

California Republican debate transcript

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Moderators:

Chris Matthews, MSNBC

John Harris, Editor in Chief, Politico.com

Jim Vandehei, Executive Editor, Politico.com

Candidates:

Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan.

Former Gov. James Gilmore, R-Va.

Former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, R-N.Y.C.

Former Gov. Mike Huckabee, R- Ark.

Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas

Former Gov. Mitt Romney, R- Mass

Rep. Tom Tancredo, R-Col.

Former Gov. Tommy Thompson, R-Wis.

Moderator: In the NBC-Wall Street Journal poll, just 22 percent believe this country is on the right track.

Mayor Giuliani, how do we get back to Ronald Reagan's morning in America?

Former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani: We get back to it with optimism. The same situation that I faced in New York City; when I became mayor of New York City, 65, 70 percent thought New York City was going on the wrong track. And what I did was, I set policies and programs of growth, of moving people toward prosperity, security, safety.

And what we can borrow from Ronald Reagan, since we are in his library, is that great sense of optimism that he had. He led by building on the strengths of America, not running America down.

And we're a country that people love to come to, they want to come to this country with a shining city on the hill. So we should solve our immigration issue, including illegal immigration, from our strengths, not our weaknesses.

We're a country that has the greatest health care system in the world. It's flawed, it needs to be fixed, but we should fix it from our strengths. We shouldn't turn it into socialized medicine.

Those are the things that Ronald Reagan taught us: You lead from optimism.

Giuliani: You will lead from hope, and we should never retreat in the face of terrorism. Terrible mistake.

Moderator: Senator McCain, most of the public pessimism today has to do with Iraq. What would you need, as commander in chief, to win the war in Iraq?

Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.): I would need the support of the American people. I would need to be able to show them some success in Iraq, both on the battlefield as well as with the Maliki government. We have a new general; we have a new strategy. That strategy can succeed.

The young men and women who are serving are the best of America. I believe that if we bring about stability in the neighborhoods in Iraq and have the Maliki government govern, you are going to succeed.

My friends, when the majority leader of the United States Senate says we've lost the war, the men and women that are serving in Iraq reject that notion.

And, if we lost, then who win? Did Al Qaida win? When on the floor of the House of Representatives they cheer -- they cheer -- when they pass a withdrawal motion that is a certain date for surrender, what were they cheering?

Surrender? Defeat?

We must win in Iraq. If we withdraw, there will be chaos; there will be genocide; and they will follow us home.

Moderator: Do you need anything, beyond what the president has now, to win the war?

McCain: Now I think it's on the right track. The war was terribly mismanaged. The war was terribly mismanaged and we now have to fix a lot of the mistakes that were made. Books have been written.

But we have a new strategy and a new general. And these young men and women are committed to winning.

Moderator: Governor Thompson, if you're commander in chief and you want to win this war in Iraq, what do you need to do to win it?

Former Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson: First, you have to support the troops. There's an undying bond in America that, any time an American soldier is in harm's way, we have to protect him.

Beyond that, there are three things that I have laid out. Number one, I believe the al-Maliki government should be required to vote as to whether or not they want America in their country.

If they vote yes, it gives us a legitimacy for being there. If they vote no, we should get out.

Secondly, there are 18 territories in Iraq, just like we have 50 states in America. I would require those territories to elect governments, just like we do in our states.

And if you do so, the Shiites will elect Shiites. Sunnis will elect Sunnis. Kurds will elect Kurds. And you won't have this internecine civil war.

Third, I would split the oil reserves: one-third to the federal government, one-third to the state governments and one-third to every man, woman and child. If every man, woman and child is getting part of the oil proceeds, they're going to have a vested interest in their country.

They will be purchasing goods. They will be investing in small businesses. And they will be building the country on democratic grounds in Iraq.

Moderator: Congressman Hunter?

Representative Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.): Yeah, very briefly, Chris, the key to winning in Iraq is standing up the Iraqi military. There are 129 battalions in the Iraqi army. We need to make sure that every one of those battalions moves into an operational setting, gets a three- or four-month military operation in a contentious zone.

At that point, they can move into the combat field.

Hunter: They can start displacing American units. And America's heavy combat units can rotate out. That's the right way to leave Iraq.

Moderator: Governor Romney, in that same NBC-Wall Street Journal poll that Chris mentioned, 55 percent of Americans say victory is just not possible in Iraq. They've made up their minds on this war.

Why shouldn't they have a president who will listen?

Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney: Well, if you wanted to have a president that just followed the polls, all we need to do is plug in our TVs and have them run the country. But that's not what America wants. It's not what America needs. We need leadership that's strong and that shows America what we can do to lead the world.

Ronald Reagan was a president of strength. His philosophy was a philosophy of strength: a strong military, a strong economy and strong families.

With regards to Iraq, there are a lot of people that say, let's just get out. I want to get our troops home as soon as I possibly can. But, at the same time, I recognize we don't want to bring them out in such a precipitous way that we cause a circumstance that would require us to come back.

Because if we leave in the wrong way, the Iranians could grab the Shia south, or Al Qaida could play a dominant role among the Sunnis, or you could have the border with Turkey destabilized by the Kurds -- and, as a result, you could have regional conflict develop.

But with that occurring, you could have our neighbors get involved, our friends get involved around Iraq, and we could have to come back again.

That's why it's so essential for us at this critical time to support the al-Maliki effort to bring strength and stability to Baghdad, to Al Anbar. Hopefully they're good signs that we're going to see increasing, and we'll be able to bring our troops home safely.

Moderator: Time, Governor.

Let me to go to Senator Brownback with the next question. Recent polls in the Islamic world reveal a sea of hostility toward the United States, feeding what General Petraeus calls the central front of Al Qaida in Iraq.

How do we win this war if every dead terrorist is so easily replaced?

Senator Sam Brownback (R-Kan.): I think we win the war by standing up for our values and working with those who will work with us.

I think you have to remember that while we're in a war on terrorism, there are a number of people that are with us, that work with us around the world, and also in the Islamic world. We're partnering with a number of moderate Muslim regimes.

And that's something I think we need to convey into the Muslim world as well, that these are groups -- the Al Qaida group, the militant Islamic fascists -- they're trying to unseat moderate Muslim regimes.

And I think we need to engage those regimes -- regimes in Pakistan, regimes in Egypt -- as long as we also confront those regimes, like in Iran, that are the lead -- Iran is the lead sponsor of terrorism around the world. And we've got to be very confrontational and very aggressive there.

So it's to engage those that'll work with us, contain and confront those that won't, and convey that to the Muslim world.

Moderator: How do you deal with the problem revealed in a recent Zogby poll that in countries that are mentioned you mentioned, like Jordan, Morocco, Turkey, another Islamic country, 10, 12 percent of the people support us, the rest are angry at us? Doesn't that create a sea of recruitment opportunity for our enemy?

And I'm just asking: Do we have to reduce that temperature of hatred before we win the war, or simply continue to fight the terrorists?

Brownback: Well, I think we have to do both, Chris. I mean, you have to engage in those countries. We have to engage in Jordan, and I think we need to engage with all the tools of state that we have: economic tools, along with foreign relations, diplomatic and military tools as well.

But at the same time, when we do that, you've got to confront. You've got to confront those that are coming after us. And they've been doing this for over a decade -- coming at us -- from before 9/11.

We cannot be weak on this whatsoever.

Moderator: Governor Huckabee, I'd like to get your views about how you balance loyalty and accountability. Would you have fired Don Rumsfeld before last November?

Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee: I think I would've done that before the election. I certainly wouldn't have said that we are not going to do it and then, right after the election, done so. But that's the president's call.

Clearly there was a real error in judgment, and that primarily had to do with listening to a lot of folks who were civilians in suits and silk ties and not listening enough to the generals with mud and blood on their boots and medals on their chest.

Those generals told us, early on, it would take 300,000 troops to successfully go in and stabilize Iraq. Instead we gave them a limited number of troops and a budget and said, you have to do it with this.

I think that's something, now, we understand was a mistake. But rather than simply walking away and leaving the Middle East in a complete disastrous chaos that will spread to the region and to the rest of the world, it's important that we finish the job, that we do it right, rather than have to go back and some day do it over.

Moderator: Why don't we start with Governor Gilmore there, and ask you a general question, as people who are political and know the mood of the country, starting with you -- you've been a military man. You were in Army intelligence.

But on this general question, the Rumsfeld removal was perhaps timed to the election. Do you think a general shake-up in this administration's Cabinet, right now, would be good for the administration?

Former Virginia Governor James Gilmore (R-Va.): I think there have been a lot of changes in the administration over the last number of years.

We've seen those changes.

But the fundamental point that we have to remember is this has been coming on for quite a long time. Decades this has been coming on. And I think we got distracted at the end of the Cold War, when we were thinking about the end of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, thanks to the president in whose name this library is named. And, instead, we didn't pay attention sufficiently to the entire Middle East.

And I see this Iraq problem as part of an entire Middle East issue, and it's sort of a fundamental problem that we're going to have an honest conversation with the American people about. We're going to have to engage in the Middle East, and we're going to have to do it for an extended and a long period of time.

It isn't just an Iraq issue. This is an issue of the challenges that we're facing between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the challenge between Sunnis and Shiites -- the problem with people on the street not even agreeing with their own regimes.

There is a great deal that has to be done, and the president is going to have to bring the American people forward into a major commitment in many areas -- one is foreign policy -- and there will have to be a new commitment to the Middle East.

Moderator: Congressman Paul, you voted against the war. Why are all your fellow Republicans up here wrong?

Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas): That's a very good question. And you might ask the question, why are 70 percent of the American people now wanting us out of there, and why did the Republicans do so poorly last year?

So I would suggest that we should look at foreign policy. I'm suggesting very strongly that we should have a foreign policy of non-intervention, the traditional American foreign policy and the Republican foreign policy.

Throughout the 20th century, the Republican Party benefited from a non-interventionist foreign policy. Think of how Eisenhower came in to stop the Korean War. Think of how Nixon was elected to stop the mess in Vietnam.

How did we win the election in the year 2000? We talked about a humble foreign policy: No nation-building; don't police the world. That's conservative, it's Republican, it's pro-American -- it follows the founding fathers. And, besides, it follows the Constitution.

I tried very hard to solve this problem before we went to war by saying, "Declare war if you want to go to war. Go to war, fight it and win it, but don't get into it for political reasons or to enforce U.N. resolutions or pretend the Iraqis were a national threat to us.

