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Democratic Debate transcript

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They have trekked thousands of miles across the state seeking the support of Iowa Democrats. Their views are as diverse as their party, but they are unified in their quest to take back the white house. Today the candidates will confront the issues that are important to their party, to Iowa , and to the nation. From the studios of Iowa public television, this is "the Des Moines Register" presidential debate, the Democrats.

Hello, I'm Carolyn Washburn, editor of The Des Moines Register, and welcome today two of our Des Moines Register debates. Today we're going to talk with six democratic candidates. These candidates have spent a lot of time together on stage in debates and forums, and Iowa ns have had a lot of opportunity to ask them questions and look them in the eye. Still half Iowa Democrats who say they're likely to caucus also say they may still change their minds, so as we wrestle our way down to these last 21 days, we looked at the issues not getting a lot of attention and issues Iowa ns said they wanted to know more about, and that is where we're going to focus our time today. First, let's welcome our candidates. Senator Barack Obama of Illinois. Senator Joe Biden of Delaware. Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico. Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut. Former senator John Edwards of North Carolina. And senator Hillary Clinton of New York. Thank you all for being here today. The rules are simple, I'll ask the questions and let you know how much time you have to answer. There are timing lights. You'll see a yellow light when you have ten seconds left, and the red light means it's time to stop. I'll try not to be a scrooge about it since it's the season, but I will ask you to respect the time so we don't have to shorten up answers down the line and there's plenty of time for conversation. We have lots of candidates and lots of ground to cover. I will offer up to 30 seconds of rebuttal time to any candidate criticized by name, and I'll include other candidates who indicate they want to jump in as long as we have time. We'll explain everything else as we go along, so let's get to it. We're going to start with a discussion about the financial situation facing our country. The

single biggest issue Iowa ns of both parties said they wanted you to talk more about. Would it be a priority of your administration to balance the federal budget every year? If yes, how, and if no, why not? Senator Obama, I'd like you to start us off, you'll have one minute.

Over the last seven years what we've seen is an economy that's out of balance because of the policies of George Bush and the republicans in congress. Not only do we have fiscal problems, but we've got growing inequality, so people are working harder for less and they're seeing costs for everything from college education to health care to gas at the pump go up. What I want to do is get the long-term fundamentals right. That means that we are investing in education, we're investing in infrastructure, we're getting our trade deals structured so that they're fair, and that we are also ending the war in Iraq where we're spending 10-12 Billion a month. That is money that can be applied back here at home for critical issues. Now, the fact is we're not going to be able to do this unless we're able to overcome some of the special interests that have clogged up the system and created trillions of dollars of tax loopholes and tax breaks. We need to put those back into the pockets of hard-working Americans.

Just so I'm clear, a priority to balance the federal budget or not necessarily?

We are not going to be able to dig ourselves out in one or two years, but if we can get on a path of sustained growth, end the war in Iraq, end some of the special interest earmarks that have been clogging up the system, I believe we can return to a balanced budget.

Governor Richardson?

I have to, by law as governor, balance budgets. I've balanced five. And it would be a major priority of mine. This is what I would do as president. We have to balance the budget. I would advocate for line item veto authority for the president, a constitutional amendment to balance the budget. There's \$73 Billion in corporate welfare that needs to be eliminated. I think we all have to sacrifice, the congress, too, and that means eliminating congressional earmarks. That means also having pay as you go policies in our budget if somebody thinks of a new program or is going to cut a tax, we've got to make sure it's paid for. But most importantly, I believe balancing the budget should be viewed as an opportunity to have economic growth the way we did in the Clinton years. We created new jobs, we stopped raiding the social security trust fund, and there was economic growth in this country. That's what I would do as president.

Senator Biden?

I think it's pretty straightforward. You don't have to make a choice of balancing the budget and/or leaving the priority that is most of us feel strongly about. Just put in real stark terms, it's about priorities. I apologize for my cold. Just by eliminating the war, eliminating the \$200 Billion in tax cuts that aren't needed for the top 1%. And by cutting somewhere on the order of \$20 Billion a year out of the military for special programs from star wars to the f22 to the anymore its class destroyer, you could save enough to allow me everything I want to do and still bring down the deficit by \$150 Billion. It would cost less than half. So the republicans are trying to sucker us into this. You either have to balance the budget and do nothing to make people's lives better, or you're going to balloon the deficit.

We're just going to go down the line with this dun.

Well, listen, the federal government's not much different. I've been a strong supporter, was a strong supporter of Rudman Hollings, but what we need to be doing is growing our economy again, we're dealing with some of the deep underlying problems that have caused the earnings to decline. Health care costs have gone up 87%, energy costs continue to rise, the cost of higher education. The cost right here at the university of Iowa has gone up 141% in the last six or seven years, so we need to have an economy that's driving growth, creating jobs which is the best social program anyone ever created, and then simultaneously as you grow bringing an end to the war in Iraq, then we can begin to put that discipline back into our process. But the national government is a very different entity than the state government, require as lot more flexibility to it.

Senator Edwards, we have 30 seconds for these rebuttals.

Thank you very much. First of all, we have to get rid of the structural deficiency of the economy. We have to strengthen and grow the middle class, which is struggling mightily in this country today. And one of the reasons we've lost jobs, we're having trouble creating jobs, we're having trouble growing and strengthening the middle class is because corporate power and greed have literally taken over the government, and we need a president who's willing to take these powers on. It is the only way we're going to have universal health care, have a trade policy that works for American workers, have a tax policy that's not favoring big, multi-national corporations but instead favors the middle class and working people.

Fiscal responsibility is a very high priority for me. We don't have to go back far in our history to see what happens when we do have a fiscally responsible budget that does use rules of discipline to make sure that we're not cutting taxes or spending more than we can afford. I will institute those very same approaches. You can't do it in a year. It'll take time, but the economy will grow again when we start acting fiscally responsible. And then we can save money in the government by cutting out

private contractors, closing loopholes, getting the health care system to be more efficient. We'll do all of this at the same time, but the results will take a while for us to see.

Let me follow up on this, and I'll start with governor Richardson. This will be a 60-second answer. When are tax increases necessary and appropriate, then, and given the current deficit, which of your priorities would be worth asking Americans to pay more for?

Well, I think the 2% for the wealthiest Americans, that is unfair, unequal. That would go in my objectives as president. I think we also when we talk about balancing the budget, I've advocated constitutional amendment. Obviously, you can't do it in the time of war, recession, you can't do it in the time of an emergency. I would exclude social security. But I think what is critically important is that when we talk about our most urgent national priority, the war, we've spent \$500 Billion in this war, and these are funds that could go off to our domestic priorities. To health care, to kids, to education, to improving our schools. To rebounding also in terms of our national spirit. But fiscally responsible budgets, I believe, are critical for economic growth. And we use a tax structure to incentivize the economy, to give preference to solar, wind, biomedical companies and aviation and companies of the future. I would take those steps as president along with improving our education system too. That'll will make us more competitive.

