because we are trusted so little. The reason why we are disliked so much, obviously — I'm not talking about al Qaeda. I'm talking about the 1.2 billion Muslims in the world who look at us and, when we say and do things as we're talking about now with Iran, conclude that this is a war on Islam.

I'll make one point. When we went into Afghanistan, the word was, the Arab street would rise up. We did it the right way. The Arab street knew that Arabs, the Muslims in al-Qaeda were bad guys. They supported us. When we do things that don't sound rational to them, it undercuts our legitimacy. We have no legitimacy.

SIEGEL: Let me put this to Senator Edwards first and then others.

When we do things that policymakers in Washington may think are rational, like very strong support of Israel, that also upsets a lot of those 1 billion Muslims you've described. How would you, Senator Edwards, how would you as president, Senator Edwards, answer the complaint that the U.S., in its support of Israel, is so pro-Israeli, it can't be an evenhanded, honest broker of matters and is anti-Muslim?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, first of all, I think that what's driving this belief about America and the Muslim community around the world is the bullying, selfish, abusive behavior of George Bush and this administration.

I do want to go back to one quick point. I listened to Senator Clinton talk about what's happening inside Iran. We know what's happening inside Iran. We know a great deal about what's happening. We know, for example, that Ahmadinejad's candidates in the election this — December, about a year ago, got clobbered. We know that there's a serious political — lack of political support for this man, and we have a huge wedge there that's available to America.

Now, as to the Muslim community, I think that the most important thing for America to do is to demonstrate that we have a responsibility not just to ourselves but to humanity, and to help make education available to fight global poverty. We need to take serious steps to demonstrate that America's actually worthy of leadership.

SIEGEL: Senator Obama.

SEN. OBAMA: Well, I think John's point is right, but I want to broaden it a little bit.

Listen to the Republican candidates' debates and how they frame this issue. And if you were a Muslim overseas listening to Rudy Giuliani say, they are coming here to try to kill you, which is the tenor of many of the speeches that are delivered by the Republican candidates, you would get an impression that they are not interested in talking and resolving issues peacefully. Now, what we need to do is we need to close Guantanamo. We need to restore habeas corpus. We need to send a strong signal that we are going to talk directly to not just our friends but also to our enemies.

And I have to say that when I brought this up early on in this campaign, I was called naive and irresponsible. And yet the point, the reason for that was not necessarily because we're going to change Ahmadinejad's mind. It's because we're going to change the minds of people inside Iran, moderate forces inside Iran, as well as our Muslim allies around the region, that we are willing to listen to them and try to engage in finding ways to resolve conflicts cooperatively.

SIEGEL: Senator Christopher Dodd.

SEN. DODD: Well, this is longstanding. I mean, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, we had — there were, I think, classified ads in The Washington Post trying to find out if there was anyone in the region who spoke Arabic. This has been a vacuum for a long time in terms of our relationship with the Muslim world, the 22 countries of the world that are Muslim nations. We've been basically AWOL on dealing with these nations here, and that has bred a lack of understanding and appreciation, the point I think that Barack was trying to make here.

But also over these last six years, despite this effort over the last few days in Annapolis, where has this administration been on the Middle East issues here? They are connected in many ways here. It appears definitely here that we're sort of just — we're not engaged at all. Over the past years, both Republican and Democratic administrations have made it a part of their agenda to stay engaged, to make it clear that we're an honest broker trying to resolve the issue of Israel's security as well as the legitimate issue of Palestinians seeking an independent state. We've walked away from that. And that — that — that absolute — that absence of our participation, as well as our failure to understand and to try to have a better feeling for what the culture of the Muslim world is, I think has created the very environment you talked about.

SIEGEL: Last word on this topic from Dennis Kucinich.

REP. KUCINICH: Thank you.

To answer your question directly, we need to reach out to Muslim nations and to tell them America's taking a different direction — no more unilateralism, preemption, first strike. We're going to — our policy will be strength through peace. As the one up here who not only voted against, but voted 100 percent of the time against funding the war in Iraq, the war in Iraq was used to create a wedge between the United States and Islam. The — the buildup to an attack on Iran was really a danger to Israel because everyone knows that Israel would have paid the price for the United States' wrongheaded policy. That's not being discussed in any of the analysis yet, but I'm here to say it.

We need to protect and provide for the security of Israel and to make sure that the Palestinians can have a state, and it has to be done under circumstances where the security of all parties, and the civil rights and human rights of all parties, are — are protected.

SIEGEL: Well, this question comes from a listener. It's political science professor Chris Pence (ph) of Marion, Indiana.

PROF. CHRIS PENCE (MARION, INDIANA): (From tape.) American diplomatic history books recount the Monroe Doctrine, the Truman Doctrine, and will likely discuss the Bush Doctrine. When future historians write of your administration's foreign policy pursuits, what will be noted as your doctrine and the vision you cast for U.S. diplomatic relations?

SIEGEL: Time for a couple of you at least. Senator Clinton, what do you think the Clinton Doctrine will be?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, it will be a doctrine of restoring America's leadership and moral authority through multilateral organizations, through attempts to come to agreements on issues ranging from global warming to stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other dangerous weapons. It will be a doctrine that demonstrates that the United States is not afraid to cooperate; that through cooperation in our interdependent world, we actually can build a stronger country and a stronger world that will be more reflective of our values.

SIEGEL: Thank you, Senator Clinton.

The Edwards Doctrine.

MR. EDWARDS: The Edwards Doctrine will be longer term, visionary, not the kind of ad hoc foreign policy, policy — foreign policy of convenience that we've seen over the last seven years, but instead looking at not only the short-term issues that America and the world faces. We've talked about Iran, Pakistan, what's happening with North Korea. We're about to talk about China. But also to think about what is it that America does over the long term to strengthen not only our leadership role, but our ability to provide stability. And that — the key to that is for America, both through our actions and through our language from the president of the United States, to demonstrate that we respect people who grow up in different cultures with different faith beliefs, that we respect people who have a different perspective than we do. And we intend to lead, but to work with those people. And for America, with education, health, et cetera, to meet its responsibility to humanity.

SIEGEL: And Senator Biden, the Biden Doctrine.

SEN. BIDEN: Clarity. Prevention, not preemption. An absolute repudiation of this president's doctrine, which has only three legs in the stool: one, push the mute button, don't talk to anybody; two, preemption; and three, regime change. I would reject all three. We need a doctrine of prevention. The role of a great power is to prevent the crises. And we don't have to imagine any of the crises. We know what's going to happen on day one when you're president. You have Pakistan, Russia, China, the subcontinent of India. You have Afghanistan. You have Darfur. And it requires engagement — engagement and prevention. That does not rule out the use of force; it incorporates the notion of prevention — prevention.

SIEGEL: Senator Obama, the short version of the Obama Doctrine.

SEN. OBAMA: Well, I think one of the things about the Obama Doctrine is it's not going to be as doctrinaire as the Bush Doctrine because the world is complicated. And I think part of the problem we've had is that ideology has overridden facts and reality.

But I think that the basic concept — and I've heard it from some of the other folks — is that, increasingly, we have to view our security in terms of a common security and a common prosperity with other peoples and other countries. And that means that if there are children in the Middle East who cannot read, that is a potential long-term danger to us. If China is polluting, then eventually that is going to reach our shores. We have to — and work with them cooperatively to solve their problems as well as ours.

SIEGEL: And we will continue our debate from Des Moines in just a minute. This is special coverage from NPR News.

(Announcements)

MICHELE NORRIS: From NPR News and Iowa Public Radio, we're back with our debate among the Democratic presidential candidates.

I'm Michele Norris.

SIEGEL: I'm Robert Siegel.

INSKEEP: And I'm Steve Inskeep.

We're broadcasting from Des Moines, Iowa, and in this part of the debate, we're going to focus on a changing China and its effects here at home.

SIEGEL: We'll talk about the economic power of China and what it means for U.S. consumers, U.S. workers and the American financial system. We'll also hear about the strategic challenges China presents, its huge military buildup, its enormous appetite for natural resources, its environmental record. We'll also cover human rights, we hope, and China's growing influence in the world.

NORRIS: And that's where we'd like to start, and I'd like to pose a question to many of you. Given China's size, its muscular manufacturing capabilities, its military buildup, at this point — and also including its large trade deficit — at this point, who has more leverage, China or the U.S.? And I'm going to begin with you, Senator Edwards.

MR. EDWARDS: I think that what's happened with the last seven years with the Bush administration is America's faced over the long term with two very serious challenges, one of which they've been a bit obsessed with, which is the issue of terrorism. The other is the rise and strength of China, which they've done virtually nothing about on any front, I mean, ranging from China sending dangerous toys into the United States to our trade relationship with China to, as Robert just mentioned, their buildup of their military, which they're doing opaquely. We know very little about what they're actually doing.