Moderator: It's time.

This is a question for Senator McCain. It's along those lines of intervention. Former Tennessee Senator Fred Thompson said that Iran has already committed acts of war. Do you agree?

And, secondly, as part of that, what's your tripwire for a U.S. strike in Iran?

McCain: Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism. We all know that. Iran continues their efforts to build nuclear weapons. Iran is now exporting lethal IEDs and jihadists and suicide bombers into Iraq, killing American soldiers.

The Iranians encouraged Hezbollah to attack Israel from Lebanon recent. Iran poses one of the greatest threats to the security of the world, and in the Middle East.

I believe the Iranians have got -- we have got to bring greater pressures, diplomatic, economic, political, join with our European allies who still fear greatly the effort of the cutoff of oil from -- into Europe.

We have to work together. If the Russians and the Chinese are not helpful to us, then we had better figure out a way to put additional pressures, encouraging democracy and freedom without Iraq, which is a very cultured -- within Iran, which is a very cultured society.

At the end of the day we cannot allow Iran...

Moderator: OK.

McCain: ... to acquire nuclear weapons.

Moderator: Let me follow up a little bit, Senator.

McCain: Sure.

Moderator: What is your trip wire? Is it the building of a nuclear weapon? The threat to use a weapon once built? A delivery system? Is it preemptive or preventive?

McCain: My greatest fear is the Iranians acquire a nuclear weapon and give it to a terrorist organization.

And there is a real threat of them doing that.

The trip wire is that if they acquire these weapons -- and our intelligence tells us that this is a real threat to the state of Israel, to other states in the region.

But I want to emphasize, Chris, there's lots of additional efforts that can be made and must be made before we consider that option. There's lots of things we can do.

That is the, ultimately, final option. And I don't think we can exercise it at this time.

Moderator: OK.

Congressman Tancredo, along those lines, imagine you're president of the United States and this is a likely or possible scenario, certainly plausible: You get a call from the prime minister of Israel -- who's now Ehud Olmert -- saying Israel is about to strike Iran's nuclear sites and he wants U.S. help.

What do you say?

Representative Tom Tancredo (R-Col.): I say that, look, when we -- if you look at this issue and stand back for just a second and say, there are two kinds of Irans that we are going to have to deal with here: one headed by a gentleman who believes that he is going to be responsible for the coming of the 12th imam and a guy with a bomb, that should put us in the position of saying that anything we can do to stop that is imperative.

And if Israel is put in that position, and we need to be involved in order to protect both ourselves and the Israelis, then of course we respond in the appropriate fashion.

Moderator: If the prime minister asks you for help, you say you will say yes?

Tancredo: Well, there are conditions, of course, under which we would say yes. But I'm telling you that if they are -- if there is a threat to the existence of Israel, which is, by the way, I think a potential threat to the existence of the United States, then you have to come to that -- the aid of Israel.

Moderator: Mayor Giuliani, on that point?

Giuliani: It really depends on what our intelligence says. I mean, the reality is, the use of military force against Iran would be very dangerous. It would be very provocative. The only thing worse would be Iran being a nuclear power.

It's the worst nightmare of the Cold War; isn't it? The nuclear weapons in the hands of an irrational person, an irrational force.

Ahmadinejad is clearly irrational.

Giuliani: He has to understand it's not an option; he cannot have nuclear weapons. And he has to look at an American president and he has to see Ronald Reagan. Remember, they looked in Ronald Reagan's eyes, and in two minutes, they released the hostages.

Moderator: Thank you.

Governor Gilmore of Virginia, when speaking about Osama bin Laden last week, Governor Romney said, quote, "It's not worth moving heaven and Earth, spending billions of dollars just trying to catch one person."

Senator McCain called that naive.

Who's right?

Gilmore: You know, I think -- well, I think we do have to do everything that we can do to get this guy, and the reason is because he is a symbol to the people who believe, as a matter of faith, that they have a right and a duty to destroy Americans and Western civilization.

The bigger, however, issue, is this: The Americans have to lead against the sea of hostility that was referred to earlier.

This is a serious challenge.

We can't allow a situation where everyone, all the way from Morocco, all the way through the Middle East, all the way to the Philippines, believes that the United States does not have their best interests at heart.

During the Cold War -- and I served as...

Moderator: If I would, is President Bush partly responsible for that, in your view?

Gilmore: This is what I think we have to do: What I think we have to do is to use all of our abilities, diplomatic and economic and military, above all things, put ourselves on the moral high ground, and let people across the world know that we are in the same shoes that we were in during the Cold War.

During the Cold War, we represented the aspirations of people everywhere in the world in good faith. And that now must be our policy, so that we in fact do deny those kinds of people and resources to the people who we can't deal with diplomatically. And that, of course, is the Al Qaida type of fundamentalists.

Moderator: Governor Romney, respond to the mentioned reference to you...

Romney: Well, of course, we get...

(Laughter)

Moderator: ... by Senator McCain.

(Laughter)

Romney: Thank you. Of course we get Osama bin Laden and track him wherever he has to go, and make sure he pays for the outrage he exacted upon America.

Moderator: Can we move heaven and earth to do it?

Romney: We'll move everything to get him. But I don't want to buy into the Democratic pitch that this is all about one person -- Osama bin Laden -- because after we get him, there's going to be another and another.

This is about Shia and Sunni. This is about Hezbollah and Hamas and Al Qaida and the Muslim Brotherhood. This is a worldwide jihadist effort to try and cause the collapse of all moderate Islamic governments and replace them with a caliphate.

They ultimately want to bring down the United States of America.

This is a global effort we're going to have to lead to overcome this jihadist effort. It's more than Osama bin Laden.

But he is going to pay, and he will die.

Moderator: OK. Thank you, Governor.

We now go to our interactive round of questions that were submitted and voted on by the users of Political.com.

Jim VandeHei will read these questions to the candidates now, who will have 30 seconds to respond. And if a rebuttal is necessary, that will also be 30 seconds.

Thanks, Chris.

Senator McCain, Sara from Arlington, Virginia, wants to know if you would be comfortable with Tom Tancredo, a staunch opponent of illegal immigration, as head of the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

(Laughter)

McCain: In a word, no.

(Laughter)

On the subject of Osama bin Laden, he's responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent Americans. He's now orchestrating other attacks on the United States of America. We will do whatever is necessary. We will track him down. We will capture him. We will bring him to justice, and I will follow him to the gates of hell.

Moderator: OK. Let me ask you a question regarding immigration. One of our prized guests here today, Governor Schwarzenegger -- looking this man in the eye, answer this question -- I'm going to go down the line, starting with Governor Romney.

Should we change our Constitution, which we believe is divinely inspired...

(Laughter)

... to allow men like Mel Martinez, the chairman of your party, born in Cuba, great patriot, the senator from Florida, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, to stand here some night?

Governor Romney?

Romney: Never given that a lot of thought, but with Arnold sitting there, I'll give it some thought, but probably not.

Moderator: No?

Romney: No.

Moderator: Yes or no?

(Unknown): I love the Governor, but...

Moderator: We got two noes.

(Unknown): I think there are other ideas that we should...

Moderator: Governor Gilmore. Two noes. We're moving here.

Gilmore: No, I don't intend to want to amend this Constitution in a variety of different ways, and this would be not a good start to do it that way.

Moderator: So that's a no. Three noes in a row.

Huckabee: After I've served eight years as president, I'd be happy to change the Constitution for Governor Schwarzenegger.

(Laughter)

Moderator: Three to one.

Congressman?

Hunter: We haven't seen his endorsement yet, Chris.

Moderator: OK. Three to one to no-show?

Hunter: That's a no.

Moderator: OK. Four noes to one.

Governor?

Thompson: No.

Moderator: Five to one.

Senator?

McCain: Depends on whether he endorses me or not.

(Laughter)

He and I have many similar attributes, so I have to seriously consider it.

Moderator: OK. We've got an overwhelming vote against you, Governor, in your own house.

(Laughter)

Congressman?

Paul (?): I'm a no, because I am a strong supporter of the original intent.

Moderator: Oh, God.

OK, Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: When he called me up to endorse him, he got me on the phone, he said, "Will you endorse me?", and I was too afraid to say no.

(Laughter)

Moderator: OK.

Congressman Tancredo -- is it no or yes?

Giuliani: I would say yes.

Moderator: Yes.

Tancredo: Intimidating as he might be, I'm saying no.

Moderator: OK. We've got two yeses here.

Mayor Giuliani, Bradley Winters of New York would like to know if there's anything you learned or regret during your time as mayor in your dealings with the African-American community?

Giuliani: There's a great deal that I learned and a great deal that I regret during the time I was mayor, and a great deal I was very, very satisfied with. I tried very, very hard to treat everyone in New York City the same. We reduced crime by 67 percent. Some of the biggest beneficiaries of that would have been in the poorer neighborhoods of New York City, not necessarily the African-American community but a lot of the communities of New York City.

And I worked very, very hard to try to move hundreds of thousands of people out of welfare.

Giuliani: We actually followed Tommy Thompson's program, and we had the most successful welfare-to-work program in the country. We moved 660,000 people off welfare. And I think one of the reasons that crime is still down in New York today...

Moderator: That's the time, Mayor.

Giuliani: Thank you.

Moderator: Governor Romney, Daniel Duchovnik (ph) from Walnut Creek, California, wants to know: What do you dislike most about America?

Romney: Gosh. I love America. I'm afraid I'm going to be at a loss for words because America for me is not just our rolling mountains and hills and streams and great cities. It's the American people.

And the American people are the greatest people in the world. What makes America the greatest nation in the world is the heart of the American people: hardworking, innovative, risk-taking, God-loving, family-oriented American people.

It's that optimism we thank Ronald Reagan for. Thank you, Mrs. Reagan, for opening up this place in his memory for us. It is that optimism about this great people that makes this the greatest nation on earth.

Moderator: Governor Huckabee, this question comes from Curtis Waldman (ph) from Boca Raton, Florida.

Thousands of reputable scientists have concluded with almost certainly that human activity is responsible for the warming of the Earth. Do you believe global warming exists?

Huckabee: The most important thing about global warming is this. Whether humans are responsible for the bulk of climate change is going to be left to the scientists, but it's all of our responsibility to leave this planet in better shape for the future generations than we found it.

It's the old boy scout rule of the campsite: You leave the campsite in better shape than you found it.

I believe that even our responsibility to God means that we have to be good stewards of this Earth, be good caretakers of the natural resources that don't belong to us, we just get to use them. We have no right to abuse them.