Thank you. Senator Edwards.

Well, I just want to add one thing. The tax policy in America has been established by big corporations and the wealthiest Americans. That's why we have tax breaks for the top one and two percent, it's why the profits of big corporations get bigger and bigger. So what we ought to be doing instead is getting rid of these tax breaks for big, the wealthiest Americans, big tax breaks for companies that are actually taking American jobs overseas. This is insanity when we're losing American jobs at the rate we are today. And then on top of that, we need to help middle-class families. I have proposed specific ideas to help them save, to help them send their kids to college, and make sure they can pay for child care. All these things are aimed at making sure that we strengthen the middle class, that we can pay for things like universal health care. Being honest with people, unless you have a way to pay for it, this is how you'd pay for it.

Senator Clinton, 30 seconds.

I think it's important we recognize how people feel in Iowa and across America. They're one pink slip, one medical diagnosis away from falling through. I want to restore the tax rates we had in the '90s. That means raising taxes on corporations and wealthy individuals. I want to keep the middle-class tax

cuts, and I want to start making changes that will save us money, save money in our medicare budget, save money for the average American. During the '90s the typical Indiana family's income rose \$7,000.

I want to go back to a question. You all campaign on fairly significant new programs in education, health care, and the like that will cost Billions of dollars. At the same time, many of you have said that even if we start pulling troops out of Iraq now, it will take some time to do that in a safe and orderly way. So if we assume that we'll continue to have some military expenses in Iraq for many months, how will you pay for your new ideas in the short term? Senator Biden.

By the way, the defense department's gigantic. It's not just the war in Iraq. Over the first four years I think all of us are going to try to get the troops out of there. I think I can do it in the first year. We shouldn't buy into the republican paradigm, and that is the idea they've built this deficit up, the republicans, in order to make it difficult to do the things we need to do. And we need to deal with health care, we need to deal with these things. Just list a few things. You can take 20 Billion a year out of the defense department just by eliminating weapons systems. You can, in fact, cut. You can put more into the government by close to \$150 Billion in tax cuts going to people who don't need them, will not affect the economy, and they didn't ask for them. So you can pay for every one of these initiatives, but as my dad used to say, it's all about priorities. What are your priorities? I would fundamentally change the republican priorities of rewarding only the wealthy government programs as well as dealing with a more rational policy to promote jobs.

Senator Obama?

Well, every proposal I've put forward during this campaign we have paid for, and we have specified where that money is going to come from. Let's just look at our tax code because it's a great example of how we could provide relief to ordinary citizens who are struggling to get by. Right now we've got a whole host of corporate loopholes and tax havens. There's a building in the Cayman Islands that houses supposedly 12,000 u.s.-based corporations. Now, that's either the biggest building in the world or the biggest tax scam in the world, and I think we know which one it is. If we close some of those loopholes, that helps me close -- we've put forward tax relief plans, that will not only restore fairness to our tax code, but it also puts money into the pockets of hard-working Americans who need it right now, who will spend it, and will actually improve our economic growth over time, particularly at a time when we're seeing a credit crunch. But it requires leadership from the white house that restores that sense that we're all in this together, and that we're not just on our own.

I'm going to ask governor Richardson and senator Dodd to answer this, 30 seconds, and then I think

we'll move to another question. Governor Richardson.

Well, I detailed \$57 Billion in military reductions which involve missile systems, procurement reform. But we've got to recognize that the Iraq war has drained our military. And what we need is we need a couple of more divisions in the army, in the marines, we've got to take the VA system needs funding, our veterans coming back are not properly being taken care of, and we need to recruit and retain to keep the volunteer army going. We need to improve our readiness, our equipment, so there are some military priorities that America and the next president has to address.

Thank you. Senator Dodd?

I try to frame this in the context of what's fair, and one of the constituencies that's suffering the most, the middle class, following further and further behind. About 12 or 13 million of our citizens are children live anything poverty. I've tried to expand the child tax credit here which would take some two-and-a-half million children out of poverty. We begin to lift people up as well here by providing the opportunities for them to get out of the liffities they're in economically and have an opportunity to grow, fulfill those jobs needed in our country. But growing the economy, too often, I think, Democrats are just associated with tax increases and not investing in the growth of our nation which I've been committed to for 26 years in the senate.

Thank you. This question will go first to Governor Richardson for 60 seconds. China is often called the United States' banker because it holds so much of the federal debt. Given that, how should we manage our complicated relationship with China differently than we have now?

Well, for one we should have a relationship that's based -- and a recognition that China is a strategic competitor. Our relationship with China today is clearly one-sided. I'd be tougher when it comes to trade, I'd be tougher with China when it comes to human rights. They need to be doing a lot more on genocide in Darfur, they need to take accidents where they protect their workers, where they have constitutional elections. Now, at the same time, we also have to make sure that China trades on an equitable basis when the United States. We ought to ban these toys they're bringing in. We ought to ban some of the contaminated food they're bringing in. But we must recognize, too, that China's a major power, and we have to have an important, strategic relationship with them. And so what I would do, I would be stronger, as I said, with China when it comes to human rights and trade. I would tell them they cannot continue playing around with currencies. They control a large part of our debt. It would be a stronger relationship with American leadership.

Thank you. Senator Dodd?

Well, my colleagues have talked about china being a competitor, and competitors normally operate under the same rules. I don't mind competing with someone as long as we're operateing under the same rules. When you have the chinese government make it more difficult for us to access even entertainment, not to mention, of course, the intellectual property theft that goes on. Here you're still using slave labor, you manipulate your currency to give you a 40% advantage over our manufacturers, that's no longer just a competitor, that's a very different relationship. Now, it's obviously important not to get bellicose. This is a very important relationship for us in the 21st century, but I think Americans are tired of this conversation, somehow, that it's business as usual. It's not. We don't have the same access to our shelves, to our services that we'd like to sell. They're very, very ricketive here. We need to get fair if we're going to have a better relationship or before long this will no longer be the most desirous market for them, and we will have disadvantaged our country substantially. This is a major, major issue.

Thank you. Senator Clinton, is too much of the federal budget going to entitlements? So how do we change entitlements for the future so we keep the promises.

In this auditorium, no matter how young they are. Number two, Hillary touched the points about medicare. It's cost. It's not new benefits, it's cost. And the whole idea there is the combination of the \$10 Billion we're overpaying HMOs a year, the combination of prescription drug costs being able to be negotiated for the federal government, and the combination of modernizing the system so you deal with chronic diseases, it's estimated we could save over \$100 Billion a year in medicare. So it is within our capability to do it. The question is you've got to act. And this is all about action. And I think we're totally within our capacity to do both of those things.

I'm going to let senator Obama and governor Richardson answer, 30 seconds, please.