On top of that, they're obsessed with their own internal economic development, and that results in them propping up bad regimes, like Sudan, like Iran. They're doing incredible damage to the environment. So the answer to the question is, America continues to have serious economic leverage with the Chinese — and diplomatic leverage with the Chinese.

NORRIS: Who has more leverage?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I think that's — what we know is they're growing — they're strong. I think America is stronger today, and if we deal with these issues and we deal with them in a serious way, across the board, and we engage on these issues, which we have not been doing, and we see the consequences for American children right now, with these dangerous lead-filled toys coming into the United States, with this extraordinary trade deficit that we have, their growing of their military, we see them propping up genocide in western Sudan, in Darfur, with their economic development there.

NORRIS: OK.

MR. EDWARDS: America must engage the Chinese on all these issues.

NORRIS: All right. We'll get to that question of product safety in just a minute.

First, Senator Obama.

SEN. OBAMA: Well, there are three issues that we have to deal with. Number one is we've got to get our own fiscal house in order. Our leverage is weakening when we run up enormous deficits funding a war that should have never been authorized, and we then are taking out the credit card with the Chinese. That gives us less leverage.

Number two, when I was visiting Africa, I was told by a group of businessmen that the presence of China is only exceeded by the absence of America in the entire African continent. And it indicates the unwillingness of our administration to think strategically about other countries beyond the war on terror.

Number three, we have to be tougher negotiators with China. They are not enemies, but they are competitors of ours. And on the economic front, on trade issues, on issues in importation, we have not been the best negotiators, and oftentimes we're negotiating on behalf of — on behalf of Wall Street, as opposed to on behalf of Main Street

NORRIS: I heard you say "less leverage." Who has more leverage at this point?

SEN. OBAMA: Well, right now the United States is still the dominant superpower in the world. But we have to — the next president can't be thinking about today; he or she also has to be thinking about 10 years from now, 20 years from now, 50 years from now. And if we continue on current trends, without dealing with the problems that we have, economically, and unless we are engaging in the world more effectively, then our influence is going to slip.

NORRIS: Representative Kucinich, very quickly.

REP. KUCINICH: Yes. And I may be the only one up here who actually voted against China trade because of the concerns I had that the U.S. was not going to be able to maintain its manufacturing base, which is central to maintaining a middle class. What we've seen is that without solid trade policies, we're undermined. Without a strength-through-peace doctrine of rejecting war as an instrument of policy, we're going to keep borrowing money from China. Let us not forget we're borrowing money from China to finance the war in Iraq. And in addition to that, the speculation on Wall Street has weakened our economy.

We need a policy of constructive engagement with China, stop the arms race with them, work to make sure we have a global climate change treaty with China, get them to transition out of nuclear and coal and oil. You know, I'm talking about a whole new direction that's based on a doctrine of strength through peace, and I have a voting record up here to back it up, unlike some of my esteemed colleagues.

NORRIS: Senator Clinton, do we need them more than they need us?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, your question about leverage is related to that — the second question. We currently still have more leverage, but it doesn't really count because we're not using it. We have handicapped ourselves because of the irresponsible fiscal policies pursued by the Bush economic direction, but we've also, unfortunately, seen an incoherent foreign policy.

So until we set our fiscal house back in order and until we understand that we have to have a strategic relationship with China, it's going to be very difficult for us to use whatever leverage we have. And I fear that if we don't start taking steps to demonstrate that we are back in charge of our fiscal destiny, that we do have a coherent diplomatic approach toward China, China will continue to gain leverage over us.

NORRIS: It's the holiday season and many Americans are heading to the stores, and many of the products that they're going to find on the shelves have a "Made in China" label. We've talked to lowans about China, and there's one listener in particular, whose name is Don Frommelt(ph), he said that consumers and politicians both have a somewhat schizophrenic relationship when it comes to China. Let's listen to what he had to say.

MR. DON FROMMELT: (From tape.) You can't have it both ways. And I think we need candidates who are willing to bite the bullet. And if you're going to say our balance of trade is upside down with China, there's one way to fix it; put on some kind of a tariff and prevent the American people from buying \$300 TVs instead of \$600 TVs.

NORRIS: Senator Biden, how would — would you actually restrict trade with China? And given the WTO guidelines, could you actually do that?

SEN. BIDEN: With the WTO guidelines, we could stop these products coming in now. This president doesn't act. We have much more leverage on China than they have on us.

Let's get something straight here. We're making them into 10 feet tall. It took them 30 years to get 20 percent of their population out of poverty. They've got 800 million people in poverty. They're in real distress.

The idea that a country with 800 million people in poverty has greater leverage over us is preposterous. What it is: We've yielded to corporate America. We've yielded to this president's notion of what constitutes trade, and we've refused to enforce the laws that exist.

As president, I would end — flat, bang, no importation of those toys. Why? Under WTO, you're allowed to do it until you send inspectors to guarantee. Why aren't they doing it? Corporate America doesn't want —

NORRIS: Now, this listener called for tariffs. Are you willing to go there?

SEN. BIDEN: I'm not. No, I'm not willing to go there. You don't need to start a tariff war. All you have to do is enforce the law. Enforce the law.

NORRIS: Thank you.

Senator Dodd.

SEN. DODD: Well, I want to go back to the characterization of the relationship. Obviously it's a strategic one, but this is not a competition. If we're a competition, competition implies that people are playing by the same rules. We're not playing by the same rules here.

This is an adversarial relationship today. That needs to change. But when you manipulate your currency as they do, in violation of the World Trade Organization here, to the tune of 40 percent, you've immediately created a huge disadvantage for our country. When you employ slave labor in the production of your

manufactured goods, when you deny access on your shelves to the products and services we produce, it is not a competition. It's adversarial.

Now, I'm not interested in being bellicose about this. But you need to understand exactly what the relationship is today, before we decide what steps you take. We ought to be far, not raising our voice in a loud necessarily way. But we ought to be able to talk about that we need to stand up and say, this is a market you want to be in.

If you want to be here, then you're going to have to play like an adult here. If you're going to continue following policies that allow you to manipulate your currency, produce goods that you sell in our marketplace that do damage to our consumers — when we got word that they were sending toys over here with lead paint in them, cat food and toothpaste here, the president had the authority immediately to suspend importation. He wouldn't do it. Had that been a U.S. corporation doing that, their doors would have been shut in 20 minutes.

NORRIS: My colleague Steve has a question. But first, before we get there, I just want to follow up on something that Mr. Frommelt also said. He said he wants a president who's going to level the playing field.

Senator Obama, what would you do in order to give the U.S. more leverage, to be able to deal with China at least as an equal partner? And are you willing to do that despite the consequences, even if it means that consumers have to kiss those \$300 televisions goodbye?

SEN. OBAMA: Well, look, I mean, I think Chris and Joe made a good point, which is, we have laws on the books now that aren't being enforced. This is what I mean in terms of us negotiating more effectively with them.

Part of the problem is, is that the relationship has shifted over time. Joe's absolutely right that they were much impoverished 10, 20 years ago, and so our general attitude was, you know what, whatever they send in, it doesn't really impact us that much, and they're a poor country.

NORRIS: But what would you do to level the playing field?

SEN. OBAMA: Things have now shifted. So, well, I'll just give you an example. I would say toys cannot come in. Food — we will have our own safety inspectors on the ground. Japan does this right now. They set up their own inspection standards in China, and they say, "Unless you meet our inspection standards, you cannot ship in here." If we don't have labor agreements and environmental agreements that are enforceable, then there are consequences in terms of them being able to import into this country.

The point is, is that we have a set of tools available to us that have not been used, and part of the reason is because when we talk about Chinese exports, oftentimes we are talking about U.S. companies that have moved to China, are manufacturing there and are trying to ship back here, and they still have influence, and those special interests have to be diminished in their voice in Washington.

NORRIS: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Edwards?

MR. EDWARDS: I want to expand on a point that Joe made and he mentioned, it was important, which is, what's happened is big corporate America is driving American policy with respect to China. They get their way, and the American people lose. This is only one place that that happens, by the way.

NORRIS: So what would you do to stand up to U.S. manufacturers?

MR. EDWARDS: There are a bunch of things we need to do. We have country-of-origin labeling laws. They've been in place for years, but we don't enforce them.

NORRIS: But we also know that China can easily get around that. They can sometimes use the "Made in Hong Kong" label instead of the "Made in China" label.

SEN. EDWARDS: But the starting place is to actually enforce the laws that exist here in the United States and their obligation to the WTO, neither of which are being done. They're not being done because corporate America drives so much of what happens in Washington, whether it's trade policy that costs Americans millions of jobs — NAFTA, CAFTA, et cetera; whether it is these dangerous Chinese toys coming into the United States of America; whether it is country-of-origin labeling. Why is the president of the United States not saying to the American people, to local communities, "Buy local"? It is good for the local economy. It is good for farmers. It is good on the issue of global warming. Because everything that comes from China carries an enormous carbon footprint with it.