Moderator: Congressman Tancredo, David Diamond (ph) from Memphis writes in, "Do you have a plan to solve the shortage of organs donated for transplant?"

Tancredo: Well, I don't believe that the government of the United -- that the president of the United States should be putting forth a plan to do such a thing.

The reality is that technology and the advancement of technology in a variety of areas is going at a pace where I believe we can look forward to cures -- we can look forward to a variety of things that will allow us to cure diseases that today we do not have cures for.

But the idea that I think is inherent in this question, that somehow we should be growing these things, somehow we should be cloning people for the purpose of using these kinds of their attributes...

Moderator: That's time, Congressman.

Tancredo: ... is ridiculous. I absolutely would not support it.

Moderator: Congressman Hunter, Maggie from Highland Park, Illinois, wants to know if you consider yourself a compassionate conservative, like President Bush.

Hunter: Answer: Yes. And let me take the rest of my time on Iran. You know, right now, right now, Iran is moving equipment into Iraq that is being used to kill Americans. Iran has crossed the line, and the United States has absolute license at this point to take whatever actions are necessary to stop those deadly instruments from being moved across the line, being used in explosives, roadside bombs, inside Iraq.

And lastly, you know, we don't -- we should not get to the edge of the cliff on this enrichment of uranium.

And plutonium to be used for a nuclear weapon in Iran -- the United States needs to move very quickly...

Moderator: Thank you, Congressman. That's time.

Hunter: The United States needs to move very quickly.

Moderator: Congressman Paul, Pete from Rochester Hills, Michigan wants to ask you this. If you were president, would you work to phase out the IRS?

(Laughter)

Paul: Immediately.

(Laughter)

Moderator: That's what they call a softball.

Paul: And you can only do that if you change our ideas about what the role of government ought to be.

If you think that government has to take care of us, from cradle to grave, and if you think our government should police the world and spend hundreds of billions of dollars on a foreign policy that we cannot manage, you can't (ph) get rid of the IRS; but, if you want to lower taxes and if you want the government to quit printing the money to come up with shortfall and cause all the inflation, you have to change policy.

Moderator: Time.

We now go to the next segment. We're going to talk about values. Let's go down the line on this just like they did with the Democrats last week on some of these trickier calls, but they do have clear answers.

Starting with you, Governor, would the day that Roe v. Wade is repealed be a good day for America.

Romney: Absolutely.

Moderator: Senator?

Brownback (?): It would be a glorious day of human liberty and freedom.

Moderator: Governor?

Gilmore (?): Yes, it was wrongly decided.

Moderator: Governor?

Huckabee (?): Most certainly.

Moderator: Congressman?

Hunter (?): Yes.

Moderator: Governor?

(Unknown): Yes.

Moderator: Senator?

A repeal.

Mayor?

Giuliani: It would be OK.

Moderator: OK to repeal?

Giuliani: It would be OK to repeal. It would be also if a strict constructionist judge viewed it as precedent and I think a judge has to make that decision.

Moderator: Would it be OK if they didn't repeal it?

Giuliani: I think the court has to make that decision and then the country can deal with it. We're a federalist system of government and states can make their own decisions.

Moderator: Congressman?

Tancredo (?): After 40 million dead because we have aborted them in this country, I would say that that would be the greatest day in this country's history when that, in fact, is overturned.

Moderator: We're looking for nuance here. Governor Gilmore, you have said in the past that you believe in the first eight to 12 weeks of pregnancy that the woman should have the right to have an abortion. Do you still want to stick with that exception?

Gilmore: I do, Chris. My views on this, my beliefs on this are a matter of conviction. And they've always been the same, and they've never changed, the entire time that I've been in public life.

However, my record as governor of Virginia, I think, has been one that the pro-life community, of which I'm a part, would be very proud: passing a 24-hour waiting period, passing informed consent, passing parental notification, signing the partial-birth abortion law in Virginia.

So I think the record is there. But my views -- my views are strongly and fundamentally believed and been held that way.

Moderator: Governor Thompson, do you have any nuance on this? Or are you just happy with the repeal of Roe v. Wade?

Thompson: I believe it should be left up to the states. That was what was originally implied, and the Constitution was changed when the Supreme Court made the decision.

I, like a lot of people up here, have made a record of pro-life for a long time, signing the partial-birth abortion, pre-notification for parents and so on.

I think it's an important imperative that states have the responsibility for making these laws.

Moderator: Governor Romney, in recent months, you've said you were, quote, "always for life," but we've also heard you say you were once, quote, "effectively pro-choice." Which is it?

Romney: Well, I've always been personally pro-life, but for me, it was a great question about whether or not government should intrude in that decision. And when I ran for office, I said I'd protect the law as it was, which is effectively a pro-choice position.

About two years ago, when we were studying cloning in our state, I said, look, we have gone too far. It's a "brave new world" mentality that Roe v. Wade has given us, and I changed my mind.

I took the same course that Ronald Reagan and George Herbert Walker Bush and Henry Hyde took, and I said I was wrong and changed my mind and said I'm pro-life. And I'm proud of that, and I won't apologize to anybody for becoming pro-life.

Moderator: Governor, with respect, some people are going to see those changes of mind as awfully politically convenient.

Romney: You know, I told you that I'd studied at great length this issue. When I ran, I -- for the very first time, I told you that I was personally pro-life but that I would protect a woman's right to choose as the law existed.

And that stayed the same until two years ago, as I indicated.

And at that time, as a result of the debate we had, the conclusion I reached was that we had gone too far, that cloning and that creating new embryos was wrong, and that we should, therefore, allow our state to become a pro-life state.

I believe states should have the right to make this decision, and that's a position I indicated in an op-ed in the Boston Globe two years ago.

Moderator: Senator Brownback, this is an important issue for you.

Brownback: It is.

Moderator: Could you support a nominee of your party who is not pro-life?

Brownback: I could, because I believe in the Ronald Reagan principle, that somebody that's with you 80 percent of the time is not your enemy, that's your friend and that's your ally. And this is a big coalition party. And it's a coalition party that's governed for a number of years in this country.

And it governs because it governs with a coalition of economic and social conservatives, and people that want to be strong for the United States.

But I want to emphasize, I believe life is one of the central issues of our day, and I believe that every human life at every phase is unique, is beautiful, is a child of a loving God, period.

Moderator: That's the time.

Let me go back to Governor -- Mayor Giuliani, because I want to give you a chance on this.

You became very well known for standing up against the use of public funds for what many people considered indecent exhibits at the Brooklyn museum and places like that.

Why do you support the use of public funds for abortion?

Giuliani: I don't. I support the Hyde amendment. I hate abortion. I wish people didn't have abortions.

Moderator: So you're not for funding at all?

Giuliani: I believe that the Hyde amendment should remain the law. States should make their decision. Some states decide to do it. Most states decide not to do it. And I think that's the appropriate way to have this decided.

Moderator: Should New York, when you were mayor of New York, should they have been paying for -- the state should have been paying for...

Giuliani: That's a decision New York made a long time ago.

And New York...

Moderator: And where were you on that?

Giuliani: I supported it in New York, but I think, in other places, people can come to a different decision.

Moderator: Thank you.

Let me go to Senator McCain. We're in the house of Ronald Reagan. Every cab driver in America knew what Ronald Reagan stood for: defeat communism abroad; reduce big government at home.

Can you, Senator McCain, restore that kind of unity of purpose?

McCain: I know that I can. I want to be president of the United States to defeat our enemies and to work with our allies. I want to lead this nation.

I may not be the youngest candidate in this race, but I'm the most prepared. I'm prepared to take on the greatest challenge of our time, and that's the specter and threat of radical Islamic extremism, which threatens our very values and our very life.

I know how the world works. I know the good and evil in it. I've seen it. I know how the military works. I know what the military should do, and what it shouldn't do. And I know what it can do.

I know how to make Congress work, work for you and not for their re-election.

My friends, we face enormous challenges, whether it be a burgeoning deficit, out-of-control spending, a need for energy independence. And we need, most of all, to restore faith in our government and confidence in the leadership.

My friends, I don't want to be president of a failed nation. I don't want to be president of a sad nation or one that thinks our best years are behind us.

I want to be president of a proud, powerful...

Moderator: OK, we have...

McCain: ... great, bountiful nation. And, as president, I intend to lead it.

Moderator: Senator, two or three gentlemen have asked to respond to that. First Congressman Hunter, and then Governor Huckabee, and then Senator -- those three. Say just quick, each.

Hunter: Chris, thanks very much.

John's not the only guy with a defense background. I've been chairman of the Armed Services Committee for the last four years. I've helped to rebuild national defense.

We have worked hard to make sure that our people have enough pay, that they've got the ammunition, that they've got the equipment, while at the same time looking over the horizon to look at the new threat of an emerging China and an Iran that is pursuing nuclear weapons and a Korea that already has some and is moving to get the means for delivery.

So a strong national defense, the trademark of Ronald Reagan is what I would pursue.

Moderator: Governor Huckabee, the question is: How do you unify the country the way Reagan did, a good portion of the country?

Huckabee: I think it's important to remember that what Ronald Reagan did was to give us a vision for this country, a morning in America, a city on a hill. We were reminded that we are a great nation not because government is great; we're a great nation because people are great.

Chris, I want to go back, though, to say why we're a great nation. We are a culture of life. We celebrate, we elevate life. And let me just say, when hikers on Mt. Hood get lost, we move heaven and Earth to go

find them. When coal miners in West Virginia are trapped in a mine, we go after them because we celebrate life.

This life issue is not insignificant. It's not small. It separates us from the Islamic fascists who would strap a bomb to the belly of their child and blow them up. We don't do that in this country.

Moderator: OK, let me go to -- Dr. Paul, how do you reconcile this moral, moral leadership kind of role of conservatism with the very libertarian strain of conservatism -- the Barry Goldwater conservatism that you represent? How do you put together what he just said with what you believe in a unified national purpose?

Paul: Well, you do it by understanding of what the goal of government ought to be. If the goal of government is to be the policeman of the world, you lose liberty. And if the goal is to promote liberty, you can unify all segments. The freedom message brings us together; it doesn't divide us.

I believe that when we overdo our military aggressiveness, it actually weakens our national defense. I mean, we stood up to the Soviets. They had 40,000 nuclear weapons. Now we're fretting day in and day and night about third-world countries that have no army, navy or air force, and we're getting ready to go to war.