Well, just to emphasize just how important prevention and cost savings can be in the medicare system. If we went back to the obesity rates that existed in 1980, that would save the medicare system a trillion dollars. So many of the reforms I've suggested in my health care plan will reduce costs not just for the overall system, but also for medicare. One thing I have to say, we are not going to make some of these changes unless we change how business is done in Washington. The reason we can't negotiate prescription drugs under the medicare prescription drug plan is because the drug companies specifically sought and obtained a provision in that Bill that prevented us from doing it.

Thank you.

And unless we change that politics, we're going to continue to see the waste we're seeing in the entitlement programs.

Governor?

I believe universal health care is a right for every American. And one-third of all of our health care budget, \$2.2 trillion, one-third of that goes to administration and bureaucracy, failure to have electronic records. That has to shift to direct care. But prevention is going to be the key. You mentioned medicare. 33% of medicare costs are, today, related to diabetes. We've got to have an elimination, as I did in New Mexico, of junk food in schools. We need to have mandatory 'tis ed. We have to be a country that does more research on stem cell research, on autism, on heart disease, on chronic diseases, on cancer. We spend \$6 Billion on cancer this year. That's two weeks of the Iraq war.

Thank you, governor. We're going to give each of the candidates 30 seconds to make a free open statement. The campaigns drew for the order of these statements, and we're going to hear from the first two candidates now, senator Obama, and then senator Edwards.

Thank you, Carolyn. You know, 40 years ago Dr. King challenged America to act on what he called the fierce urgency of now. And I feel that urgency today. Our nation's at war, the planet's in peril, and Americans and Iowans are working harder and harder just to keep pace. Now, I am confident that we can meet these challenges. I believe we can provide better economic security, that we can restore our standing in the world, and that we can make sure our children have a brighter future, but we can only do it if we have the courage to change. If we can bring the country together, if we can push back against the special interests, and if we level with the American people about how we're going to solve our problems. That's the kind of campaign I've tried to run, and that's the kind of president that I intend to be. I ask that all of you caucus for me.

Thank you. Senator Edwards.

So much at stake in this election. Jobs, the middle class, health care, preserving the environment and the world for future generations, but all those things are at risk. Why? Because of corporate power and corporate greed in Washington, D.C. and we have to take them on. We can't, they can't make a deal with them, you can't hope that they're going to go away. You have to be willing to fight, and I want every caucus goer to know I've been fighting these people and winning my entire life. And if we do this together, rise up together we can make absolutely certain starting here in Iowa that we make this country better than we left it.

Thank you.

Leave it better than we started.

[laughter]

Whatever.

We all knew what you meant.

I thought you did.

Well, I want to come back to some other issues affecting the American economy. You'll have 45 seconds to answer these. Some of our big trading partners commit human rights violations. Considering that poverty and abuse are also often blamed for fostering terrorism, how should we alter trading policies with these countries? Senator Biden?

We should hold them accountable. Every new trade agreement, and I voted against them all since nafta, every new trade agreement should have built into it what we all talk about. Environmental standards and labor standards. But we talk about it in terms of preserving jobs heres, but -- here, but it's also about human rights. Signing an agreement knowing they're going to exploit workers either by polluting their lungs or their drinking water and/or putting them in a position where they're getting paid a couple bucks a week. So it should be a condition to every trade agreement that we engage in.

Governor Richardson?

Well, I believe that human rights is a fundamental tenet of American foreign policy and, therefore, trade policy. And I'm going to be very specific. What we need to do is impose trade sanctions when a country violates human rights and doesn't hold elections, as we should be doing and we're doing in Burma, as we're doing in Sudan, as we probably should consider doing with china. But also I think in any future trade agreement we've got to specify that every nation that we trade with and have a trade agreement has to follow international core labor standards, no child labor, no slave labor, the right for freedom of assembly, collective bargaining, the opportunity to make sure there's job safety, that there's some kind of wage parity to, and also environmental protection. Air quality standards. This is what's important. These are our values. We have to transmit our democratic values of a equality and freedom and human rights when it comes to our trade policy, when it comes to our national security

policy, when it comes with us doing business abroad to promote American trade and exports and get more jobs for our people.

Senator Dodd?

Well, I go back, again, the Harkin amendment adopted a number of years ago back when we thought human rights in the carter administration had some value. He was a strong supporter of it then. Then we walked away from it. Too often people think that human rights and security are opposing interests. Our job, of course, is to advance the security of you are country. We do it in no strocker -- stronger fashion than talking about the rights we embrace here. Not some ad hoc basis where we apply it one place and not another. It needs to be understood from the very beginning that if you're going to do business with the United States, human rights is fundamentally important. That's one way to enhance our reputation, restore our footing on the moral authority that insisting that be a part of the nation's foreign policy.

I feel like I still owe senator Edwards some time here in the mix, so if you want to take this on, I think we're going to move on, and the rest of you will have a chance in a couple of minutes.

Human rights should be central to the way America works with the rest of the world. But if you look at what's happened with American trade policy, look at what America got. Big corporations made a lot of money and are continuing to make a lot of money in china. But what did America get in return? Millions of dangerous Chinese toys, we lost millions of jobs. Right here in Iowa the Maytag plant in Nnewton closed, a guy named doug bishop worked in that plant and his family had work inside that plant literally for generations. Same thing happened, by the way, in the plant that my father worked in growing up. It is so important that we stop allowing these corporate powers and corporate profits to run America's policy. Whether it's trade policy, how we engage with china. This is not good for America, it's not good for American jobs, and it's not good for working people in this country.

And so a logical question, senator Clinton, I'd like you to answer this, should nafta be scrapped or changed?

Well, it should be changed. You know, I think it's important for us to look at the entire context here. You know, you have winners and losers from trade right here in Iowa . People who are gaining because we're exporting, and people who John has rightly pointed out, have lost their jobs. I want to be a president who focuses on smart pro-American trade. I will review every trade agreement, I'm going to ask for revision that is I think will actually benefit our country, particularly our workers, our exporters, and I'm going to go to the international community and get the kind of enforceable

agreements and standards on labor and environment that we have been seeking as Democrats. Because we need to make it clear to the rest of the world that we are an open society, we believe in trade, but we don't want to be the trade patsys of the world. We want to have an equivocal, balanced relationship, and that's what I will do as president. And nafta will be part of that review to try and reform and improve it.

Senator Obama, what do you think about that?

There's no doubt that nafta needs to be amended. And I've already said I would contact the president of Mexico and the prime minister of Canada to make sure that labor agreements are enforceable. But I did want to just go back briefly to the issue of trade and human rights that you had mentioned earlier. I think that folks made a terrific point, that we have to stand for human rights, and that should be part of the trade equation. It is harder for us to do it when we have situations like Guantanamo where we've suspended habeas corpus. To the extent that we are not being true to our values and our ideals, that sends a negative message to the world, and it gives us less leverage, then, when we want to deal with countries that are abusing human rights. So I think it's part and parcel with a larger program of us restoring the traditions that made this country great and made us admired around the world.

Thank you.

Can I just mention one thing here, by the way? Just last evening thanks to colleagues here, I offered legislation on Darfur that passed unanimously through the United States senate last night, so there is some good news on these issues.