NORRIS: Steve, just indulge me for just a minute. Your patience, please.

INSKEEP: Please go right ahead.

NORRIS: I'm just curious. You mentioned these Chinese toys. Senator Edwards, you have two small children. Will you be buying toys that are made in China to place under the Christmas tree this year?

MR. EDWARDS: No, ma'am, I will not.

INSKEEP: Got to give Chris Dodd equal time on that question.

NORRIS: You know, it's difficult to do that, because, you know, 70 percent of the goods and most of the toys that you find at the local Wal-Mart are made in China.

MR. EDWARDS: My kids will not have toys coming from China.

SEN. DODD: Barack and I would like to comment on this. (Laughter.) My toys are coming from Iowa. (Laughter continues.) I'm buying Iowa toys. They're going to eat Iowa food. Iowa toys. (Laughter.)

NORRIS: Senator Obama, and then Senator Gravel. Senator Obama first on this issue of Chinese toys.

SEN. OBAMA: As I said before, the problem is that we are not using the power that we have. And we just have — I can't amplify this point enough. Right now, laws with respect to China are being made in part with the interests of Wall Street in mind and special interests who are manufacturing in China — used to manufacture here in Iowa, now are manufacturing in China, are shipping the goods back here and taking advantage of low — cheap labor and lower environmental standards.

We have to have a president — and this is part of the reason I'm running for president, is to give a voice to American workers. I believe in trade, and I think trade can strengthen America. And I want, by the way, Chinese workers and consumers to benefit. That's good for our long-term security. But I don't want every single trade decision to be looked at through the lens of does this increase corporate profits as opposed to is it good for U.S. consumers and U.S. workers.

NORRIS: Senator Gravel, and then Steve has a question.

MR. GRAVEL: Yeah, Michele, I want to take you to task right at your first rhetoric, and that was this great, tremendous —

NORRIS: I believe it was a question.

MR. GRAVEL: Right. The tremendous increase in their defense. They're only 10 percent of American defense. They haven't had a tremendous increase. Ten percent of our defense.

And I want to take all of them to task. Clearly, none of them are running for China — president of China — because this amount of demagoguery is shameful.

Here, the Chinese people have a problem. And when we continue this rhetoric of beggar thy neighbor, where our interests always come first, there should be the interests of human beings, the interests of human beings.

NORRIS: Senator Gravel, thank you.

MR. GRAVEL: Because when you have a foreign policy that's beggar thy neighbor, we all become beggars. And so when they talk about the currency of China, what about the — what manipulations we do? What about the American companies that dump things abroad?

NORRIS: Senator Gravel, thank you.

MR. GRAVEL: What about the tariffs — you want to have a —

NORRIS: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

MR. GRAVEL: Thank you.

NORRIS: In the interest of time.

Steve has a question.

INSKEEP: Just want to wrap up Dan Frommelt's tradeoff that he discussed, the \$300 TVs versus the \$600 TVs. Is any of you willing to state frankly that, if you do what you're talking about — getting tough on the currency, cracking down on what Senator Dodd called slave labor, taking other steps — that Americans are going to pay more for consumer goods at Wal-Mart, and you believe it's worth it? Is anyone willing to state frankly that that is the tradeoff?

Congressman Kucinich.

REP. KUCINICH: Either buy America or bye-bye America. We have to recognize that, and a Kucinich administration will rebuild American industry. And while I'm listening to this debate right here, I'm the only one up here who voted against China trade. My good friend John Edwards, who is a friend of mine, you know, he voted for it and is now decrying what's come over.

I'm saying that it is critical that we rebuild America's industry, that we not get in an arms race with China, that we have new trade laws based on workers' rights, human rights, environmental quality, that we take a new direction with respect to environmental policy, getting China away from nuclear, coal and oil.

I mean, we should be able to have solid relations with China, but we got to get our own house in order, stop the speculation on Wall Street and stop Wall Street from moving our jobs out of this country. And that's what the China trade vote was all about.

INSKEEP: But Senator Obama, is that the trade-off, that people will have to pay higher prices if we do what you propose; and that's worth it, in your view?

SEN. OBAMA: I actually believe that China will modify its behavior if we actually are tough in our negotiations. Look, we are the biggest market for China. They can't afford to just say, "See ya later." They're going to have to sell here. And if we tell them you have to meet certain safety standards, that you have to enforce certain labor and environmental agreements, they will meet them.

Now, could there potentially be some higher costs in the front end? Probably. But I guarantee you I don't meet a single worker in Iowa who's been laid off who says, "I wouldn't rather pay a little bit more for sneakers at Wal-Mart but still have a job."

NORRIS: Now listen, just quickly, I want to bring another listener into this, because we did get some questions from the listeners. And I want to hear from Karen Zuch (ph). She is a listener. She is also a mother. So let's take a quick listen.

MS. KAREN ZUCH (Santa Cruz, California): (From tape.) As the mom of a 1-year-old son, I am very concerned about the toxic chemicals that lace many toys and other products sold in America. These chemical agents cause cancer, birth defects and genetic damage. Unlike the European Union, the U.S. does nothing to limit the use of these agents and does not require that the toxic ingredients are listed.

If you are elected president, what changes will you make to ensure that my son will grow up free from these frightening dangers?

NORRIS: Karen Zuch there. She's from Santa Cruz, California. She's pointing out that the European Union has stricter standards. But if you look at the Chinese recalls in this country, they still represent fewer than 1/100th of all of the toys and products that come into this country. Is it possible that the U.S. could overreact to this?

I'm posing this to Senator Clinton. What's the danger of that?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, first, I really sympathize with the young mother, because we don't do anywhere near enough to try to prevent dangerous materials and products from coming into our country. We don't even do enough of it within our own country. We have totally turned our back on the information that is available to try to better track the impact on children and others of these kinds of exposures to toxic materials.

So, number one, we need tougher standards across the board, something I've been advocating for years. Number two, it should be especially applied to any kind of imports, and that requires going and making sure that we have inspectors on the ground and we have tough standards and we exercise recalls.

You know, the reason we have such few recalls, even though they have been increasing because the evidence has been so overwhelming, is because this administration has basically defanged the Consumer Product Safety Commission. They do not have any real appetite for going after these companies and countries that are flooding our markets with dangerous products, and that has to stop.

NORRIS: We only have just a few — very short time, Senator Dodd. But I just want to ask you, because you've served in the Senate for some time, given the concerns about currency manipulation, product recalls, is there any vote that you would look back at and think, "You know, I really wish I could reconsider that"?

SEN. DODD: No, no, I wish the Senate would have reconsidered when I offered legislation on lead paint, for instance, here to try and reduce the kind of problems that Karen has talked about.

I have a child that has serious food allergies. I know what it's like every day to read a label — every single day — because my child could die if she consumed the wrong products here. Eighty percent of the food we consume in this country is imported and only 1 percent of it is inspected. And there's no country of labeling on the products here, and you'll have about 10 different descriptions of an egg here. And that's very difficult, if not impossible, for women like Karen and parents who have children who have to be careful about the products they consume.

NORRIS: OK. We're going to have to leave this part of our discussion right there. We'll take a break for just a few minutes, then we will continue with the second hour of our Democratic presidential debate from Des Moines. This is special coverage from NPR News.

(Announcements)

INSKEEP: From NPR News and Iowa Public Radio, this is the second hour of our Democratic presidential candidates' debate from Des Moines. I'm Steve Inskeep.

SIEGEL: I'm Robert Siegel.

NORRIS: And I'm Michele Norris.

INSKEEP: We are at the Iowa State Historical Museum, near the State Capitol Building. And with us are seven of the Democratic candidates. From left to right on your radio dial, they are Senator Hillary Clinton, former Senator Mike Gravel, Senator Barack Obama, Senator Christopher Dodd, Senator Joseph Biden, former Senator John Edwards and Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

By the way, we also invited the Republicans to debate this week in a separate forum. They were unable to come for scheduling reasons and they are working with us to find a new date.

SIEGEL: This is an unusual debate. We've selected just three topics, subjects we think deserve close examination. And because we're limiting the topics, the candidates will have more time to explain their positions, and we will have the time to follow up on some of those answers.

We've already heard the candidates on Iran and the lessons of Iraq. And coming up, we'll talk immigration. Right now, it's China, and that's where my colleague Michele Norris is going to pick up.

NORRIS: Thank you, Robert.

Every modern president has faced a delicate balancing act with China. And this is how one listener, Panpan Wang of Venice, California, put it. Let's listen.

MR. PANPAN WANG (Los Angeles, California): Many presidential candidates have talked tough about China and its human rights record in the past but, in the end, favor securing our economic interest rather than risk upsetting China by substantively talking about the human rights issue. China is given a free path to go at her own pace. How would you balance human rights and trade with China?