But the principle, the moral principle, is that of defending liberty and minimizing the scope of government.

Moderator: I'm sorry, we have to go on. We have to go on.

Governor Thompson, same theme. If a private employer finds homosexuality immoral, should he be allowed to fire a gay worker?

Thompson: I think that is left up to the individual business. I really sincerely believe that that is an issue that business people have got to make their own determination as to whether or not they should be.

Moderator: OK. So the answer's yes.

Thompson: Yes.

Moderator: Governor Romney, what do you say to Roman Catholic bishops who would deny Communion to elected officials who support abortion rights?

Romney: I don't say anything to Roman Catholic bishops. They can do whatever the heck they want.

(Laughter)

Romney: Roman Catholic bishops are in a private institution, a religion. And they can do whatever they want in a religion. America doesn't...

Moderator: Do you see that as interference in public life?

Romney: Well, I can't imagine a government telling a church who can have Communion in their church. We have a separation of church and state. It's served us well in this country.

This is a nation, after all, that wants a leader that's a person of faith, but we don't choose our leader based on which church they go to.

This is a nation which also comes together -- we unite over faith and over the right of people to worship as they choose.

The people we're fighting, they're the ones who divide over faith and decide matters of this nature in the public forum.

This is a place where we celebrate different religions and different faiths.

Moderator: Thank you, Governor.

Governor Huckabee, you've criticized Governor Romney for saying his faith wouldn't get in the way of his public life, his governing. Are you going to back that up tonight?

Huckabee: I've never criticized Governor Romney for that.

(Crosstalk)

Huckabee: I said, in general -- and I would say this tonight to any of us -- when a person says, "My faith doesn't affect my decision-making," I would say that the person is saying their faith is not significant to impact their decision process.

I tell people up front, "My faith does affect my decision process." It explains me. No apology for that. My faith says, "Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you..."

Moderator: But you answered a question that George Stephanopoulos of ABC about this governor, one of your rivals, and you answered it in this way: "I'm not as troubled by a person who has a different faith. I'm troubled by a person who tells me their faith doesn't influence their decisions."

That's in direct response to George Stephanopoulos on February 11th of this year. Why are you changing that point of view now?

Huckabee: Well, I didn't know I was changing the point of view.

Moderator: No, you're changing your quote.

Huckabee: I'm saying that of anyone, whether it's Governor Romney or Governor Gilmore...

Moderator: Well, you answered in direct response to Governor Romney and his Mormonism. Why are you pulling back now?

Huckabee: I don't mean to be pulling back. I want to state very clearly: A person's faith shouldn't qualify or disqualify for public office. It shouldn't do that.

But we ought to be honest and open about it. And I think it does help explain who we are, what our value systems are, what makes us tick, and what our processors are.

Moderator: Governor Romney, do you accept the fact that he wasn't talking about you?

Romney: I didn't hear it.

(Laughter)

I didn't hear it on George Stephanopoulos. But I can tell you this: Of course everyone who's a person of faith has values that are deeply held in their heart, and they include the value of the relationship they have with their spouse and their children, the value that they place with their country and with their community.

Romney: That's what makes America such a powerful land. Look at us. We're a land that's the envy of the entire world. We are the hope of the world, not because of our hearts.

And that comes from being a people of faith, but not people of a particular church or a particular synagogue. Rather, the great values we share are American values.

Moderator: Senator?

Brownback: This is a key point, I think. And I think it's a key point for the country. Because we've had 40 or 50 years, now, of trying to run faith out of the public square.

And we're a nation of faith. As my colleague, Senator Lieberman, a Jew, says, America is a faith-based experiment as a country. We should celebrate and invite faith.

And our motto is, "In God we trust." This isn't something that divides. This is something that pulls together and lifts us up. And it's key, and it's important. We shouldn't be trying to run it out of the public square. We should invite it in and celebrate it.

Moderator: OK, thank you. Thank you, Senator.

Gentleman, let's talk a bit about the future of your party.

Congressman Hunter, Governor Schwarzenegger, who is here tonight, has won the state twice by downplaying partisanship and taking centrist positions on the environment, immigration, abortion. Is that the way to win for Republicans?

Hunter: You know, it's a way to win, but we need to win the right way. And about 100 miles south of here, in my town of San Diego, we build the border fence. When we built that fence, we had a border out of control, and we built that fence. And it's a double fence. It's not that little scraggly fence you see on CNN with everybody getting over it.

We had massive murders on the border, massive illegal immigration, massive importation of drugs. I built that border fence. We brought down the smuggling of people and narcotics by more than 90 percent.

I think there's an implication in your immigration statement that the Hispanic community of California wants to have a secure border, and I wrote that law that extends the San Diego fence for 854 miles across Arizona, New Mexico and Texas that the president signed in October.

One way to bring down crime in the state of California and every state in the union is to have an enforceable border.

That means let's build that border fence. When people want to come into this country, let's ask them to knock on the front door.

Moderator: Governor Gilmore, you know Karl Rove and you've worked with Karl Rove. Is Karl Rove your friend?

(Laughter)

Moderator: Do you want to keep him in the White House if you get elected president -- the president's chief political operative?

Gilmore: You know, at the end of the day, the responsibility for this government and for its policies rests with the president of the United States. And the president is able to choose the people that he wants to choose in order to implement his policy. The president has chosen Karl Rove.

Moderator: But you, as commander in chief and chief executive, would you employ Karl Rove?

Gilmore: It isn't a matter of Karl Rove. What's important to this nation is not Karl Rove.

(Laughter)

What's important to this nation and to this party is the acquisition of the philosophy and values that we are as Republicans.

There is a time now for us to reach out and to say that we're spending too much money in government, that it's taking too much of the resources of this nation, that we have got to do something about government spending, create more jobs and a higher revenue and a better opportunity, and thereby to cut taxes for regular people.

Gilmore: I did that as governor.

I'm a consistent conservative that keeps his word and does what he says that he's going to do.

Moderator: Thank you. Thank you, Governor.

Congressman Tancredo, that Karl Rove question, do you have an interest in answering that one?

Tancredo: Yeah. Karl Rove would certainly not be in the White House that I inhabited. We have had our differences for quite some time, specifically on the issue of immigration and my criticism thereof.

And as a matter of fact, this is as close as I've ever been to Air Force One.

(Laughter)

Moderator: Well, by the way, this isn't still the Air Force One.

Tancredo: To the replica...

(Crosstalk)

Tancredo: ... of Air Force One. Exactly.

Moderator: All right. Mayor Giuliani, I have to ask you the next question. Has the increased influence of Christian conservatives in your party been good for it?

Giuliani: Sure. The increased influence of large numbers of people are always good for us. I'd like to go back to the earlier question that you asked because I think it really is important that we, you know, define the Republican Party to fit today.

Neither party has a monopoly on virtue or vice. That's just a fallacy that we sometimes fall into. If we're going to win, and we're going to govern after we win, we have to reach out, bring in Democrats, bring in independents.

I ran a city that was five-to-one Democratic, and I was able to -- according to George Will, I ran the most conservative government in the last 50 years in New York City...

Moderator: Time...

Giuliani: ... reduced crime, reduced welfare, balanced the budget, lowered taxes 23 times.

Moderator: Mr. Mayor, it's time.

Giuliani: And I had 45 Democrats and I think six Republicans.

Moderator: OK.

Governor Thompson, same question. Well, actually, you could respond to just about anything at this point.

(Laughter)

Thompson: Well, Chris, then I will.

I'm the reliable conservative. I vetoed 1,900 things. I reduced taxes by \$16.5 billion.

I'm from Wisconsin, a blue state, and I won four consecutive times. I still have a very high popularity appeal.

And I'm the one that started welfare reform, reduced the welfare caseload in the United States and the state of Wisconsin by 93 percent.

And I believe that kind of a record will attract Democrats and independents, if you stand up and start talking on principles and ideas.

Where I think the Republican Party lost its way is we went to Washington to change Washington -- Washington changed us. We forget to be coming up with new ideas, big ideas like Ronald Reagan.

Ronald Reagan had an optimism and a belief that America could be stronger and better tomorrow than it is today, and he instilled that and inculcated that in every American. That's what we have to do as a party again.

Moderator: Thanks, Governor.

Senator Brownback: Jack Abramoff, Mark Foley, Duke Cunningham in prison for bribes. Just last month, FBI raids of two Republican members of Congress.

What's with your party and all this corruption?

Brownback: And there are also Democrat members that there was cash found in refrigerators or deep freezers.

I think you have to look at the overall situation and system and say this people were wrong and they should go to jail, and they are going to jail.

And they would go to jail under my administration.

But I think you also have to back up and ask, we, as a society, what we can do to bring stronger families and build a stronger culture as well. We need to have laws to enforce these systems and, we, as leaders need to live by those laws as well.

But we need to back up as a society. We need to rebuild the family structure in this country. We've got 36 percent of our children born out of wedlock. We've got a culture that's got things like what Don Imus said going on not only on the radio, now it's in records that are being marketing to teenagers with million dollar ad budgets using the same words that he was fired for.

I mean, what I would hope to do is to lead by example, lead ethically, lead in rebuilding the family and in renewing the culture.

Moderator: Congressman Tancredo, you want to respond to that question that John put about these serious problems of ethics violations?

Tancredo: Yes, well, they are not unique to the Republican Party. These are failures by individuals and it's important to understand that, and they should, of course, be dealt with.

Let me also, please, if I -- because I've had enough opportunity -- I shouldn't say enough, but certainly an opportunity to address some of these other issues, especially with regard to whether or not it has to be a centrist who wins the presidency of the United States.

Look, we're standing in a place dedicated to a man who we would not call a centrist, who was able to win this state. He was also able to win the presidency, twice. Why? Because he believed in principles, he articulated them, and he put them into effect. He had heart. We know it. We saw it. The American people saw it, and they respected that.

I believe it's not necessarily whether you're a centrist or not.

Moderator: It's time now.

Tancredo: I believe it's whether or not you believe in your heart in the things that you say, and I do.

Moderator: Senator McCain, when you announced last week, you took a couple of shots at incompetence in government. You talked about you wouldn't put up with having police and fire radios on different frequencies.

And I somehow got the idea you were talking about New York City.

(Laughter)

McCain: No, I was talking about the fact that the special interests have kept the spectrum, which the American people are supposed to have and our first responders are supposed to have -- we gave the broadcasters high definition television.

In return, they were supposed to give a spectrum that was going to be reserved for the first responders.