Thank you. Now let's hear free statements from the next two candidates, senator Biden and then governor Richardson.

You know, folks talk about this election being about experience or change, it's really about action and pragmatic solutions. And that's what I've done my whole career. The violence against women act, the balkans, helping stop the genocide there. And ladies and gentlemen, you know, leadership is also about knowing who you are, what you believe, and what your priorities are, and what'll what -- what you'll do. I'll start by ending that war in Iraq and also trust the American people. They're ready. There's a hymn in my church, our church, it says may he raise you up on eagles wings and let the light shine on you. The American people are genuinely ready to do that.

Governor?

Well, I'm going to use my 30 seconds to thank the people of Iowa for putting us through this very good process of electing president.

[laughter]

And I say that, and I am going to focus on one issue because I'm concerned about the fact that in the media and the last debate the Iraq war was not discussed. And somehow we're losing sight that that's the most important fundamental issue affecting our country. Not just because we need to come together as a country and this war has divided us enormously, but also because the key to what we do and give health care a chance and education a chance and our kids a chance and creating jobs a chance. And 38 Americans died in November, our troops. We've got thousands, over 60,000 with mental trauma and PTSD coming back, and we have a VA system that is not responding. This is such an urgent fundamental issue, and I can tell you as I've gone to every one of the 99 counties in Iowa, this is the number one issue affecting not just this country but Iowa caucus goers.

Thank you. Most of you have laid out plans to move toward energy independence. Those plans have costs attached and potential negative impacts, at least in the short term. For example, maybe more expensive cars, more expensive feed for livestock, impacts on coal-producing states. So what would you do to turn it into a net benefit for the American economy, and how long might that take? Senator Biden?

It will take, to begin it won't take long at all. We should increase the mileage for automobiles required, we should make sure every new car sold in America is a flex-fuel automobile. We should invest in anything cellulosic research because corn ethanol's not going to take us the whole way. You've got to make it a fundamental priority. You've got to say we are going to make a major change, and that requires a significant investment on renewable energy, moving from 22% to 20% by the end of this next decade in 2020, but the bottom line here is the president's got to make this a moral crusade for the American people. We're going to have to sacrifice to be able to get by, and for the next couple of years in order to be able to get a handle on the energy crisis.

Governor Richardson?

Well, I like to think that I've made my state a clean energy state. I was energy secretary, it's going to take an energy revolution. And I regret that this morning the U.S. Senate, despite the best efforts of all here, killed an energy Bill that would have given more tax credits and incentives to renewable energy. And I think this is tragic. I think fuel efficiency standards in this country should be 50 miles per gallon,

not 35. That's pathetic. I think we need to have 30% renewable sources in our electricity by 2020. I think 2020. Reduce our consumption of oil by 50%. 50 miles per gallon. Also we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and I would do so by 90 better with a cap and trade program. But it's going to take the American people, and it's going to take the president on a bull bully pulpit asking the people to sacrifice a little bit, and I will. And that means being sensitive to mass transit, to air-conditioning, to the way we live. And if we all do this, without mandates, we can reduce our dependence on foreign oil which is unhealthy. 65% of our oil is imported. We're paying close to \$100 to opec today. This has to be an energy revolution led by a president.

Senator Dodd, can you try that in 30 seconds?

Well, look, first of all, you're starting here. Governor Vilsack started, governor culver, the skate legislature, a great step forward. One state, making a difference. We're borrowing a Billion dollars every day to buy oil. I'm the only candidate on this forum here who's advocated a corporate carbon tax. I'm fully aware of the implications of suggesting a tax, but it's not enough to state the goals. We've got to have the courage to stand up and tell you how you get there. Cheaper fuel is always going to win out, unfortunately, so you need to be able to tax this carbon which is killing us and killing this planet. And I'm pleased that al gore, Bill bradley have called our plan the most honest and bold. This is the best gift our generation can give to the next. If we're not tough and honest, nothing much will change.

Senator Clinton?

I think it's imperative we address this issue, and I think your question was will how we do it affect the average American? Yes, it will. That's part of what we're going to have to tell people. I advocate a cap and trade system. What I want to do with the auction of pollution permits is take that money and invest in new technologies, new ways of getting to our objectives that I've outline inside my energy plan. I want to use some of it to cushion the costs that will come on to the American consumer. It's not just enough to tackle global warming, we've got to enlist the help of the next generation. I remember feeling there was something I could do. My fifth grade teacher said it was to study math and science, but it gave me an idea of contributing to my country. When people particularly on the other side of the aisle talk about how we will wreck the economy and impose all of these costs, that is what is happening right now. We cannot sustain the current energy profile in this country. That's why we have to act, and we will act a way that brings the country together and lifts us up and gives us a feeling that we are, once again, reaching for the stars, only we're going to do it right here on earth.

Senator Obama?

This is a moral imperative. I want to make sure the planet is as beautiful for my daughters as it was for me. Now, what that means is there are going to be some increases initially in electricity prices. For example, if we have a cap and trade system. Over time technology will adapt because investors and people who are looking to make money will see that they can make money through green technologies. We're already seeing this. In keokuk they're opening a plant right now that is going to provide 400 well-paying jobs to build wind turbines. And that's the promise of the future. But in order for this to happen, we've got to be courageous enough to not just talk about it in front of the sierra club or organizations that are already sympathetic to us. When I announced my proposal to increase fuel efficiency standards on cars, I went to detroit in front of the automakers and said they had to change their ways. I have to say the room was quiet and nobody clapped, but that's okay. Part of what the next president has to do is not just tell the American people what they want to hear, has to tell them what they need to hear.

Senator Edwards, your turn.

I think first of all we need to recognize what the obstacles are to the change that everyone believes is necessary. And the obstacles are oil companies, power companies, those entrenched interests. And we do need a president who'll ask Americans to be patriotic about something other than war. Who will say to America fortous deal with these issues and deal with them in a serious way, whether it's cap and trade, but either way it's a serious effort to move America off its dependence on carbon-based fuels and deal with what I think is a moral crisis, the future of our planet for our children and grandchildren. We have a responsibility to future generations, an enormous responsibility. I mean, 20 generations came before us. Our parents, our grandparents, and did everything they could do to leave America better than they found it, and to make certain that their children had a better life than they've had. That's what our responsibility is. Our moral responsibility is to rise up as a nation with the right kind of president and the right kind of leadership and go after these huge moral responsibility that is we're faced with.

Thank you.

Carolyn, do you want to ask us to raise our hands about global warming? You didn't get a response from the republicans.

I wasn't doing that today.

We believe in it, we think it's a real problem.

[laughter]

The senate on tuesday -- I'll ask you to raise your hands on this, how about that? Not really, but you'll have a minute to talk about this. The senate on tuesday rejected a proposal to replace traditional subsidies for certain crops and shift the money to conservation and nutrition and biofuels programs. It would have replaced subsidies with an insurance program tie today farm revenues. Senators, none of you were there for the vote. How would you have voted and why? You have one minute.