NORRIS: Senator Biden, I'd like to begin with you.

What kind of human rights commitment should the U.S. try to exact from China, particularly in advance of the 2008 Olympics? And how do you ensure that the country would actually live up to those commitments?

SEN. BIDEN: You can't ensure it but look, this is all about playing by the rules. I've been pushing, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee for the last seven years, or the ranking member during that

period, that we hold China accountable at the United Nations. We won't even, at the United Nations, we won't even designate China as a violator of human rights.

Now, what's the deal there? We're talking about competition. That's the — in terms of trade. It's capitulation, not competition. Name me another country in the world that we would allow to conduct themselves the way this country has — China — and not called them on the carpet at the U.N. Name me another country in the world who would use the trade practices they use with us, that we would not call them on the carpet.

NORRIS: So, Senator Biden, are you saying that you would call them on the carpet, that you would —

SEN. BIDEN: Absolutely. Why —

NORRIS: — that you would appoint a U.N. ambassador who would press for this?

SEN. BIDEN: And the reason I would is that, well, it's the one way to get China to reform. You can't close your eyes. You can't pretend. It is self-defeating. It's a Hobson's choice we're giving people here.

NORRIS: A Hobson's choice is how Senator Biden characterized this.

Senator Clinton, what kind of commitment should we try to exact from China?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, I agree with Joe very much. You know, 12 years ago, I went to China, and the Chinese didn't want me to come. And they didn't want me to make a speech, and when I made the speech, they blocked it out from being heard within China, where I stood up for human rights and in particular women's rights, because women had been so brutally abused in many settings in China.

And I think you do have to call them on it. I mean, the Chinese respect us if we actually call them on their misbehavior and their breaches of human rights, economic activities and other kinds of problems that we have with them.

That's what I object to about this administration. We've gotten the worst of both worlds. We've gotten neither the kind of smart enforcement nor the kind of cooperation that might lead to changes in behavior. Instead we have this erratic, incoherent policy.

So I think it's important that, as the next president, I would make it very clear what we expect from China and use every tool at our disposal to try to change behavior.

NORRIS: Just a quick follow. When you traveled to China and then when you returned to the White House, did you advise your husband on Chinese foreign policy or on foreign policy in regard to any other countries that you traveled to? And conversely, if you were elected president, would he advise you?

SEN. CLINTON: I certainly did. I not only advised; I often met with he and his advisers, both in preparation for, during and after. I traveled with representatives from the Security Council, the State Department, occasionally the Defense Department, and even the CIA. So I was deeply involved in being part of the Clinton team in the first Clinton administration. And I am someone who want the best possible advice from as many different sources as possible, and that would certainly include my husband.

NORRIS: Senator Dodd.

SEN. DODD: Well, I think there's an ongoing situation. I want to commend at this point here people like Nancy Pelosi and others, who just recently, when the Dalai Lama was here, presented him with a gold medal. We've raised the issue — not often enough — on Tibet and what's happened with the almost genocidal behavior, when dealing with this remarkable culture that's been under assault. And the idea that

we'd recognize him and welcome him here as a religious leader in the world is exactly the kind of symbols we need to send.

We're talking here about a lot of things we would do to be tougher on China. It's also important to understand a balance is necessary here. China is acquiring massive natural resources, you raised earlier, around the world. They have huge energy issues. Twenty-five million people a year move from rural China to urban China. We ought to be working with them in various areas on energy policy, environmental policy as well.

So I don't want this to be seen, as we discuss this today here, always just about the acrimonious or the difficult or the tough positions we're going to take —

NORRIS: But if you're —

SEN. DODD: — but to make them recognize that the Dalai Lama is an — is an international religious leader who's worthy of recognition. And if they, as they apparently did, threaten to deny some ships to be able to move in waters off China over that, they need to understand this isn't going to change in a Democratic administration.

NORRIS: Senator Edwards, with all this tough talk about China, how do you actually hold them accountable?

MR. EDWARDS: You hold them accountable in the WTO. America uses its diplomatic and economic leverage. We have enormous leverage with the Chinese.

And I want to add on to one thing that Chris just said. This whole issue of balance — if you look at what's happened — and this didn't just happen under George Bush; this has been going on for a decade and a half now — in my hometown, the mill that my father worked in, and the people that I grew up with — that mill's closed now. The jobs are gone. The same thing has happened in Newton, Iowa, and all across this state.

I met a man named Doug Bishop a couple — few years ago, who talked about having to look his child in the eye and explain why his — her daddy, who had worked in that mill his entire life, that factory, had lost his job and hadn't done anything wrong, because his child did not understand.

American trade policy is catering to the interests of big corporate America. It has been for a decade and a half. And we desperately need a president of the United States who, instead of asking, is this going to help corporate profits — is this actually going to stand up for American workers and American jobs.

NORRIS: Robert has a question, but just for clarity, just — I just heard you say that America has enormous leverage. To my first question when we began this discussion on China, you said that America did not have enough leverage —

MR. EDWARDS: Oh, no, I didn't. No, I said we have more leverage than they do. We do. I think everybody actually agrees with that.

But our leverage is economic, our leverage is diplomatic, and we have leverage within the WTO, which Senator Biden and others have spoken about.

But we have not held China accountable, and the result is the loss of American jobs, the struggling of American families, the struggles of the middle class. Those jobs help support the middle class and build the middle class in this country. And as we've already talked about, dangerous Chinese products coming into the United States.

NORRIS: So diminished, but significant.

Robert, you have a question.

SIEGEL: Senator, there's an implication in what you just said. The text — that the United States can become once again a major power in textile production, an industry we associate with low-wage emerging economies. Isn't it fair to think that no matter what our relationship with China, obviously poorer countries are going to be producing a lot of textiles in mills around the world, it's just not what our economy should be specializing in at this time?

MR. EDWARDS: What is fair to think is that we have had a trade policy that has cost America — my father, who worked in a mill for 37 years so that I could be — and my brother and sister could have a better life than he had, that mill that he worked in is gone. Jobs all across Iowa are gone. And the reason is because America has catered to the interests of corporate profits, not the interests of the American middle class, not the interests of American workers, and not the interests of these manufacturing jobs.

Are there other things we need to do? Of course there are. America, to be competitive over the long term, needs a trade policy that works, that looks out for the interests of the middle class, but it also needs — America needs to be the most creative, best educated, most innovative workforce on the planet. Those two things are not mutually exclusive. They can both be done at the same time.

NORRIS: Thank you very much.

Senator Obama, I just want to return to the question of currency manipulation. You had said that if China is actually manipulating their currency, this country needs to "take them to the mat." What exactly did you mean by that?

SEN. OBAMA: We have legislation that says that if, in fact, they are manipulating their currency — and I think there's no dispute that they are — that we need to take strong action. It's in the Banking Committee. Chris is presiding over that.

And — now, here's the problem. I will say that it's actually a blunt tool. I'd prefer not doing this legislatively. The problem is we've had a president that has shown no leadership on it. So if — and when I am in the White House, I will meet directly with the Chinese leadership and indicate we have to restore balance. And, by the way, we have to mobilize our allies, such as the European Union, to have that conversation with us.

This is an imbalance that is not good for any economy over time. It's not sustainable, the trade imbalances that we have.

But just to go to a point that was made earlier, so often we see these issues as contradictory. Mike Gravel, I am interested, as I said, in making sure that the Chinese population is fed and clothed and advancing. I think that is important. It is not, I think, in the long-term interests of China to expand solely on the backs of low-wage worker — work that is undermining U.S. work. If we are saying to China, raise your labor standards that will over time improve the lot of Chinese workers as well as U.S. workers. And that's what we should be looking at, is how can we improve the working conditions, the safety conditions, the consumer protections that are available for all people, and that's not what's happening right now.

NORRIS: Senator Obama, thank you.

Senator Biden, very quickly.

SEN. BIDEN: Look, first of all, I don't buy this being, "Why are you being so tough on China?" Would we do any of these things with regard to France or Germany or England, our friends, our allies? The answer is we would.

NORRIS: Do you think it's an analogous situation?

SEN. BIDEN: No, I think it is — look, if France was acting like China's acting, we'd be tough with them. If England was doing what China's doing, we'd be tough with them. This is about being fair.

And by the way, to deal with the currency — back in '88 we had the same deal, and what happened, we had a thing called the Plaza Accords. We brought in all of the major currencies in the world to sit down and say we've got to rationalize the currency here. Us doing it by ourselves is the ultimate blunt instrument. We may be able to do that, but were I president, I'd be calling a similar conference, bringing in the rest of the world to rationalize our currencies here.