Again, the special interest influence prevailed over the public's interest.

On the issue of why we lost the election in 2006, it's because we did lose our way. We began to value principle (ph) over power, and spending got out of control. Spending lurched completely out of control.

Ronald Reagan used to say, we spend money like a drunken sailor. I never knew a sailor, drunk or sober, with the imagination of the Congress.

And by the way, I received an e-mail recently from a guy who said, "As a former drunken sailor, I resent being compared to members of Congress."

(Laughter)

Moderator: It's time now for another round of interactive questions. We're going to go to Jim VandeHei right now.

McCain: Can I -- I thought I had a yellow -- I thought I had a yellow light there.

Moderator: It's red now.

(Laughter)

Moderator: I'm sorry.

McCain: I'm sorry. The first pork-barrel bill that crosses my desk, I'm going to veto it and make the authors of those pork-barrel items famous all over America. We're going to stop it.

Moderator: Sorry, Senator.

This is actually a great follow to that, Senator McCain. Chris Harris from Manhattan, Kansas, is very concerned about the budget and about deficits. He wants to know, what specific programs would you cut if you were president?

McCain: Line-item veto is the best tool. President Reagan sought it, and we need it very badly.

There are a whole variety of programs that need to be cut, and I would start in cleaning up defense acquisition. The cost overruns associated with the purchase of our weapons systems is completely out of control. There's a \$160 million combat ship that is now \$400 million.

We've got to get that under control first. Let's stop the pork- barrel spending; then we'll go at programs.

Each one of them must justify their existence every year. They will lay out their goals, and then they will have to meet those goals, or they will go out of business.

Moderator: Thank you, sir.

Governor Huckabee, a Politico.com reader wants a letter grade. He wants to know, A through F, how would you rate the Bush administration's handling of the Iraq war?

Huckabee: I think it's too early to give them the grade. You don't give a student a grade in the middle of the exam. We're still in the middle of the exam. Let's wait and see how it turns out, then we can give the president a grade.

Moderator: But a teacher will usually give you a heads-up, maybe midway through that semester.

(Laughter)

Huckabee: My teachers never did. I don't know where you went to school, but in Arkansas...

(Laughter)

... we didn't get a grade until it was over, and usually we didn't want to take it home.

(Laughter)

Moderator: Governor Romney, you said that being a pro-life president entails more than just appointing strict constructionist judges. A Politico.com reader wants to know what you meant by that and whether that was directed specifically at Mayor Giuliani.

It's directed at anybody who's not pro-life. And I have had the opportunity of serving as a governor and finding that while the courts were making decisions that affected abortion, it's really upon the legislature and the governor to have an impact as well.

Romney: And so you can fight, for instance, to make sure that partial-birth abortion is made illegal. You can fight to have information given to women who are thinking about having an abortion. You can fight to make sure that there's opportunities for people to express their views on this topic openly and near abortion clinics.

You can fight for the opportunity to go out and campaign for the rights of those who care about this issue to be heard before Election Day, and the McCain-Feingold law prevents that from happening.

Moderator: It's time, Governor.

Let me ask Mayor Giuliani, do you want to respond to this? Because it seems like across the room here, this strong, unrelenting -- with the exception of Governor Gilmore, an unrelenting pro-life position. You seem to have a nuanced position on this. Many people think you're pro-choice. Could you define it in a couple of seconds?

Giuliani: Sure. This is a very, very difficult issue of conscience for many, many people. In my case, I hate abortion. I would encourage someone to not take that option. When I was mayor of New York City, I encouraged adoptions. Adoptions went up 65, 70 percent. Abortions went down 16 percent.

But ultimately, since it is an issue of conscience, I would respect a woman's right to make a different choice.

I support the ban on partial-birth abortion. I support the Hyde amendment. But ultimately, I think when you come down to that choice, you have to respect a woman's right to make that choice differently than my conscience.

And I'd like to respond on spending...

Moderator: OK, later. We'll have to kill you now because it's a red light.

Governor Thompson, is racism still a problem in our society, and can a president do anything about it?

Thompson: A president can do a lot of things. A president can set a vision that's going to abrogate as much as possible racism in our society. A president has got to be able to get out and speak and be able to unite.

And the great thing about Ronald Reagan was, he was a uniter, and that's exactly what I tried to do as governor of the state of Wisconsin. I tried to bring people together. And if you do that, you can reduce and abrogate racism to a very great degree, and the president of the United States has got to be the number one person in doing that.

Moderator: Congressman Tancredo, David Kim from here in California wants to know: Beside yourself, who do you think should be the Republican nominee for president of the United States, and why?

Tancredo: Well, of course, if I thought there should be another one, I wouldn't be here. I think that I serve the purpose, and I think we -- good men all here. Don't get me wrong.

But I am telling you this. There are issues that I believe have not been addressed tonight, not in full, and I believe that they do separate us. And I certainly believe the issue of immigration and immigration reform and what's going to happen to this country unless we deal with this forthrightly -- no more platitudes, no more obfuscating with using words like, well, I am not for amnesty, but I am for letting them stay.

That kind of stuff has got to be taken away from the political debate, as far as I'm concerned, so people can understand exactly who is where on this incredibly important issue.

Tancredo: And when they see that, I think, frankly, I'm the candidate.

Moderator: OK. Time.

Anyone have a follow-up with that? Anyone disagree with the strong anti-illegal-immigration position, take a strong view?

Senator McCain?

McCain: Well, I'm happy to say that we've been working very hard for a couple of months with Democrats and Republicans, led by the president and his Cabinet, to come up with a comprehensive solution and resolution of this terrible problem.

One thing we would all agree on, the status quo is not acceptable. We have to secure our borders. But we also need a temporary worker program, and we have to dispose of the issue of 12 million people who are in this country illegally.

This issue is an important and compelling one, and it begins with national security. But we also need to address it comprehensively. And I'm proud to work with the president of the United States...

Moderator: Time.

McCain: ... on this issue.

Moderator: Time. I've got to go to Jim VandeHei.

VandeHei: Congressman Hunter, Kay Thomas from Honolulu, Hawaii, wants to know if you watched Al Gore's environmental documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth."

Hunter: No, I didn't watch it. But, you know, I think that global warming and the need to be energy-independent gives us a great opportunity.

I think we should bring together all of our colleges, our universities, the private sector, government laboratories, and undertake what, for this next generation, will be a great opportunity and a great challenge to remove energy dependence on the Middle East and, at the same time, help the climate.

I think we can do that. We need to take taxes down to zero for the alternative energy sources. We need to make sure that all the licensing from our laboratories that goes to the private sector goes to the American manufacturing sector for these energy systems.

Moderator: Congressman, that's time.

(Crosstalk)

Moderator: That's time.

Hunter: I think we can do it.

Moderator: Congressman Paul, Bob Hussay (ph) from Minnesota writes that perhaps the most important skill a good president must have is the ability to make good, sound decisions, often in a crisis situation.

Please cite an example when you had to make a decision in crisis.

Paul: I wonder if he's referring to a political decision like running for office, or something like that.

(Laughter)

I guess, in medicine, I made a lot of critical decisions.

Paul: I mean, you're called upon all the time to make critical, life-saving decisions. But I can't think of any one particular event where I made a critical decision that affected a lot of other people. But I think all our decisions we make in politics are critical.

My major decision, political decision, which was a constitutional decision, was to urge for (inaudible) years that this country not go to war in Iraq.

Moderator: Dr. Paul, that's -- again, is there another question for Jim?

Governor Gilmore, this question comes from Malika (ph) in Washington, D.C.: "Women are the fastest growing prison population. Most are mothers who are non-violent, first-time offenders. What will you do to address the issue of mothers behind bars and the children left behind?"

Gilmore: You know, when I was governor of Virginia, I had to deal with a great number of these issues, and I think that we have to insist upon the obedience to the law.

And that means that we have to let the courts and the juries make decisions based upon all of those matters. When I was prosecutor -- I was an elected prosecutor -- I had to address these issues all the time. And the fact is, that we just simply have to have the law apply in an appropriate way.

I would like to answer that question about decision-making. I was governor of the state of Virginia during the 9/11 attack, and I had to act immediately in order to address these issues. And I was also chairman of a national commission on terrorism that addressed these issues as well.

Moderator: We have to go down the line again. It's always fun to ask these questions down the line. We have Mr. Reagan here. The camera will not focus on her, but I will tell you, it will now focus on you.

Mrs. Reagan wants to expand federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. Will that progress under your administration, Governor?

Romney: It certainly will. Altered nuclear transfer, I think, is perhaps the best source...

Moderator: Embryonic. Embryonic.

Romney: Altered nuclear transfer creates embryo-like cells that can be used for stem cell research. In my view, that's the most promising source. I have a deep concern about curing disease.

I have a wife that has a serious disease that could be affected by stem cell research and others. But I will not -- I will not create new embryos through cloning or through embryo farming, because that will be creating life for the purpose of destroying it.

Moderator: And you won't take any from these fertility clinics to use either?

Romney: I'm happy to allow that to -- or I shouldn't say happy. It's fine for that to be allowed, to be legal. I won't use our government funds for that. Instead, I want our governments to be used on Dr. Hurlbut's method, which is altered nuclear transfer.

Moderator: The same question, embryonic stem cell research with federal funds, sir.

Brownback: It will not, with all due respect to Mrs. Reagan and her desires here. I've studied this matter a great deal. We are curing and healing people with adult stem cells.

Moderator: OK.

Brownback: It is not necessary to kill a human life for us to heal people. And we're doing it with adult stem cell work, and it's getting done.

Moderator: OK. I'm going to have to go yes or no.

Governor Gilmore, for embryonic stem cell federal funding or not?

Gilmore: We can't create people in order to experiment with people.

Moderator: Governor Huckabee?

Huckabee: I would concur. I don't think it's right to create a life to end a life. That's not a good health decision.

Moderator: Congressman?

Hunter: No. I'd like to show Mrs. Reagan the alternatives, which are adult stem cells.

Moderator: Governor Thompson.

Thompson: There's so much research going on, Chris, you cannot answer that question yes or no. There's research currently going on right now at the Weissman Center (ph) in Madison, Wisconsin, that's going to allow for adult stem cells to become pluripotent, which will have the same characteristics of embryonic stem cells, so you do not have to kill an embryo.

Moderator: Senator, embryonic stem cell federal funding.

McCain: I want to thank Mrs. Reagan for the many kindnesses extended to me many -- and my fellow prisoners of war many years ago when we came home to this wonderful state.