I think tom harkin's been doing a terrific job in changing the direction of the reforms in agriculture and the idea of encouraging more conservation. I often point out here as I travel around the state, people have reminded me that iowa represents as much as 10%, maybe more, of the most fertile land in the world here. All of us bear a responsibility to see to it that this incredible world global resource is going to be preserved and protected. So move anything a direction here that encourages farms in the state, I think, makes a great deal of sense. Ones that all of us ought to support. Not only iowa ns but across the country so we preserve this valuable resource.

Senator Obama.

I have made as a center piece for my rural farm agenda that we lower the subsidies because too many of them are going to agribusiness. We've got folks in manhattan who are getting farm subsidies, fortune 500 companies who are getting farm subsidies, and as a consequence, family farms are getting squeezed out. This is something you hear about all across rural iowa . So I would cap those subsidies. I think we have to have a structure that are provides protection for farmers if a drought or collapse in market prices, but we have to take that money that is saved, invest in conservation, invest in organic and alternative crops, invest in nutrition programs. Through that process we cannot only save the land, but we can also improve the economic engines in a lot of these rural communities, and that is something that I'm absolutely committed to doing as president of the United States, but it's going to require overcoming the excess influence of agribusiness in Washington.

So would you have voted for or against?

There were elements of the proposal on tuesday that, I think, did not make the changes I would have approached it, so I probably would have voted against it. But there was a vote today that would have capped the subsidies so that it wouldn't be going to these folks who don't deserve it.

Senator Biden?

I would have voted for it. Look, you know, one of the interesting things, first time I ever came out to Iowa was with senator culver in '74, and one thing seems different now. You ride across this magnificent state and you see so much open land and so few farmers. It's kind of fascinating. You know, you'd think you'd see a farmhouse, you know, every 800 acres or so. But this is all about how do you preserve family farmers? And if you continue the system the way it is, it's breaking the system. It's going to just flat break the system. And the cost of, you know, the cost of an acreage has gone up with these excessive payments, the fact that we're not focusing on the things the farm program started out focusing on, helping farmers that are distressed. It's gotten all out of whack, and so it seems to me that we need a radical change. Tom is working hard on that, but I would have voted for it, and I voted for -- I voted today the same way Barack and all the rest of us did to maintain, to lower the caps.

Which we lost, by the way.

Well, I think you're referring to the luger/lautenberg, Bill, and I have been following senator Harkin's lead, so I would have voted against that, and then voted as I did today for the limit on subsidies. There's so much we could do that would really help family farmers and help rural development. I've got a dozen or so of my family farmers from new york traveling around Iowa today talking about family -- talking to family farmers about what I'm trying to do. So we do need a farm Bill, and tom harkin's been working like a trojan to get it done, and he's making progress, but he keeps getting beaten back all the time on conservation, on subsidy limits. When I'm president we're going to finally make these changes because I believe that if we don't, we're going to see increasingly our family farmers as an endangered species. That's not good for any of us, so I'm going to do everything I can to get to the point where we have a farm plan.

I'm going to save that question for the senators in the room, and we're going to move on, I'm afraid. The last two 30-second candidate statements, senator Clinton first and then senator Dodd.

Everywhere I go across Iowa I'm impressed by the people I meet and touched by the stories they tell me, especially the first-time caucus goers, and everyone wants change. Well, everybody on this stage has an idea about how to get change. Some believe you get change by demanding it, some believe you get it by hoping for it. I believe you get it by working hard for change. That's what I've done my entire life. That's what I will do as president. I will end the war in Iraq and bring our sons and daughters home, I will get quality affordable health care for every single American, and I will not rest until every child has a chance to live up to his or her god-given potential. I hope you will caucus for me. Stand up for me, and I'll stand up for you during this campaign and when I'm in the white house.

Thank. Senator Dodd.

Thank you. Let me begin by thanking Iowans. We've been warmly and graciously received, and we're grateful to the state for all of that. One of the things I've tried to do is talk about positive ideas and results here. I think Iowans, like other Americans, want to know not only what you're going to do, but also give us some sense that you've got a record that you believe in ideas that brings people together. It's what I've done for 26 years, working to bring Democrats and Republicans together. I'm a former peace corps volunteer, I'm the only candidate to have done that public service, and we believe very strongly that that kind of background and history contributes well to the decisions a president must make. We ask for your vote. It's about choosing the best candidate who can win and who can lead our country.

Thank you. I want to move to another topic that affects Americans' ability to compete in a global economy, and that's education. Please describe the key features of what you consider to be the best education system in the world, and tell us your goals and timetable for making U.S. schools among the best. Senator Edwards, one minute.

The starting place is to get the children young and get them on the right track, which is why we ought to have universal pre-k for 4-year-olds in America. We also should go younger than that to deal with nutrition, health care needs of younger children. I think we ought to have a national teaching university where we attract the smartest, brightest young people in America to this university, and we pay for their education. Then they go out to the places in America where we so desperately need them. I think we ought to give bonus incentive pay to teachers who are willing to go to the most difficult places. We need to radically change no child left behind, and if that doesn't work, we should get rid of it. And we need second-chance schools. Because in so many places in America we still have two public school systems. I mean, I would never have been able to do in this country had I not had a great public school education. It was the foundation for everything that I've done, and what you see in America is you see very wealthy suburban school that is get everything they need, and then poor rural schools, poor inner city schools that are struggling.

Thank you.

I am committed to doing something to create one school system that works for everybody.

Thank you. Governor Richardson.

Well, I would make education one of the top priorities if not the top priority as president. And I would start early. Preschool for every child under 4. You get to kids before you're 4. Full-day kindergarten, that is desperately needed. A timetable, I would say that within 15 years Americans become number one in the world again in science and math. I would hire new science and math teachers, I would create science and math academies, I would revise and strengthen the high school curriculums with local control. Here's my position on no child left behind, I'd scrap it. It's a burden on schools, it's an unfunded mandate, it hurts all kinds of kids and achievement. What else would I do? I would recognize that the key to our educational system is a good teacher, and we disregard our teachers. We disrespect them, we don't pay them enough. I'd have a minimum wage starting salary of \$40,000, and then finally I would have art in the schools as a way to stimulate kids being stronger in science and math proficiency. But if we're going to be competitive, if we're going to keep families together, if we're going to be a family that values community, education is the key.

Governor, I do have to ask a follow-up question, and that is what, how should people look at the education in your state and where education ranks in your state and interpret from that what changes you would make in America?

Well, we've made enormous progress in my state. We were 49th in the world, in the country on teachers' salaries, we're 28th today. Educational achievement has increased. One of the problems with no child left behind in my state is that we have 11% native Americans, very rural, and so it's very hard for that achievement gap to be narrowed. Teacher training has increased in my school, teacher performance, testing has dramatically improved. We've reduced the achievement gap. I have to deal with this issue every day just like governor culver.