NORRIS: Time is tight. I just want to return to something that Senator Clinton said. You said that China reacts if they are pressed. So would we believe that — should we believe that the relationship — the U.S. relationship with China under a Hillary Clinton administration would be less one of cooperation and engagement and one more akin to confrontation?

SEN. CLINTON: No. No, absolutely not. It would be a position where we would operate from strength with a coherent policy about what our interests were and what we hope to achieve.

I'll give you a quick example. I have a company in my state that has exported into China for many years. All of a sudden, out of the blue, they were told that they were going to start having tariffs slapped on their product that would have made it absolutely uncompetitive for them to compete. Their alternative was to go into business with some Chinese company, more than likely some kind of front group for the People's Army, and therefore lose their intellectual property. And so I helped them stand up to that, and they respected it and backed down.

NORRIS: Thank you. That's where we're going to have to end our discussion of China. We could have gone on, but thanks to all the candidates. We'll continue in just a minute with our Democratic presidential debate.

(Announcements)

SIEGEL: From NPR News and Iowa Public Radio, this is special live coverage of our Democratic presidential debate from Des Moines. I'm Robert Siegel.

INSKEEP: I'm Steve Inskeep.

NORRIS: And I'm Michele Norris.

The other day, an Iowa voter advised us of a big campaign issue. He called it the M-word, M-igration. The so-called M-word is our next topic, and Steve Inskeep will lead our questioning.

INSKEEP: Thanks, Michele.

Candidates, we've just been doing some reporting in the last few days from Marshalltown, Iowa, a city that I know many of you have visited. This is a city with a lot of immigrants, a number of illegal immigrants. There have been immigration raids there. And that raises questions about citizens in places like that all over America.

Some citizens in Marshalltown turn in illegal immigrants, some take them in. There's actually a person who's been indicted for sheltering immigrants, which raises a question that I'd like to put to you: What obligations do American citizens have when it comes to illegal immigrants?

And let's start with Senator Obama. Would you expect Americans, if you're president — January 2009, immigration reform, whatever you want hasn't happened yet. Would you expect Americans to turn in illegal immigrants when they come across them?

SEN. OBAMA: We do not deputize the American people to do the job that the federal government is supposed to do. So as president of the United States, I will make sure that the federal government does what it's supposed to do, which is to do a better job of closing our borders and preventing hundreds of thousands of people to pour in, have much tougher enforcement standards when it comes to employers, and create a pathway of citizenship for the 12 million people who are already here.

INSKEEP: So does that mean that Americans should not turn in illegal immigrants?

SEN. OBAMA: The point is that we are not going to have — we're not going to deputize a whole bunch of American citizens to start grabbing people or turning them in, the — in part because the ordinary American citizen may not know whether or not this person is illegal or not.

Now, we do — we should be holding employers accountable, because they have a mechanism whereby they can actually enforce. But you know, the notion that we're going to criminalize priests, for example, or doctors who are providing services to individuals and throw them in jail for doing what their calling asks them to do, which is to provide help and service to people in need, I think that is a mistake. I think that's out of America's character.

INSKEEP: I'm going to get to several candidates on this. Senator Dodd, let's say that you're hiring a nanny. Perhaps you've have this experience. A number of —

SEN. DODD: No, I haven't had that experience, and I —

INSKEEP: Well, let's say that you had.

SEN. DODD: Nice try. (Laughter.)

INSKEEP: — for your kids. Let's say that a citizen is hiring a nanny.

SEN. DODD: (Inaudible) — be checking out, very thoroughly —

INSKEEP: Working parent — well that's the question.

SEN. DODD: Yeah.

INSKEEP: You interview a number of applicants. They all seem very nice. They seem like they would take care of the kids, but it would appear that their documents may not be in order. What would you want an American to do?

SEN. DODD: Well, I think you've got an obligation here to go beyond that if you have any doubts or questions here. People who knowingly hire undocumented workers, I think, need to be held accountable to a far higher degree of penalty, civil and possibly criminal, if in fact it's widespread, because these are the things that are going to slow down the 4 to 500,000 people who come here each year.

You know, I understand — look, I think this debate has to begin someplace. I'm very worried about the fear- and hatemongers out there who are going to divide this country very terribly on this subject matter. We've been a welcoming people for the entire history of our nation. I hear there were exceptions in the 19th century with the "Know-Nothings" and at the end of World War I, which were dangerous periods here.

But obviously, any self-respecting country has to control its borders. It has to impose penalties that would otherwise attract people to come here — understanding why they want to be here but also understanding our capacity and ability to handle this.

That's why I've taken the strong position here of doing whatever we can on both sides of the border, and I've worked this for a long time. For 20 years, I've chaired the interparliamentary meeting with Mexico. I speak the language fluently. We have a large percentage of people coming from Latin America. We passed the CAFTA trade agreement here. You want to go right to the heart of these things here, we allowed every single country under CAFTA to be able to set its own labor standard. Exactly what happens is businesses locate there and race to the bottom. Instead of improving the quality of working conditions that would give people in these countries a chance to stay in their own nations, which most of them would prefer to do, we're encouraging people to come here by not having trading agreements that don't insist upon —

INSKEEP: We're going to talk more about that, those issues, as we go along here.

But sticking with real people, Congressman Kucinich, the real person in that situation, what should they do?

REP. KUCINICH: Rely on the Constitution. You know, we don't encourage vigilantism in this country. We have a Constitution, we have due process, we have equal protection, we have habeas corpus. This administration, as — like — you know, would like to shred the Constitution and deny people all those rights. But when we get into that, what we do, we take the path of denying constitutional rights, and we're back to Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and all those other violations of rights that we're ashamed of now. And I'm saying that we have to realize that these are economic refugees from NAFTA.

You know, I've said it over and over. Cancel NAFTA. Negotiate a new trade agreement with Mexico based on workers rights, human rights, environmental quality principles. Give a path to legalization for the people who have been here. You can't send them home willy-nilly. You have to have a way in which our immigration policy resonates with the deeper principles of inclusiveness in America, as symbolized by our Statue of Liberty.

INSKEEP: We may get to NAFTA as well, time permitting.

I want to play a bit of tape, though, of Amy Vybiral(ph). She's at the Marshalltown Education & Training Center so she's somebody who deals with this in real time. And here's the policy that she follows as an English as a Second Language institution teaching immigrants.

MS. AMY VYBIRAL (Marshalltown Education & Training Center): I don't know their status and I don't — we don't ask. Let me put it this way. We ask a Social Security number of everybody who enters and we require it of no one. So it's not a prerequisite to attend a college.

INSKEEP: Senator Clinton, if you're president in January of 2009, is "don't ask, don't tell," which is a way you could characterize her policy there, is that appropriate for people and institutions that receive government funding?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, I agree with what Barack and Chris and Dennis have already said. It's the failure of the federal government that puts people like Amy into this position. I do not think we should be criminalizing her or expecting her to enforce the broken laws of our federal immigration system.

In fact, I spoke out very strongly against an effort that was undertaken in the House of Representatives to do just that, to basically say anyone who offered aid, comfort or any kind of service to someone in need who turned out to be an illegal immigrant was going to face criminal penalties. That is not in keeping with who we are as Americans. What is in keeping is having a government fulfill its responsibilities. That would be my

highest priorities and that what — that's what I would attempt to achieve with comprehensive immigration reform.

INSKEEP: Although if a citizen witnessed some other kind of crime, wouldn't you want them to report it?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, you know, it's a very clever question, Steve. But I think it really begs the question, because what we're looking at here is 12 to 14 million people. They live in our neighborhoods. They take care of our elderly parents. They probably made the beds in the hotels that some of us stayed in last night. They are embedded in our society.

If we want to listen to the demagogues and the calls for us to begin to try to round up people and turn every American into a suspicious vigilante, I think we will do graver harm to the fabric of our nation than any kind of, you know, person by person reporting of someone who might be here illegally. I reject that. I think again you have to look at the failure of the federal government and the failure of our political system to make a change in how we should be enforcing our immigration laws. And that's what I will try to do.

INSKEEP: Senator Biden.

SEN. BIDEN: I'd like to make a distinction here, and I agree with Hillary on this.

What Amy, as I understood the question, is doing is providing a service to children. There's 1.8 million children here.

SIEGEL: Many adults as well, people learning English as a second language.

SEN. BIDEN: OK, well, that — I just assumed she was talking about children.

There's a distinction, quite frankly, between providing a service and providing for you being able to make money by hiring someone you can hire cheaply in order to be able to make your business grow. I find a moral distinction there, number one.

Number two, as a single parent for five years after my wife and daughter were killed, raising two kids, I went through, out of necessity, trying to figure out how to get a nanny to help me out. Thank God I had my sister and my mother, but I went through that, to try to relieve them. Guess what? Most of the illegals that came to seek a job with me, they did not speak Spanish. They were from Ireland, England. They were from Germany. They were from Poland. The majority of the people here undocumented — 60 percent — are not Spanish-speaking. They've overstayed their visas. And —

INSKEEP: Question from our colleague — from our colleague, Robert Siegel.