I believe that we need to fund this. This is a tough issue for those of us in the pro-life community. I would remind you that these stem cells are either going to be discarded or perpetually frozen.

We need to do what we can to relieve human suffering. It's a tough issue. I support federal funding.

Moderator: That's a yes. Dr. Paul, yes or no on federal funding?

Paul: Programs like this are not authorized under the Constitution.

The trouble with issues like this is, in Washington we either prohibit it or subsidize it. And the market should deal with it, and the states should deal with it.

Moderator: OK. That's a no.

Giuliani: As long as we're not creating life in order to destroy it, as long as we're not having human cloning, and we limit it to that, and there is plenty of opportunity to then use federal funds in those situations where you have limitations.

So I would support it with those limitations, like Senator Coleman's bill in Congress.

Moderator: Mr. Tancredo?

Tancredo: There are billions of dollars going into this research right now. It does not require me taking money from federal -- from taxpayers in the United States to fund it...

Moderator: OK. Thank you.

Tancredo: ... because it is morally, I think, reprehensible in certain ways.

Moderator: Governor Romney, a year ago, it seemed that you couldn't wait to tell the world about your health-care experiment in Massachusetts. Since then, it's been criticized by conservatives as something Hillary Clinton could've devised. You hardly mention it on your Web site. What's changed?

Romney: I love it. It's a fabulous program.

I'm delighted with the fact that we, in our state, worked together across the aisle, Republicans and Democrats, to find a way to get health care for all of our citizens that's affordable and that's portable.

Now, I know there's some people that don't like it, but when it came time to vote, you know, we won 198-2. The Heritage Foundation worked on it with us. We had people on both sides of the aisle.

Now, I know there's some people who wonder about it. Senator Kennedy, at the signing of the bill -- we were all there together -- he said, "You know, if you've got Mitt Romney and Ted Kennedy agreeing to the same bill, it means one thing. One of us didn't read it."

(Laughter)

But I helped write it and I knew it well, and this is a country that can get all of our people insured with not a government takeover, without Hillary care, without socialized medicine. Instead, get the market to do its job. Let me people have health care that they can afford. Get the market to do its job. Let people have the opportunity to choose policies in the private sector.

We didn't expand government programs. We didn't raise taxes. There was no government takeover. The market can work to solve our health care needs, and that's the great, exciting news. And 27 other states are working on health care reform right now. It's a great program, a great opportunity for the entire country.

Moderator: Senator McCain, some of your colleagues have been hit pretty hard on flip-flops, but you now support extending President Bush's tax cuts.

But you originally voted against them. That makes no sense.

McCain: Because in the proposal that I had, there were significant tax cuts. And the thing that bothered me was that there was no provision to start addressing Social Security or a contingency.

We had a contingency called the Iraq war. And we had no restraint on spending. And spending got completely out of control.

Yes, these tax cuts needs to be made permanent. Otherwise they will have the effect of a tax increase. But spending is destroying the future of this country. And we've got to get it under control.

And as I started to say before, the first pork barrel earmark bill that crosses my desk as president of the United States, I'm going to veto it and I'm going to make the authors of it famous.

Moderator: OK. Let's start with an enjoyable down-the-line, OK?

I want each candidate to mention a tax you'd like to cut, in addition to the Bush tax cuts, keeping them in effect.

Governor?

Romney: I like middle-income Americans to be able to save their money and not have to pay any tax at all on interests, dividends or capital gains. And by the way, we're all talking about...

Moderator: A zero rate on capital.

Romney: A zero rate on capital gains for middle-income Americans. And by the way, we're all talking about how anxious we are to veto overspending. I was a governor. I've done it hundreds of times. I can't wait to get my hands on Washington's budget.

Moderator: Senator?

Brownback: I'd put forward an alternative flat tax and allow people to choose between the current tax code system, which doesn't work, which I'll be taking behind the barn and killing with a dull ax, and an alternate flat tax and let them choose.

Moderator: Governor Gilmore, tax you'd like to cut?

Gilmore: You know, Chris, I've been a governor of Virginia. I ran on a tax cut proposal, and I ran on eliminating the car tax in Virginia. I received terrific opposition to doing that. I kept my word, kept my promise, and we eliminated that car tax. Now, the question is, who is actually going to do what they say they're going to do? Where have you been is where you're going to go, and I have actually lived up to my word.

And the answer is, the alternative minimum tax, which is continuing to drive people in the middle class into higher and higher tax brackets (ph).

Moderator: Governor Huckabee.

Huckabee: Well, I cut taxes 94 times as governor, but I realize tinkering with it doesn't work.

I'd overhaul it. I would work for the fair tax, which meets the four criteria: flatter, fairer, finite, family friendly. We'd get rid of the IRS. We're get rid of all capital gains, income, corporate. And we'd have a consumption tax.

The fair tax proposal, I believe, offers the best opportunity for all levels of Americans.

Moderator: Congressman, your turn.

Hunter: Absolutely. Chris, you know, right now our manufacturers are getting killed. We're seeing manufacturing move offshore because a dumb trade deal that we signed with the rest of the world allows all of our exports to be taxed twice while their exports to us are not taxed at all.

The only way that we can even come close to leveling that playing field is to eliminate manufacturing taxes. So eliminate all taxes on Americans who will stay in the United States and make products and hire American workers.

Moderator: Governor?

Thompson: Thank you very much.

I'm excited about this question because I was governor of Wisconsin and vetoed 1,900 items -- 1,900 times -- reduced taxes \$16.4 billion.

I think the biggest problem we've got in America is the alternative minimum tax that's bringing more middle-income people in. Let's put it in -- let's have the people have a flat tax and have the option of paying whichever is least.

Moderator: Senator McCain?

McCain: I'd give the president of the United States the line- item veto on these bills as well as spending bills.

The alternative minimum tax is obviously eating Americans alive, and it's got to be repealed.

Another one -- another one I think is important is a \$3,000 tax credit for people to be able to purchase health insurance. So low- income Americans will have access to health care, which is an amazing and difficult problem today.

And a simpler, flatter, fair tax so that Americans don't have to spend \$140 billion, as they just did last April, to prepare their tax returns.

Moderator: OK.

Dr. Paul?

Paul: Well, in my first week, I already got rid of the income tax.

In my second week, I would get rid of the inflation tax. It's a tax that nobody talks about.

We live way beyond our means, with a foreign policy we can't afford, and an entitlement system that we have encouraged. We print money for it. The value of the money goes down, and poor people pay higher prices.

That is a tax. That's a transfer of wealth from the poor and the middle class to Wall Street. Wall Street's doing quite well, but the inflation tax is eating away at the middle class of this country. We need to get rid of the inflation tax with sound money.

Moderator: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: We have to adjust the AMT. That has to be reduced. We have to get rid of the death tax, which is going to go to zero in 2010, which is going to create an incentive -- I can't imagine what kind of an incentive it's going to create.

It's going to go to zero in 2010. And then in 2011, it's going to go to 55 percent. And we have to make sure that the tax cuts that went into effect, that that level remains. Otherwise, we're going to have one of the biggest tax increases in history in 2011.

Giuliani: And I would look to try to regularize the rates and look for some marginal reduction, even beyond what we're doing right now.

Moderator: Thank you.

Tancredo: For all the reasons mentioned by some of my colleagues, I absolutely support the fair tax. It has to be accompanied, however, with the repeal of the 16th Amendment or we'd end up with a consumption tax and an income tax.

And all this talk about vetoing spending bills and how that's going to solve our problem -- let me tell you, my friends, you can veto all the spending bills you want. You will not touch the deficit until you actually deal with the structural problem in mandatory spending.

That's where all the money is. You can veto every one of the bills that come to you as discretionary funding, including the military, if you want.

Moderator: That's time.

Tancredo: It is, in fact, mandatory spending that has to be dealt with, or forget the idea of deficit spending.

Moderator: Senator McCain, you said you plan to appoint a Democrat to a major candidate post. Tell us some of the Democrats you've got in mind.

(Laughter)

We will give you bonus points if you give us a name other than Senator Lieberman.

McCain: I was going to say, the first three are Joe Lieberman and Joe Lieberman and Joe Lieberman.

Moderator: Keep going. Keep going. There must be some others.

McCain: There are others who are qualified. There are many Americans who are Independents, who are Democrats, who are Republicans -- whatever they are -- who are highly qualified.

And I'll tell you what, I'd go to corporate America, I'd go to Silicon Valley and I'd say to John Chambers, who's a billionaire, "You've made your money. Now come. Come and serve. Come and serve this country."

I wouldn't care if these people with this great expertise, this great talent that have made America the leader of the world economically and innovation, I'd go to these people and I'd say, "Now come and serve your country."

And my first priority would be their talents and what they can contribute rather than what their party identification is.

We need to come together more. I know how to reach across the aisle to the Democrats and they know how to reach across the aisle to me.

McCain: I've been doing it for a long, long time.

Moderator: Time for our final interactive segment of the program, in the debate. Jim VandeHei.

Congressman Hunter, Ryan from Los Angeles wants you to name one thing that the federal government does really well, and one thing that it does poorly.

Hunter: Yes. Really well: Precision munitions on Mr. Zarqawi's safe house.

(Laughter)

Really poorly: Secure the border. Right now, the border is 2,000 miles of a very porous area where hundreds of thousands of people come across on an annual basis, and where last year we had 155,000 folks who came across from Mexico who were from other countries in the world. Some from communist China, some from Iran, some from Korea. We have to secure the border. That's the biggest failure of the federal government.

Moderator: Senator McCain, this comes from a Politico.com reader and was among the top vote getters in our early rounds. They want a yes or a no. Do you believe in evolution?

McCain: Yes.

Moderator: I'm curious, is there anybody on the stage that does not agree, believe in evolution?

McCain: May I just add to that?

Moderator: Sure.

McCain: I believe in evolution. But I also believe, when I hike the Grand Canyon and see it at sunset, that the hand of God is there also.

Moderator: Governor Romney, Robert Deitrich (ph) from Towson, Maryland, wants to know, which Cabinet official would be at the top of the list of those you'd like to carry into your administration if you're elected?

Romney: Well, my guess is it will be an entirely new team. My experience is you want to build a group of people who are excited about the prospects for the future.

And, for me, what I want to do is see that we strengthen our military, we strengthen our economy, and we strengthen the American family.