Thank you. I've dealt with these issues.

Thank you. Senator Obama?

A lot of good ideas have been mentioned. Oftentimes minority children are already behind when they start school. Not just talking about how great teachers are but giving them more money and more support. Changing no child left behind so that we're not just teaching to a test and crowding out programs like art and music that are so critical. You asked earlier about sacrifices that I'll ask from the American people. One of the things that I want to do is get parents reengaged in instilling a sense of excellence in their children. And I've said this all across the country when I talk to parents about education, government has to fulfill its obligations to fund education, but parents have to do their job too. We've got to turn off the tv set, we've got to put away the video game, and we have to tell our children that session not a passive activity, you have to be actively engaged in it. If we encourage that

attitude and our community is enforcing it, I have no doubt we can compete with anybody in the world.

Senator Dodd?

I've been asked what's the single most important issue? The answer I've given a thousand times is education is the key to everything who we are, not only economically, individually, and collectively, but our system of government depends on an educated population. I want to underscore what Barack just said, we've got to begin with parents. Parents are the first teachers, and tune we have 37 million people live anything poverty and 12 million of those children, they don't get the right start. I come from a family of teachers. One of my sisters just retired teaching 4 1 years, it is staggering to what is happening to these kids. It's going to take leadership to talk about the importance of this underlying question as of who we are as a people.

Senator Clinton, you wanted in on that?

I do, because I know that the president has a certain bully pulpit that can be used on behalf of education to do exactly what Chris and Barack and others have said. I'm privileged, you know, to have a family that supported me in education. My daughter's here today, obviously Bill and I were incredibly focused on her education. So the federal government only pays 10% of the costs of public education. Let's use those dollars strategically. Let's do what we said we were going to do. How about funding special education which we never have to the extent we promised? How about fully funding whatever we ask the local communities to do? I want to have a very holistic view of this because if you go into a classroom today, it didn't look like the 21st century in most instances. It looks very familiar to me who was last in a classroom decades ago. I will use both the bully pulpit and legislative and executive efforts to do that.

Senator Edwards, 30 seconds.

Well, I've already talked about education, you asked me about this in the beginning, I think, but what I would add on to that is if you think about the period posthigh school, postk-12, there's such enormous work to do to make sure that kids get to go to college, first of all. I've suggested any young person who's willing to work went they're in -- when they're in college, we pay for their books. And I also want us to think in a bigger way about what we do over the long term to create an infrastructure that allows America's work force, when they're 30, 35, 40, 45 to continue to be the best-educated, most innovative work force on the planet.

Okay. I mistook you for raising your hand again, so that was extra time. Senator Biden?

[laughter]

Well, the reason my wife's not here today is she's teaching. She teaches full time, and she has a doctorate in education. But you don't need a doctorate to know there's four things everybody out there knows we have to do. Every parent knows it intuitively. Got to start kids to school earlier, got to put them in smaller classes. In order to do that you need 100,000 more teachers, and -- teachers, but you've got to pay teachers. The pay's not competitive, and lastly you've got to provide access to college, and that costs money. And we can't easily pay for it. It's about our priorities.

Thank you. In light of the big needs and the financial realities we've talked about up to this point, what realistically do you believe you could accomplish in your first year as president? We're going to go down the line, senator Obama?

I will call in the joint chiefs of staff and tell them they have a new mission which is to in a responsible, careful way end this war in Iraq, bring our combat troops home. I will initiate the kind of diplomacy that's necessary to stabilize the country and the region as we're pulling out. Number two, I'll call in my new attorney general to review any executive order that's been made by George Bush. Number three, we're going to have an open conversation with all the key players in the health care arena to make sure that we are moving forward on a plan to provide coverage to every single American and to save money so that we can actually afford it over the long haul.

Thank. Senator Biden, 30 seconds.

I will call the joint chiefs in to implement the Biden plan to end the war in Iraq, and the Congress is about to vote for it as well. And most international leaders have endorsed it. Secondly, I would in my inaugural address make it clear to the world that we were abandoning the Bush policy with regard to torture, the Bush policy with regard to holding prisoners. And thirdly, I believe by picking things Americans value the most and we can take on interest groups the quickest on, I'd insure every single child in America and provide catastrophic health insurance for every child before the first year's out. And lastly, I would, in fact, implement the preschool education proposal that I have here. I think I'd get that done in the first year.

Thank. Governor?

First year I'd end the war, all troops out within a year, no residual forces, a specific plan. I'd make a

major effort to pass the first year, and I think we could, universal health care. It'll take two or three years to implement. I'd announce an energy revolution because I think this is one of the most urgent domestic and national security priorities, to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. And then I would simply say to the American people as your president, I'm going to follow the constitution of the United States. And that means bringing back habeas corpus, not using torture as a tool in our foreign policy, rejoining the Geneva Conventions, not eavesdropping on our own citizens, that means restoring ourselves as a nation that is going to respect the balance between the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branch, that we're going to be the conscience of the world, not the world's policemen.

Thank you. Thank you, that was longer than Senator Biden's answer.

Every one of his are longer -- I think he's color blind. I'm not sure.

[laughter]

Senator Dodd?

It's going to be a long year, I can see.

[laughter]

First thing I'd try and do is change the discourse, the shrillness of the discussion here. We're divided as a country by the political leadership. That has to change. Every other subject matter we're talking about depends upon having a president who will change the nature of our conversation. We care about the same things, we want the same things. I've said the very first day I'll do whatever I can by executive power to give you back your constitution. I've been campaigning on it daily for the last year and a half. I've been active trying to legislate in this area. Certainly the war but also a robust diplomacy in the Middle East as well. It's about engaging in a constructive and positive way to offer hope to people, and I won't wait until January 20th. A week after the election I'll convene people to begin talking about the stakeholders coming together to shape a policy that will give us answers on those two issues.

Senator Edwards?

I'm listening, there are a lot of promises being made. I think people deserve to know the truth. We're faced with huge, huge challenges. I will end the war, I'll close Guantanamo, and I'll begin the process of fighting for health care reform, universal health care, attacking global warming, but none of those

things are going to happen unless we have a president of the United States who calls on the American people to join together to take this democracy and take this country back. Because what's happening in America today is absolutely clear. We have a small group of entrenched interests, corporate powers, corporate greed, the most wealthy people in America who are controlling what's happening in the democracy, and we have to take it back starting right here in Iowa .

Thank you. Senator Clinton?

Well, I'm going to be busy because I know how important it is to get started quickly. I will send bipartisan emissaries around the world with a very simple message, the era of cowboy diplomacy is over. We're going to start working together to try and find common ground wherever possible. I will review executive orders, rescind those that undermine the constitution and betray the rule of law and issue some like, for example, not interfering with science. I'll ask the congress to send me everything that bush vetoed like stem cell research and begin to prepare my legislative and budget proposals for the congress. Because you have to move quickly in order to get off to a good start, and that's what I intend to do.