SIEGEL: You used the same figure at the Brown and Black Forum on Saturday, but the Pew Research Center has estimated this, that in fact 56 percent of the illegal immigrants are from Mexico and 22 percent from other Latin American countries. Aren't the vast majority of the people here, in fact, Spanish speakers?

SEN. DODD: They are.

SEN. BIDEN: Well, Chris tells me they are. The data I received was that the total amount of people who are here undocumented and the people overstaying their visas were people who are not from Latin America.

Chris knows more about this than anybody in terms of numbers —

SEN. DODD: I think — I think both of you are right. The Pew statistic's, I think more recent arrivals, and that number is higher coming from Latin America. Overall, Joe's point, the people going back years here, would include a larger number coming from non-Latin American countries. So both numbers may have — may be accurate; just depends how you frame it.

SEN. BIDEN: But the point is — the idea here is — and it seems to me there's an obligation on the part of an employer who is seeking someone to work for him or her to know whether or not that opportunity is being given first to an American before they hire someone here who is legal or illegal — I mean, excuse me, who is illegal.

INSKEEP: Just a yes-no question before we go on, Senator. Those Irish people and others, illegal immigrants you interviewed, did you hire one?

SEN. BIDEN: Did not hire one, absolutely not.

INSKEEP: You found someone legal?

SEN. BIDEN: I found — I didn't — I didn't find anyone. I thank God for my sister.

And by the way, you may remember, I'm the guy that reminded the former administration that Zoe Baird was a little bit of a problem, if you may remember.

INSKEEP: Let me move on to Senator Edwards, if I might. Senator Edwards, in a recent debate you said, as I'm sure you've said many times, that illegal workers are exploited, that they're paid less; if they try to report problems, they're asked about their immigration status. But you have also said that you do not believe that illegal immigration is driving down wages. If they're being paid less, how can they not be driving down wages?

MR. EDWARDS: What I've actually said is there have been some serious academic studies done on this question and the studies are not the same. They have not reached the same conclusions. I think that — that there is — there is some confusion in the work that's been done, the research that's been done on this question.

But what I've also described are some of the things that I've seen firsthand. The town — small town that I grew up in, in North Carolina is now about half Latino, Hispanic. I did a poverty tour earlier this year that began in — in New Orleans, but it also went through Mississippi. And in Canton, Mississippi, I met with a group of workers who worked at a poultry plant there, largely Hispanic, and the abuses that they described to me were extraordinary. There was a man there who had been injured on the job — had his back broken, literally, on the job — and was told by the company doctor that it was just a generic condition and there was nothing they could do for him.

And what I consistently heard from the workers — I've heard this all over the place — is if they're — they're not being paid in many cases for the work that they're done, not being paid overtime, not being paid in many cases the minimum wage. And if they raise any question about it, they're — the first question the employer asks is, "What is your status?"

INSKEEP: Well, how are they not driving down wages for everybody else if that's the case?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I think what the studies show is there are a lot of things driving down wages in the United States of America. One of those things, which I hope we have time to talk more about, is the loss of good middle-class jobs, which has been accelerated under this administration but didn't begin under this administration. And I think there are a variety of things that are contributing to that. And one — the great issue facing the next president — that will be facing me as president is, what do we do to strengthen and

grow the middle class? And there are a whole range of things that we need to do, that if we actually want to — want to save the middle class and strengthen the American economy.

INSKEEP: Let me go over to our colleague, Michele Norris, who has a question.

NORRIS: I just want to follow up, Senator Edwards, on something that you said. I've had the pleasure to sit in a debate setting in front of you twice within the last week, and at the debate on Saturday, you noted that undocumented immigrants are punished if they complain about unsafe conditions, if they speak up. And you noted that these workers would have rights, they would be looked after, in an Edwards administration. What rights do immigrants have if they're working without proper authorization?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, the — the answer to this is not a short-term solution. I wish there were a clear short-term solution that would be effective.

The answer to this is comprehensive immigration reform. That is ultimately the answer. But we —

NORRIS: But until you get to that point, what —

MR. EDWARDS: But until we get to that —

NORRIS: — if workers don't have proper identification, proper authorization, what rights would they have under your administration?

MR. EDWARDS: They're in a — they're in a very vulnerable position. And what we want to make certain, and that we would do in my administration, is that we are enforcing the laws that apply to employers. People in this discussion have talked about enforcing the responsibilities of employers not to hire undocumented workers. That's true and that is a responsibility. And I would do that as president, until we had comprehensive immigration reform. But we can't continue to allow — in my state, we have agricultural workers who are being taken advantage of and abused and in many cases living in horrid, horrid conditions. And so —

NORRIS: So I'm just going to try this one more time. How would you, quote, "take care of" them, what rights would they have?

MR. EDWARDS: What we would do is we'd use the power of the federal government and the power of our regulatory agencies to ensure that these people are not being abused. Like the — I'll give a specific example: the poultry workers that I met in Canton, Mississippi. We would make certain that their work conditions were safe. We'd make certain that they're in fact being paid for the work that they're doing; if they're working overtime, that they're being paid for their overtime. Those are all things that we would do in my administration.

INSKEEP: Senator Obama, then Congressman Kucinich.

SEN. OBAMA: Well, look, this requires leadership. I believe that there are circumstances where, in fact, illegal immigrants are driving down wages. The question is, how do we fix it? Because oftentimes when it's posed that way, then your — the thinking is that somehow we have to pit low-wage American workers versus low-wage immigrant workers.

My answer is to stop illegal workers from coming in, hold employers accountable, but give the 12 million people who are here illegally, many of whom have been here for years, many of whom have U.S. citizens for children, to make sure that they've got a pathway to legalization. If we do that, then they do have rights that they can — they can access.

INSKEEP: What about January 2009, still millions of illegals? Would you let them work? Would you encourage them to work? Would you give them rights as they work?

SEN. OBAMA: No, no, no, no. The — I think that if they are illegal, then they should not be able to work in this country. That is part of the principle of comprehensive reform, that we're going to crack down on employers who are hiring them and taking advantage of them. But I also want to give them a pathway, so that they can earn citizenship, earn a legal status, start learning English, pay a significant fine, go to the back of the line. But they can then stay here and they can have the ability to enforce a minimum wage that they're paid, make sure the worker safety laws are available, make sure that they can join a union.

INSKEEP: Congressman Kucinich, would you let people work in January 2009 if you're president?

REP. KUCINICH: Absolutely, I mean, you know, we have to recognize that many of them have continued to work in providing services. We have to get them a path to legalization.

But you raised a question. The question is, are they driving wages down? The passage of NAFTA helped drive wages down. Wall Street speculation, ending in closing plants, have driven wages down. Non-productive military spending drives wages down.

What your panel here is conjuring is taking — is the same approach that the Bush administration has used in denying any kind of rights at all to so-called enemy noncombatants. And I say that a Kucinich administration, everyone who's in this country or within the reach of this country has to be accorded constitutional rights that would be accorded to anyone else, because that's what we stand on. This is one of the reasons why I'm pursuing impeachment against the vice president, because he's trashed the Constitution.

INSKEEP: Former Senator Gravel.

MR. GRAVEL: Hasn't it become obvious in this discussion that there has to be a reason why over the last 15 years we haven't solved this problem as a nation? Stop and think. Our unemployment level is about 4.5, and that's about as low as you can get it. So, where is the problem? We have to have people fill these jobs. They come in and fill these jobs. We call them illegal. Are they illegal? They're filling jobs that need to be done.

If we were to chase them out, aren't we playing to the nativists, the crazies, who are opposed to anybody coming in since they got here? And the media plays into this. The Congress plays into this. Just open our doors. When the jobs are there to be filled, they'll come in. If the jobs aren't there, they'll go home. We can deal with all these other problems in trade.

But we're making a mountain out of a mole hill. We're creating laws. We're trying to deal with this. Deal with the obvious: We do not seem as a nation to be able to solve this problem the way we've been approaching it.

INSKEEP: Senator Mike Gravel, former Senator Mike Gravel, thanks very much.

A couple other candidates had their hands up but we are approaching a break here. So let me assure you that we will continue a bit more on this topic after the break.

You are listening to the NPR Democratic candidates' debate from Des Moines. We're going to take a break of about a minute. This is special coverage from NPR News.

(Announcements)

SIEGEL: From NPR News and Iowa Public Radio, this is NPR's Democratic presidential debate. Along with Michele Norris and Steve Inskeep, I'm Robert Siegel.

Our topic right now is immigration, and Steve is leading the questioning. Steve.

INSKEEP: Now, let's dive right back in with Senator Clinton, who had her hand up before. And I do want to ask about a very similar topic, Senator.