I think that's the heart of the Republican Party: the American family. The American family is seeing an explosion in out-of-wedlock births. We've got great single moms doing their very best. But we have to encourage moms and dads, because the best work, the most critical work for the future of America is the work that goes on within the four walls of the American home. We've got to help the American family and get more marriages before babies.

Moderator: Time.

That's time.

Mayor Giuliani, this question comes from Eric Taylor from California. He wants to know, what is the difference between a Sunni and a Shia Muslim?

Giuliani: The difference is the descendant of Mohammed. The Sunnis believe that Mohammed -- the caliphate should be selected, and the Shiites believe that it should be by descent. And then of course there was a slaughter of Shiites in the early part of the history of Islam, and it has infected a lot of the history of Islam, which is really very unfortunate.

Moderator: Governor Gilmore, a Politico.com reader says you claim to be the only real conservative in this race. They want you to explain why none of the other candidates deserves the label themselves as the true conservative.

Gilmore: No, I have not tried to say I'm the only real conservative in the race, but I have tried to say that I am a consistent conservative and someone that you can count on, something that isn't going to say one thing one year and another thing another year and flip and flop and change around.

I'm a person who ran as a conservative.

Gilmore: I governed as a conservative. I was a alternate delegate for Ronald Reagan to the Kansas City convention back in 1976. So I have been consistent all throughout. And I'm someone that people can count on as a conservative.

Moderator: Congressman Paul, Carrie from Connecticut asks: Do you trust the mainstream media?

(Laughter)

Paul: Some of them.

(Laughter)

But I trust the Internet a lot more, and I trust the freedom of expression. And that's why we should never interfere with the Internet. That's why I've never voted to regulate the Internet. Even when there's the temptation to put bad things on the Internet, regulation of bad and good on the Internet should be done differently.

But, no, there's every reason to believe that we have enough freedom in this country to have freedom of expression. And that's what is important. And whether or not we trust the mainstream or not, I think you pick and choose. There are some friends, and some aren't so friendly.

Moderator: Thank you, Doctor.

That's time.

Senator Brownback, a reader wants to know if your personal religious beliefs influence your foreign policy thinking.

Brownback: I think personal beliefs of everybody shape everybody. I think we all have values.

And that is taken in and that's taken forward. I've served on the International Relations Committee. I have worked on these issues. I've carried bills concerning Sudan. I've carried bills concerning Congo. I've carried bills concerning North Korea and Iran and Iraq.

I wouldn't say it dominates it, but I would say it influences it as it does for everybody. And I've got a consistent record here of an aggressive, clear, compassionate foreign policy that I think is key. It's going to be key for a future president.

Moderator: That's the time.

Brownback: And my presidency will have a very strong, aggressive foreign policy.

Moderator: Mayor Giuliani, Jesse from Madison wants to know: "What do you consider to be your most significant weakness as a candidate for the president of the United States?"

Giuliani: The fact that they're not all endorsing me.

(Laughter)

I don't know. I mean, I think my strengths outweigh my weaknesses. I have plenty of weaknesses and I kind of work on them, but I think that I'm a person who's an optimist. I try to look at the half-full glass rather than a half-empty glass.

The only way I could turn around a city like New York, that was considered the crime capital of America and turn it into the safest large city in America, is to kind of inculcate some of that Ronald Reagan optimism and look to try to create results that people thought were impossible, and we did.

Moderator: Senator Brownback, do you find any faults in Mayor Giuliani?

(Laughter)

I saw you looking attentively, waiting for him to say something.

Brownback: No, I don't. And I think the crowd will see and I think the audience will see as well that's watching this, these are a set of quality candidates. And that's why I love about this, is we've got a chance to debate ideas.

And we win as a party when we run on ideas, big ideas and principles. And you're seeing these articulated here, and that's why we're going to win in 2008. It's going to be on principles and ideas and big ideas, how we lead.

Moderator: Thank you.

Governor Huckabee, this question comes from a reader in New York: "In light of the scandals plaguing the current administration and its allies, involving corruption and cronyism, which mistakes have you learned not to repeat?"

Huckabee: The most important thing a president needs to do is to make it clear that we're not going to continue to see jobs shipped overseas, jobs that are lost by American workers, many in their 50s who, for 20 and 30 years, have worked to make a company rich, and then watch as a CEO takes a \$100 million bonus to jettison those American jobs somewhere else. And the worker not only loses his job, but he loses his pension.

That's criminal. It's wrong. And if Republicans don't stop it, we don't deserve to win in 2008.

Moderator: Congressman Tancredo, this reader requests a yes or no answer: "Will you work to protect women's rights, as in fair wages and reproductive choice?"

Tancredo: I will work to protect women's rights.

The reproductive choice part of that, if I heard you correctly, is a reference to abortion. The right to kill another person is not a right that I would agree with and support.

Moderator: Governor Thompson, Joanie from California wants to know how many American soldiers have lost their lives in the Iraq war, and how many have been injured, to date?

Thompson: There's been over 3,000 that have been lost and several thousand that have been injured. And the truth of the matter is, is that we have to do everything we possibly can to give our troops the necessary dollars, the resources, the weaponry and the armed forces, in order to be able to protect themselves.

It's a bond that every American has with our armed forces. Any time an American soldier's in harm's way, we have to do everything, as our country, to protect them.

Moderator: We're at the last round. It's going to be 30-second responses. I want to start with Mayor Giuliani.

Something you've come out for, I believe -- I want you to explain it and defend it: a national tamper-proof ID card.

Giuliani: I think that's critical to having immigration security. Every single person in this country who comes in from a foreign country should be identified, should be in a database. It should be a tamper-proof card.

Giuliani: I probably have the most experience in dealing with security. I had to take a city that had an outlandish amount of crime and reduce it.

So the very, very best way to sensibly create security is to have a tamper-proof card, a database, and then kind of back up from that -- well, how do we get there? That would allow for a fence, a technological fence, border patrol, having people come forward. People who are paying taxes or who want to pay taxes...

Moderator: That's the time.

Giuliani: ... God bless them. Let them pay taxes.

Moderator: Governor Romney, I think -- are you with him on that, a tamper-proof ID card?

Romney: Absolutely. I had the occasion, as you know, following the great disaster on 9/11, to help organize the Olympic Winter Games, bring people from all over the world together in Salt Lake City, organize the first national special security event following that tragedy, and brought together law enforcement from all over the country, coordinated them in a way that we could communicate with each other.

There's no question as we deal with the issue of immigration, having a national special card that indicates a person's name, date, birth date, biographic information, and an indication of their work status will allow us to know who's here legally, who's not, who can work and who cannot.

Moderator: Is someone against this on libertarian grounds, the idea of a national ID card?

Senator Brownback?

Brownback: I don't think this is the way to go, and I don't think we need to go this way. And I've been serving on the Judiciary Committee and working on these immigration issues.

What we need to do is secure the border with a fence, and then interior-wise, we need to make sure that that Social Security number means something. We already have a Social Security number.

Moderator: How's that different from a national ID card if it works?

Brownback: Because we don't need a new system, and we don't need a new ID.

(Crosstalk)

Moderator: Senator McCain, Senator McCain, are you for a national, tamper-proof ID card?

McCain: That's one of the recommendations of the 9-11 Commission. And absolutely, if someone wants to work, they have to have a document that's tamper-proof. And any employer who employs someone else with any other document like a bogus Social Security card or birth certificate should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Moderator: Dr. Paul.

Paul: I am absolutely opposed to a national ID card. This is a total contradiction of what a free society is all about.

Paul: The purpose of government is to protect the secrecy and the privacy of all individuals, not the secrecy of government. We don't need a national ID card.

Moderator: Mr. Tancredo, do you agree with the need for a national tamper-proof ID card?

Tancredo: We do not need a national -- I do not think we need a national ID card, much for the reasons that Dr. Paul said. We absolutely need a verifiable Social Security card. They are two separate things. I believe that we can accomplish the former without jeopardizing individuals liberties...

Moderator: But you say legally you have to be who you say you are?

Tancredo: Pardon me?

Moderator: You have to be the person on that card.

Tancredo: That is absolutely what I'm saying. It's got to be verifiable, absolutely.

Moderator: OK, let me go to a question that's more ephemeral and it is passing and it will be decided in the next several months. We'll go down the line again. This isn't as much fun as cutting taxes. Do you think Scooter Libby should be pardoned.

Governor?

Romney: I don't think somebody who is running for president, let alone someone who is president, should make that decision until the judicial process is complete. I can tell you that I think it was outrageous for the prosecutor, knowing that Scooter Libby was not the source of the leak, to go ahead and begin interviewing him, gathering information, setting up a case against him.

I think it was prosecutorial indiscretion.

And by the way, the national ID card -- that's for aliens, not for citizens.

Moderator: Oh, you don't want a national ID card, Governor?

Romney: No, it's for those that come here outside the country.

Moderator: Mayor Giuliani, you want it for everyone, right?

Giuliani: No, no, I'm talking about it for people who come into the United States, foreigners, people who come in as immigrants into the United States.

Moderator: OK, that will be tested...

Giuliani: The only way in which you know who they are.

Moderator: That will be interesting how that's tested.

Let me go to senator. Do you think Scooter Libby should be...

(Unknown): Let the legal process move forward, and I'd leave that up to President Bush. And I think he could go either way on that.

Moderator: The judge is going to rule on that case next month and decide whether he will be in prison during his appeal. Would you let it go, let him be imprisoned?

(Unknown): At this point in time, I would leave that up to the president, if at the end of the term, he decides to let him out.

Moderator: You don't encourage him to repeal, to...

(Unknown): I would see willingness to go either way on that, because the underlying facts of this case are ones where there was not a law that was violated. So what they're saying is: OK, you didn't remember right, and that's what you're being prosecuted, and that was what you were guilty for. And, my goodness...

Moderator: Two noes. Two no pardons so far.

Gilmore: First, Chris, I think that, like...

Moderator: Not yet.

Gilmore: Not yet. Like others, I think that we have to deal with these papers, with respect to illegal immigrants, not with respect to all Americans. We should not have a national ID card. We should have that more diffused across the states.

With respect to Scooter Libby, I actually was an elected prosecutor. I handled many cases myself, and I also managed many other cases. The law has to apply within the discretion of the prosecutor.

Now, if the president is going to exercise -- which I have, by the way, done myself, as a chief executive -- pardons or clemency, in this particular case, as high-profile as it is, you have to go to the American people and make your case as to why that kind of discretion ought to be applied. And if he can't make that case, then he shouldn't do it.