Thank you. We're going to shift gears a bit. Voters have told us that character and leadership qualities matter as much or more than many issues. The next set of questions is entirely about character and leadership, and you'll have a minute to answer. Senator Clinton, during your time as first lady, there were criticisms that your process to develop your health care plan was too closed and secretive. Some Iowa ns we hear from are worried that your presidency would operate the same way. As president, how would you insure that your administration doesn't withhold information from the public even if it gave ammunition to your critics?

Well, I learned a lot from that experience, and clearly one of the principle lessons is that you have to have a very strong communication strategy. And we didn't do that. And I have certainly learned from that during the remaining years in the white house when I helped to create the children's health insurance program and did a lot of other work with the Clinton administration and, of course, now in the senate. I want to have an open and transparent government. I have put forth very specific plans for how I would reform the government, put as much as we can on the internet. Now we've got this tool, let's use it. Let's have as much sunlight as we can possibly gather. Let's make sure we have an administration that works with the congress instead of denying legitimate requests for information and witness testimony and all the rest that this administration, unfortunately, has done. I think it's also very important that we end the revolving door of lobbyists, that we move toward public financing. I've signed on to russ fine gold's Bill because I think it is the best piece of legislation to try to make those changes, so I'm committed to open, transparent government, and I've learned a lot, and I think I can

apply those lessons.

Thank you. Senator Biden, you and your campaign have had a number of occasions to correct or clarify things you've said relating to race including your remarks about senator Obama being, quote, clean and articulate, your comment about Indians working at 7 eleven, and recently to the Washington post in which you spoke about race while describing disparities between schools in Washington, D.C. and Iowa . Do these gaffes or miss understandings or however you would characterize them indicate you're uncomfortable talking about race, or are people being too sensitive?

I think that I have my whole career, I got involved in public policy, I got involved in politics because of the civil rights movement. It's the overwhelming core of my support in my home state. I get the overwhelming majority, over 95% of the vote of minorities in my state. I may have phrased those things wrongly, but when I talked about the indian population, I was making the point they're building families. They're buying businesses, 7 elevens and bun can doe -- duncan doughnuts, and they're making families. The point I was make about Washington, Barack made the point, he said that minorities start off with a disadvantage, with a gap, an achievement gap cha exists before they walk into school, minorities. So I was making the same point. It may be possible because I speak so bluntly that people misunderstand, but no one who knows me in my state, no one who I've worked with in the United States congress has ever wondered about my commitment to civil rights and civil liberties, and if you take a look at my record as chairman of the judicial committee, chairman for 16 years starting with the voting rights exact working straight through to voting against constitutional amounts on bussing. My credentials are as good as anyone who's ever run for United States on civil rights.

Here, here.

[applause]

Senator Obama?

I've worked with Joe Biden, I've seen his leadership, I have absolutely no doubt about what is in his heart and the commitment that he's made with respect to racial equality in this country. So I will provide some testimony, as they say in church.

[laughter]

That Joe is on the right side of the issues and is fighting every day for a better America.

Thank you. Senator Edwards, you've talked a lot about reducing the power of wealth and special interests in the country. The same groups often responsible for getting things done in Washington, too. How will you accomplish your agenda after spending a lot of months calling these groups corrupt?

Here's what I believe. What I believe is that there are very well-financed insurance companies, drug companies, oil companies, some people argue that we're going to sit at a table with these people and they're going to voluntarily give their power away. I think it is a complete fantasy, it will never happen. I don't think anybody in America wants to see politicians fighting with each other. But I think they understand that we have an epic battle in front of us to do what needs to be done for all the American people. All the things we've talked about today, health care, attacking global warming, doing something about the tax policy that favors the richest Americans, doing something about our trade policy. Every single one of those things depends on winning this battle. We cannot do it if we don't win this battle, and all I would say is I've been fighting these people, big corporations, for 20 years in courtrooms and then in public life. I have been fighting them my entire life, and I have been winning my entire life. And if you want a fighter, to voters, to caucus goers, you're looking at somebody -- I'm 54 years old, who has spent his entire life engaged in this fight and winning this fight that we must win to be able to do the things we want to do for this country.

Thank you. Senator Dodd, you write in your book that you still struggle with the memories of when your father was censured by the senate in 1967 for alleged misuse of campaign money. How much are you motivated in your run for president by a desire to restore the Dodd family name that was hurt by the censure?

I'm motivated by my family because of their public service. About a week or two before my father passed away he was asked by a reporter if he'd do it all over again. I'll never forget hearing his answer, he said he'd do it again in a minute. Franklin Roosevelt's new deal, he said there's no other calling in life where you can do as much for as many people as you can through public service. Doctors only have so many patients, but a well-intentioned public servant can make a difference. That's my motivation, I want to carry that tradition on. That's why I'm running for president.

Thank you.

[applause]

Governor Richardson, you promote your experience as energy secretary among your credentials.

During that time, though, there were serious questions about lax security at the country's national labs, allegations that scientist -- a scientist breached security at Los Alamos. You told Tim Russert in may we had some issues, but I think on the whole I was a good energy secretary. In this era when Americans are fearful about our national security, talk about that part of your resumé.

Well, and i, and I will add that in 25 years in public service there are probably many more other mistakes that I've made. But I want to say to you that the issue of protecting our nuclear secrets, he did plead guilty. I do feel that he was incarcerated in solitary confinement. This was wrong. I tried to change it, but I didn't work hard enough. The point is that we do have, in all of our lives as a congressman, as a U.N. ambassador, as a candidate, I've made a lot of gaffes, and I'm glad you didn't raise 'em.

[laughter]

But, you know, I'll stand, I'll stand behind my record as energy secretary. I brought compensation to workers that had -- and other contamination, I brought forth a renewable portfolio standard that says electricity has to be renewable in this country. There are some cases where I wish I'd been stronger, but I don't apologize for trying to protect our nuclear secrets, and we should have done a lot more.

Thank you. Senator Obama, you have Bill Clinton's former national security adviser, state department policy director, and navy secretarial among others advising you. With relatively little foreign policy experience of your own, how will you rely on so many Clinton advisers and still deliver the kind of break from the past that you're promising voters?

[laughter]

I want to hear that.

[laughter]

Well, Hillary, I'm looking forward to you advising me as well.

[laughter]

[applause]

I want to gather up talent from everywhere. You know, we haven't talked too much about the war, but one of the points that I've tried to make during the course of this year during the campaign is I want to

change the mind set that got us into war. And because I think that since 9/11 we've had a president who essentially fed us a politics of fear. And distorted our foreign policy in profound ways. And I think that there are a lot of good people in the Clinton years, the carter years, George bush one who understand that our military power is just one component of our power, and I revere what our military does. And I will do whatever it takes as commander in chief to keep the American people safe. But I know part of keeping us safe is restoring our respect in the world. And I think those advisings me -- advising me agree with that. Initiating contacts with Muslim leaders around the world, doubling our efforts in terms of foreign aid, all those are designed to create long-term security by creating long-term prosperity around the world.