You said in a debate on Saturday night that you support people who are, as you put it, "Yes, undocumented, but also working hard, trying to support their families. That's why they're here." In the same answer, you said you want to crack down on employers. Is there a contradiction there? If you crack down on employers, doesn't that mean you're telling employers to put these hardworking people, as you define them, out of work?

SEN. CLINTON: No, there is no contradiction.

You know, comprehensive immigration reform means five things. You have to have tough border security plus a system of knowing who's here and what they're doing. Secondly, you've got to crack down on employers, because people wouldn't come if there weren't a job waiting for them. Third, you've got to provide more help to local communities to be able to bear the costs, because they don't set immigration policy. Fourth, you do have to do what Chris Dodd is talking about, and that is try to create some economic activity by working with the countries to our south. But fifth, you've got to have a path toward legalization.

INSKEEP: But granting that it —

SEN. CLINTON: And I'm in favor of all of that. Now, I just want to —

INSKEEP: But granting that it may take a while to do that —

SEN. CLINTON: Well, yes it will. But let's put this in context because, you know, sometimes we talk about these issues as though they're stovepiped.

Part of the reason we're having this contentious, demagogic debate right now about immigration is because the economy is not performing for average Americans. Yes, the reported unemployment rate is 4.7 percent, but the labor force participation rate has fallen dramatically. That means people have given up looking for work. There is no effort to try to ease the transitions that do happen in any economy.

You know, I traveled this country extensively during the 1990s. I did not hear this kind of contentious debate. Why? Because we had 22.7 million new jobs. People's incomes were rising. They felt like there was plenty of opportunity to go around. Now, Americans feel like they're standing on a trapdoor.

INSKEEP: Granting that you want to do several things, it appears from the reality of the moment that the easy thing to do is to crack down. Everything else is hard and may take a while. January 2009, as I've asked other candidates, are you going to crack down on employers, given that that may harm people you've defined as hardworking?

SEN. CLINTON: I will crack down on employers. I will do all five things that I just outlined.

But I think it's important to look at where this debate is often taken to such an extreme, because you'll hear the voices of those saying deport people, round them up. That is absolutely unrealistic, and it is not in keeping with American values.

The best estimates I have is it would take about \$200 billion over five years to round up 12 to 14 million people. It would take tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of new law enforcement officials. It would take a convoy of 200,000 buses stretching 1,700 miles. People in America would be outraged at the loss of their privacy and the invasion of their homes and businesses.

So we've got to do all five of the things, and I would start immediately to do that.

INSKEEP: Senators Obama and Dodd, can you limit yourselves to 30 seconds each? Senator Obama.

SEN. OBAMA: Steve, you've — you've asked a couple of times, are you going to crack down on January 1st, 2009? Listen, I will initiate the process immediately, but to get comprehensive reform, to — to get an employer verification system that works, is going to take some time, just the same way that a pathway to legalization is going to take some time. But what it takes is some leadership.

Look, two years ago I worked with about 10 other senators — McCain, Kennedy, Graham — an unlikely group — Brownback — and we put together a package that had everything that Senator Clinton and others have talked about. It had some provisions we didn't like in it, but we were able to pass it with a significant majority in the Senate. But what you have not seen over the last several years is leadership from the president to change the tone and to describe to the American people how we can be a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

INSKEEP: Senator Dodd.

SEN. DODD: Just a couple of points.

That point that Barack has just made is very important. This was a failure of leadership by this administration to step at a critical moment when we could have gotten something done.

We need to also recognize there are people at this very hour that are showing up at U.S. embassies all over the world who are seeking to come here through legal means, and we need to keep them in mind. If it looks as though they're fools to be doing what they're doing because we're creating virtually an amnesty program in this country, then you're going to have an awful problem around the world. So we need to understand that.

And thirdly, this point. Look, let's understand this. The Republicans, the extreme conservatives here, want this issue on the table. They don't want to talk about the war in Iraq. They don't want to talk about the failure of fiscal policies here at home. They don't want to talk about what's going on with health care in the country. So they're going to use this issue as a wedge issue here to inflame the passions, the fears and hatreds of too many Americans. We have seen it in the past in our country. It's dangerous politics, and we need to describe it for what it is.

INSKEEP: I'm sorry that we're limited on time. We need to move on.

Our colleague Robert Siegel has a question for the candidates.

SIEGEL: A question for Senator Edwards. If you're elected president, you'll hear competing claims about H1-B visas for highly skilled workers. People like Bill Gates will tell you we should have much, much more of them to bring in more highly skilled workers. Critics of that will say no, the United States is training other countries' engineers and in fact those workers are working for less than American-trained specialists and engineers would.

What would you do as president? Expand H1-B visas or scale them back?

MR. EDWARDS: Well — well, the first point is, why is America not educating and training American workers to do these jobs? I mean, that's the starting point —

SIEGEL: Well, there are Americans who say that they are being trained for those jobs but that they can't compete with workers from India who will work for 10 percent less.

MR. EDWARDS: And that's the reason — if American workers are actually competent to do those jobs, American workers should be doing those jobs. The whole purpose of the H1-B visa program is to bring people from other places who are — who have to do jobs that we don't have American workers to do.

Now, I think there are two pieces to this. One is, if there are American workers who can do the jobs, they should be doing them, as I just said. And they will when I'm president.

Second, if we don't have adequate American workers — and this is the other side of the equation, what Bill Gates and others would argue, and I've heard the same arguments — then that means America's not doing its job of educating our young people, making —

SIEGEL: But are you saying that for you, it's a matter of fact-finding to see which way you would go on H1-B visas, or have you already made up your mind that they should be limited or they should be increased?

MR. EDWARDS: I believe that there are American workers who can do some of these jobs that people are being brought from other places to do. And I think those American workers, if they're there and available, should be doing the jobs.

But I — I've — you got to give me 30 more seconds on this, because you can't ignore the underlying issue. The underlying issue is, are we making it easier for kids to go to college? Are we driving our young people into engineering, science and math, the very areas that we're talking about? And are we doing it in a way that will strengthen the American economy over the long term? Because if we don't — if we are not the most creative, the best-educated, the most innovative workforce on the planet, it is very difficult for us to compete.

INSKEEP: Senator Biden.

SEN. BIDEN: Look, I have been working with this for a long time, as former chairman of the Judiciary Committee. That's where it comes out of. We have it about right now, except that the employers aren't doing their part.

You use the — Robert, you use the example of an Indian engineer who would work less than an American engineer. The truth is they're not allowed to hire based on that. They've got to offer the job. If there's an American there who will take the job, they can't undercut it by hiring an Indian engineer who will work for less; that's illegal. We're not enforcing it.

Second point I'd make is, you know, we make this out to be so black and white. I'm the author of the Violence Against Women Act. It came to my attention not long ago — it is relevant, believe it or not — what happened? Immigrant women getting the living crap beat out of them, getting brutalized — brutalized — and they're afraid to come forward and acknowledge they're being brutalized because they'll be deported. So what we have to do — sometimes humanitarian needs trump — trump — immigration laws.

And so what did I do? I changed the law. My colleagues all voted for it. It's now the law that a woman who comes forward of being beaten will be effectively immune from being deported so you can put the SOB who's beating her in jail. So sometimes it trumps. Sometimes humanitarian needs trump an existing law relating to immigration like that.

INSKEEP: Let me move onto another subject here because our time is quite short. We're going to go —

SEN. DODD: Health care would be good example of that as well —

REP. KUCINICH: Exactly right. A not-for-profit system, that's it. (Laughter.)

INSKEEP: Let me — let me move on. We're running shy of time here, and I'll tell you, we're going to do about five or six minutes on immigration, and then there's one final question we're going to throw to all of you and give you an opportunity on.

We mentioned that we've been taking questions from listeners in recent weeks about this debate, and one is on a small issue that, I think, points to a large concern. It comes from Tally Wilson (ph) of Boone, North Carolina, and her concern has to do with those voicemail automated messages that you get if you call a government office or a business office; the ones that say for English press one, "para Espanol oprima numero dos." She says, "Suddenly we're asked what language we speak in our own country. Will you remove the question about what language we speak when we call any U.S. government office?"

Senator Obama?

SEN. OBAMA: No.

INSKEEP: OK.

SEN. OBAMA: Because there are Spanish-speaking U.S. citizens who may not speak English well, and if they're seeking help, for example, on some vital health care question, or a senior citizen who emigrated here a long time ago and they're trying to get their Social Security check, I don't want them to not be able to get those services.

INSKEEP: Larger question here to Senator Clinton, which is, is this country gradually going to become more a Spanish-speaking country, and should we accept that?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, there's three different points here. First, we need to have English as a common, unifying language. It's an important part of who we are and how we keep this big, diverse country of ours going.