Moderator: So we don't want another Marc Rich.

Gilmore: Pardon?

Moderator: Never mind.

(Laughter)

Gilmore: No, that's right.

Moderator: Does anybody want to -- I want to save time here. Does any gentleman want to raise his hand and say, "Pardon him"?

Tancredo: Yes. Yes.

Moderator: OK, Congressman Tancredo wants to pardon him.

Tancredo (?): I'd say pardon him. But right after or before you pardon him, Ramos and Compean -- two people who are presently serving prison time for actually doing their job on the border...

Moderator: OK. Dr. Paul, do you want to pardon them?

Paul: No. He doesn't need a pardon. But he doesn't need it because he was instrumental in the misinformation that led the Congress and the people to support a war that we didn't need to be in.

Moderator: OK. Let me ask you a question which has grabbed a lot of Americans personally, the Terri Schiavo case.

Again, it was a question whether the United States, the U.S. Congress should have intervened and passed a law to advise the appellate court whether to act or not in this case -- the district court, it was.

Terri Schiavo: Should Congress have acted or let the family make the decision, the husband?

Romney: I think we should generally make the family make a decision of this nature.

Moderator: The husband should have decided?

Romney: Generally, we should make that decision. In the case here, the courts decided what they thought was the right thing to do. And then I think Jeb Bush and the Florida legislature did the right thing by saying, we've got a concern. They looked over the shoulder of the court. But I think the decision of Congress to get involved was a mistake.

Moderator: OK.

Romney: I think the Congress's job is to make sure that laws are respecting the sanctity of life. But to actually adjudicate a case like this, better done at the state level by the governor...

Moderator: Senator Brownback, should Congress...

Romney: ...the legislature and the court.

Moderator: ... have gotten involved in a personal case?

Brownback: Yes, it should have. And it gave her the right, and the family the right to take that appeal to the court. That's what the Congress did.

And her life is sacred. Even if it's in that difficult moment that she's in at that point in time, that life is sacred, and we should stand for life in all its circumstances.

Moderator: Senator McCain, was Congress right in intervening in that case?

McCain: It was a very difficult issue. All of us were deeply moved by the pictures and the depiction of this terrible, tragic case. In retrospect, we should have taken some more time, looked at it more carefully, and probably we acted too hastily.

Moderator: Mayor Giuliani, was that a good thing for Congress to do to get involved that weekend?

Giuliani: The family was in dispute. That's what we have courts for. And the better place to decide that in a much more -- I think in a much fairer and even in a deeper way is in front of a court.

Moderator: I want to ask you a question almost as much fun...

(Crosstalk)

Moderator: I want to get to the next question. I'm sorry, because you can expand on your thought as part of this answer.

I asked about raising taxes. It was almost like the Reagan round here. Everybody wanted to do that. I'm sure he was listening to that good thought.

(Laughter)

But let me ask you about something else that might be a negative in the upcoming campaign. Seriously.

Would it be good for America to have Bill Clinton back living in the White House?

(Laughter)

Romney: You have got to be kidding.

Moderator: No, I'm not.

(Laughter)

His wife's running, haven't you heard?

Romney: The only thing I can think of that'd be as bad as that would be to have the gang of three running the war on terror: Pelosi, Reid and Hillary Clinton.

So I have to be honest with you, I think it'd be an awful thing for a lot of reasons.

Moderator: Senator Brownback?

Brownback: I think it'd be bad because it would mean that Hillary Clinton would be elected, not because of who she is, but because of the policies that she stands for of raising taxes, of not standing up for life, for marriage. I mean, those are what would be bad for the country.

Moderator: Governor, Bill Clinton back in the White House?

Gilmore: You know, no, because that would mean that Hillary Clinton would be president of the United States, and where you have been is where you're going to go.

And Hillary Clinton tried to socialize medicine in this country -- a very bad idea. You need to keep that in the private sector. And yet she said in this debate...

Moderator: Well, we have a razorback ready to talk to you, the razorback from Arkansas.

Should the Clintons come back to the White House, especially big Bill?

Huckabee: No one on this stage probably knows Hillary Clinton better than I do...

(Unknown): Oh, my.

(Laughter)

Huckabee: ... and I will tell you that it's probably not a good idea to put either of them back in the White House.

Moderator: OK.

Congressman, Bill Clinton back home?

Hunter: You know, Bill Clinton cut the U.S. Army by almost 50 percent. In this war against terror, he's the wrong guy to have in there.

And incidentally, on the Schiavo case, you know, Ronald Reagan said, on the question of life, "When there's a question, err on the side of life." I think Congress did the right thing.

Moderator: Governor, should Bill Clinton be back in the White House? Is it good for America? I mean, it is a possibility here.

Thompson: A bad possibility. No national I.D. And the Terri Schiavo case should be left up to the states. And Bill Clinton should not be in the White House.

And we certainly should not elect any Democrat to the White House. One of us here should be the next president.

Moderator: Good clean-up, good clean-up hitting there.

(Laughter)

Senator?

McCain: No, because it obviously would mean that Senator Clinton is the president of the United States, and we don't want that.

Most importantly, it would mean that the appointment of Supreme Court justices and other judges would be -- take a very sharp turn to the left.

One of our greatest problems in America today is justices that legislate from the bench, activist judges.

I'm proud that we have Justice Alito and Roberts on the United States Supreme Court. I'm very proud to have played a very small role in making that happen.

Moderator: OK.

Dr. Paul?

Paul: I am known for sticking to principle and not flip-flopping. I voted to impeach him, so...

(Laughter)

(Crosstalk)

Moderator: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: It would mean that we were back on defense against terrorism, given Senator Clinton's recent positions.

And the reality is, in the 1990s, we were on defense in dealing with Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.

When you had this debate last week and all the Democrats were up here, I never remember the words "Islamic fundamentalist terrorism" being spoken by any of them. And I heard it a lot tonight.

Moderator: Mr. Tancredo, last thought?

Tancredo: I know that he is presently measuring the drapes over in the Oval Office...

(Laughter)

... but, no, it's a lousy idea.

Moderator: You really think he's measuring the drapes, huh?

Let me start with a question. In all seriousness, if you want to pass, please pass it. We don't have much time.

Every president, if you look back to Ike, was elected to fill the problem of the previous president. We are, of course, correcting all the time in this country; it's how democracy works.

How will you be different, in any way, from President George W. Bush?

Romney: I think we're each our own person. We have our own values.

I respect the president's character, his passion, his love for this country. I believe everything he does in this war against terror flows from a desire to protect the American people and to make our future secure.

But I will go to work not only to win the war on terror as it relates to Iraq and Afghanistan, but on a global basis, not only with a strong military -- we need at least 100,000 more troops, more military spending.

But at the same time, we have to strengthen our economy and make sure that somebody who has been in the private sector all his life can protect American jobs.

And finally, strengthen the American family. That's what we've got to do.

Moderator: OK. I've got to go to Senator McCain.

McCain: I would not have mismanaged the war. It was badly mismanaged for four years. Now we have a new strategy that I think and pray every night will succeed.

And I would have vetoed spending bill after spending bill after pork-barrel project after pork-barrel project, in the tradition of President Reagan.

Moderator: Mr. Gilmore?

Gilmore: You know, Chris, this campaign is about the national security of the United States. And there are at least four things that need to be done.

We need to be vigorous on the war on terror, and we need to draw other people across the world to us as we address it.

Homeland security has got to become an entire effort of an entire community of the United States. And we have not yet achieved that.

Moderator: OK.

Mr. Huckabee?

We have to move. I'm sorry.

Gilmore: And we have to energy independence.

Moderator: I want to give everybody a shot.

Mr. Huckabee, Governor?

Huckabee: I want to make sure that we went to a place where the states had more power and not centralized in the federal government.

That's been a mistake of this administration, I think an honest and sincere one, but a huge mistake.

And instead, we need to honor the Tenth Amendment, we need to remember that we are a nation of strong states and weak federal government, not strong federal centralized government and weak states.

Moderator: Congressman Hunter?

Hunter: You know, we won World War II, World War I and the Cold War with a major industrial base. We're losing our industrial base through bad trade policy right now. China is cheating on trade.

I would enforce trade laws. That's something that the president is not doing.

Moderator: Senator Brownback?

Brownback: I'd push more a political solution along with a military solution in Iraq, and here I would push a three-state, one-country solution in Iraq, with a Kurdish state, a Sunni state, a Shia state, with Baghdad as the federal city.

I think we've got to push a political solution, along with the military, to get to a stable situation in Iraq, which is our key political issue of the day.

Moderator: Mr. Tancredo.

Tancredo: The president has done many good things, and I'm proud of him for -- he's a good man, but I'm telling you, on a number of issues, especially No Child Left Behind, the Medicare prescription bill, these things -- these things were overarching and overreaching for the federal government.

Also in terms of Iraq, it is time. You know, Benjamin Franklin said in 1727 -- 1787 that he wanted to...

Moderator: Governor? Out of time. Governor Thompson then.

Tancredo: Could I please...

Moderator: Governor Thompson please?

Thompson: Many different areas. One, I would transform the health care system, a lot different than the president's talking about. I would set up a peaceful way to settle the situation in Iraq by allowing the Iraqis to elect their own leaders in the states and being able to split the oil revenues. I would set up medical diplomacy as well as educational diplomacy in order to expand our foreign relations.

Moderator: Mr. Giuliani?

Giuliani: I think we should remind ourselves, because I remember it every day, that on September 11th, 2001, we thought we were going to be attacked many, many times between then and now.

We haven't been. I believe we had a president who made the right decision at the right time on September 20th, 2001, to put us on offense against terrorists. I think history will remember him for that. And I think we as Republicans should remind people of that.

Moderator: Dr. Paul?

Paul: I certainly would continue on my earlier theme that foreign policy needs to be changed -- Mr. Republican, Robert Taft, we have a statue of him in Washington.

He advocated the same foreign policy that I advocate.

I would work very hard to protect the privacy of American citizens, being very, very cautious about warrantless searches. And I would guarantee that I would never abuse habeas corpus.

Moderator: This is hardly the end of the 2008 presidential campaign, or even the beginning of the end. But it is, to quote Winston Churchill, "at least the end of the beginning."

This debate airs again tonight on MSNBC at 11 Eastern time. And in just a moment, I'll join Keith Olbermann on MSNBC for a complete debate analysis and coverage as the campaign heads to the spin room.

I want to thank everyone here.

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