Thank you. Time is getting a little short, now, so the answers to these questions will need to be 30 seconds or less. As president would you use signing statements to assert that certain acts of congress conflict with your interpretation of the constitution and your obligation to enforce those laws? Senator Clinton, 30 seconds.

I would use them the way presidents before this president used them. They were used to clarify the law, to perhaps make it more coherent with other laws that had been passed, and then along came president bush. He's used them as essentially a form of veto. He did it to a piece of legislation I passed where I said if you're going to have a fema director, it should be somebody with experience handling emergencies.

[laughter]

I know. We actually had to pass it there us the congress. And when George bush signed the Bill, he used a signing statement to say I don't have to follow that unless I choose to. So let's quit with all the of the perversion of the constitution and the rule of law, let's get back to what presidents did in both parties and hopefully remove the legacy of George w. Bush.

Senator Edwards, 30 seconds on that.

Well, it's true that bush has not only in the use of signing statements but in every conceivable way expanded the executive power. And this is not the way our founding fathers intended this government to operate. And what I will do is go back to the way signing statements have been used historically. And on top of that, I'm going to make absolutely certain that our three branches of government are, in fact, co-equal. We don't have a royal presidency, we don't have a king of the United States, whatever George bush thinks, he is not king. And it's important for the American people to understand that their president respects them and understands that the oval office and the white house and the presidency

doesn't belong to one person. It belongs to the American people.

Thank you. Well, we're all about to get the hook, so I'm going to get us down to the end. Tell us your new year's resolution for 2008. We're going to start with senator Clinton and just go down the line, and you have 30 seconds.

Well, my new year's resolution is multipart, as you might guess. You know, I have a lot of things I think about resolving, and, you know, there are personal sides to it. Obviously spending time with my family, trying to do what some of my colleagues do religiously, and that's exercise. But I'm also resolved to do the very best job I can in this campaign. To rebuild the optimism and confidence of the American people, to run a campaign that Democrats can be proud of and that independents and republicans can support and then to go into the white house with the country behind me and head to serve. -- ready to serve.

Thank you, senator Edwards.

To remember that in the midst of political hoopla the glorification of politicians and presidential candidates that somewhere in America tonight a child will go to bed hungry, somewhere in America tonight a family will have to go to the emergency room and beg for health care for a sick child, that somewhere in America today a father who's worked for 30 or 40 years to support his family will lose his job, and that that's what's at stake in this election. What's not at stake are any of us. All of us are going to be just fine no matter what happens in this election. But what's at stake is whether America is going to be fine.

Senator Dodd?

Well, again, the motivation of standing before you today and running for the presidency. I want to see our country regain its optimism, a sense of hope about its future, I want to see us regain our moral authority around the world. I'm deeply sad that we've moved from a generation where the word Nuremberg used to mean something. Obviously spend as much time as you can with your family, and lastly, that Iowa caucus, and you caucus correctly on January 3rd.

[laughter]

Who was that for, Chris?

[laughter]

Governor?

Well, my new year's resolution is one that I have every year, and that's to lose weight, and I'm going to do it again.

[laughter]

But, you know, that's on a personal level. I wish, this is what I wish, I wish that the congress and the president end their dysfunctional relationship and address the problems that affect this country, health care, ending the war, torture, you know, energy. It just seems that everything they do, nothing ever happens. And my last request ask that I -- request is that I continue to stay positive. I think we should as democratic candidates stay positive, be optimistic, not tear each other down.

Thank you.

The American people want to see us together debating the may major issues affecting the country.

Thank you, senator Biden.

I make the same one every year, remember where I came from. You know, everything can, your whole life can change in a split second. Things are always beyond your control, and I just, I every year make a resolution to try to remember what it was like when things were really bad so that I enjoy, treat my family, treat my colleagues, treat everybody the way they should be treated when things are good. But just remember, remember where you came from.

Thank you. Senator Obama?

Well, I want to be a better father, be a better husband, and I want to remind myself constantly that this is not about me. What I'm doing today. It's an enormous strain on the family, and yesterday I went and bought a Christmas tree with my girls. And we had about two hours before I had to fly back to Washington to vote. And the only reason that is worth that sacrifice is if somehow my participation in public life is having a broader impact on their lives and the lives of children all across the country. And so I have to constantly remind myself not to be timid, not to be distorted by the fears of losing in order to make a real difference in the lives of the American people.

Thank you. We're going to have one last question before we close, and we'll go back down the line.

You all have spent an extraordinary amount of time in Iowa , and there is a lot of debate about Iowa 's role in this process. What are the lessons from Iowa ? 20 seconds, senator Clinton.

Well, I want to thank the people of Iowa because it's been a wonderful experience for me. I've eaten my way across the state.

[laughter]

Had a great time at the state fair, and I through the intimacy, the personal connection, the relationship building that I've experienced over this last year has just been extraordinary for me. And I will never forget the people of Iowa , and I hope that –

Thank you.

I will be a good president for those people who believed in me.

Twenty seconds, senator Edwards.

Well, the Iowa caucuses are crucial for a simple reason, because instead of seeing us for a few seconds on television, they see us up close in their living rooms and in town hall meetings which means they can judge what they believe is crucial to the next president which is having somebody who's honest and sincere and can be trusted, and having someone who's driven in their gut by the fight to make sure that every single American gets the same opportunity in this country.

Thank you. Senator Dodd?

Well, aside from enjoying everything on a stick from the state fair –

[laughter]

I love the independence and the notion that Iowans I think at this time and historically as well make up their own minds. They're being told all the time deciding what you're going to do on a caucus night, and you have proven over and over and over again you make up your own minds, and that's a good thing for America.

Thank you. Governor?

Well, I've studied the history of the Iowa caucuses. You like underdogs.

[laughter]

And you like, you like to shake things up. You don't like the national media and the smarty pants telling you who's going to be the next president. And I've been enormously enriched personally by my contact with Iowa ns. You're tough, you scrutinize, you look into our eyes and our hearts, you know the issues, and I've been privileged to be part of this process. Now I hope you vote for me.

Senator Biden?

Iowa deserves to be first, and the reason they do is because they take it so seriously. I've never met a group of people either in Shenandoah, up in the north, wherever you are. People take it seriously, and you always treat us with respect. I've never walked out of a place with someone -- without someone saying, thank you for coming, senator.

Senator Obama?

Well, I think that the Iowa caucuses give people a chance to lift the hood and kick the tears and take us out for a test drive. I've been struck by just the core decency of the American people. Sometimes they don't get the information they need, but when they're presented with good choices, they make the right decision. There's a generosity of spirit that I think the next president can tap, and I'm looking forward to doing well in this caucuses and leading this country.

Thank you. And that wraps us up. You can find out more about this debate and yesterday's republican debate at pbs.org. I want to thank the candidates for being here as well as Iowa public television, the studio audience, and everyone at home. Happy holidays, everyone.

[applause]

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