Secondly, as Barack said, there are a lot of Americans who are citizens who speak different languages. I represent New York City. I think there's, like, 170 languages and dialects; the city would be in total chaos if people didn't get some services and some, you know, help in the language that they actually understood.

And thirdly, you know, part of what the challenge here is, is to make it clear that we do expect people who want to become legal in America to try to learn English. But that doesn't mean that they have to give up the language that they originally had, but we have to do more with English as second language, more help in schools, to get people to be able to speak and comprehend English.

INSKEEP: Congressman Kucinich.

REP. KUCINICH: I was able to defeat an English-only proposal in the Ohio Senate years ago when I pointed out our state's founding documents were in German. We need to have our children learn languages. I mean, what is this fear of the other? Why are we separating ourselves from the possibility of being able to merge with the world? An insular and isolated America doesn't cut it. And so what I'm talking about is rebuild our economy, do it confidently, and encourage the American people to work — to reach out.

My political philosophy, I see the world as one. I see the world as being interconnected and interdependent and there being an imperative for human unity. And so we need to reach out, and education is the way to do it. Let's have our children learn languages, and let's grow our economy in a confident way, full-employment economy, jobs for all, health care for all, not-for-profit health care for all.

INSKEEP: Anybody here willing to say directly that immigration, because of the millions and millions of people involved, is going to change American culture as it is in the past; America's not going to be the same kind of place it is now?

SEN. OBAMA: Of course it will. Of course it will.

INSKEEP: Senator Gravel?

MR. GRAVEL: It always has been. All waves have changed our society. And it's a change that's for the good.

INSKEEP: Senator Biden?

SEN. BIDEN: Yeah, it will change our culture, but they'll all speak English. Like every other large wave of immigrants, once they're bond to a second generation, they'll all be speaking English. What's the fear here? Give me an example where that hasn't happened.

INSKEEP: Senator Dodd.

SEN. DODD: Well, Dennis said something important. I believe I'm the only candidate here who speaks fluently a second language. Bill Richardson isn't here today — (cross talk).

The point is that you need to be, I think, enriching this. Paul Simon, a former colleague in the United States Senate, wrote a book called "The Tongue-Tied Americans." And understanding what I mentioned at the outset of this debate about having to run classified ads to find Arabic speakers at a time after 9/11 is an indication that we need to be talking more about that.

And clearly as Joe has just said, this is a source of our wealth and richness of this country. We have so benefited as a result of people who have come here because of religious, political persecution, seeking a better life for their families. This has been a great source of strength for our country. We need to work with it, obviously be practical about it. But this is a source of pride in our country, not something to be talked about in negative terms.

INSKEEP: Senator Obama, Senator Obama.

SEN. OBAMA: Well, I completely agree with Chris. Look, a Pew study just came out that shows the next generation, children of Spanish speakers, learn English. You know, they're going to do the same thing that every generation did, so we shouldn't worry about this.

But on the issue of legal immigration, I think, an earlier point was made. We have a broken legal immigration system that has to be expedited. That's part of the problem that we're seeing, whether it's H-1B visas or others. It's too cumbersome. It's often too expensive and unwieldy. That's something I will do as part of comprehensive immigration reform.

INSKEEP: That has to be the last word on immigration. We still have a few minutes left on the clock, and we want to use it for one more question from voters. We were speaking to some Iowa voters on Saturday morning in Des Moines and we received one question which we wanted to put to you all. The gentleman's name is James Irwin (ph). He is a Democrat, by the way. And we asked them, what are some things you want to know from the Democratic presidential candidates? And this was his choice.

Mr. JAMES IRWIN: What do you think the toughest choice you have left to make is? Is it gay marriage, immigration, the war in Iraq? What haven't you made up your mind on yet? And why haven't you?

INSKEEP: We'll go left to right, just the way we've introduced people.

Senator Clinton, what is something you don't know the answer to?

SEN. CLINTON: Oh, there's a lot of things I don't know the answer to. (Laughs.)

INSKEEP: Name one.

SEN. CLINTON: Well, I mean, obviously, you know, everything we started off talking about in the beginning of this debate, you know, we're going to have so much repair work to do around the world. What are the best ways to try to stabilize the very difficult problems we face, from Iran to China? And you know, I have some very clear ideas about it, but I'm not going to sit here and say that I have the answers.

INSKEEP: We're going to have to go rather quickly. If you can name one specific thing — one specific thing.

MR. GRAVEL: I don't have the answer — I don't have the answer to be able to persuade the American people that they are the solution, not their leaders. I wish I had the answer to convince them of that.

INSKEEP: That's Senator Mike Gravel — former Senator Mike Gravel.

Senator Obama?

SEN. OBAMA: The issue of climate change. I've put forward one of the most aggressive proposals out there, but the science seems to be coming in indicating it's accelerating even more quickly with every passing day. And by the time I take office, I think we're going to have to have a serious conversation about how drastic steps we need to take to address it.

INSKEEP: Senator Dodd?

SEN. DODD: I would say the single largest issue in many ways for us to grapple with is education, because it's the heart of who we are, both in terms of our governance and economic strength and the future. And convincing everyone in the country of the importance and the priority of that issue is something that I think is going to be critical for the success of our country in the 21st century.

INSKEEP: Senator Biden?

SEN. BIDEN: I know exactly what I'd do in those foreign policy issues. But quite frankly, I think that the toughest choice for me, the thing I'm most unsure about, is how you rationalize competition and trade policy. I think that's the single most difficult challenge that I will have as president.

INSKEEP: Senator Edwards?

SEN. EDWARDS: Who I would choose as my vice president and whether — (laughter) — whether to consider any of these people sitting at the table with me.

INSKEEP: Anybody want to put in a resume or anything at this time? No one seems to be very eager to grab that job at this time.

SEN. EDWARDS: They will, they will.

INSKEEP: But is there seriously — is there seriously something that you're wrestling with?

SEN. EDWARDS: I think we have an enormous struggle to try to restore the power in the country and the democracy back to the American people and take it away from big corporate interests, et cetera, who've taken over the democracy.

INSKEEP: And you're not sure —

SEN. EDWARDS: I think there are many ways to do that, and I think the starting place is to galvanize America to do it. But I think it is central to what we need to do for America.

INSKEEP: Congressman Kucinich.

REP. KUCINICH: I wrestle with the question as to whether or not the president and the vice president should be held liable for crimes, for taking us into a war based on lies.

I mean, I'm ready to be president. I've been right all along on Iraq, on Iran, on not-for-profit health care and giving our children a chance for an education from age 3 all the way through to a degree —

INSKEEP: Oh, come on. You know what you want to do on that. You want to impeach people —

REP. KUCINICH: I know. Listen, I'm ready to be president. I am ready to be president. And the standards — I'm the only one here who has said that both President Bush and Vice President Cheney ought to be impeached for lying to the American people, not only to take us into war against Iraq, but now this new development with the N — with the National Intelligence Estimate.

Tell us what our standards should be for the Oval Office. Tell us what standards — I'm asking my colleagues here — that you would expect to be obtained by anybody who would be president. Can you lie about a war? Is that OK?

INSKEEP: Let me — because we still have a few seconds left — I heard a number of specific answers, and I want to come back to you, Senator Clinton. You said there were a host of things that you don't know the answers to. Would you like to name one — since your fellow candidates did, in general, name something in particular?

SEN. CLINTON: Well, you know, I think that, you know, when you are running for president, you do your very best to try to anticipate what the problems are going to be. I think we have such serious issues when it comes to the economy. I think we're heading into some very turbulent waters on the economy. How are we going to balance what we need to do to perhaps stimulate our way out of some very difficult economic conditions — which are certainly being predicted now — at the same time, getting back to making sure we don't put the burden on the middle class. And I intend to have an economic policy that will get us through what I'm afraid we're going to inherit from the Bush administration.

INSKEEP: OK. Senator Clinton, Senator Gravel, Senator Obama, Senator Dodd, Senator Biden, Senator Edwards, Congressman Kucinich, that's where we'll have to leave it. Thank you very much to all of you. It's been a great discussion.

(Cross talk.)

SEN. CLINTON: Thank you.

MR. EDWARDS: Thank you very much.

INSKEEP: We've appreciated going a little bit deeper into the issues and hopefully given the voters of Iowa some things to think about as they prepare for their caucuses in just under a month.

NORRIS: Our coverage will continue on NPR's "All Things Considered," also online, at npr.org. There you can hear more from these Democratic presidential candidates. Thanks to our host, Iowa Public Radio, and the State Historical Museum. And thanks also to the people of Iowa. They have been so good to us in the time that we've been here.

SIEGEL: We are working with the Republican presidential candidates to reschedule their debate for later in the election season. So for now, from Des Moines, from my colleagues Michele Norris and Steve Inskeep — this is Robert Siegel — thank you for listening. This has been special coverage from Iowa Public Radio and NPR News.