Time to Question Presidential Candidates

by Phyllis Schlafly

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The 2016 presidential campaign is in full swing, but candidates have already demonstrated they are “not ready for prime time” to answer questions from the voters and the press. The leading Republican candidate, Jeb Bush, stumbled all over himself with conflicting answers to a question about whether we should have gone to war in Iraq, while the leading Democrat, Hillary Clinton, continues to ignore fair questions about her missing emails, her foundation’s foreign fundraising, and her checkered career in and out of government.

Since the Republican Establishment had prematurely declared Jeb a virtual shoo-in for the nomination, pumping his campaign-in-waiting with an estimated $100 million, Republicans are said to be “scratching their heads” with dismay at Jeb’s poor answers to predictable questions. According to The Hill newspaper, one GOP lawmaker said he was “flabbergasted at the degree of back and forth on the Middle East – answer, correction, non-answer, correction, etc.”

War in the Middle East is one of many subjects on which presidential candidates should be prepared to expound at length and not insult the voters by refusing to address "hypothetical" questions. Nearly every question by a voter to a candidate is hypothetical because it’s designed to examine how a candidate would respond to future events that may or may not happen if the candidate is elected.

In the spirit of preparing for the early primaries, I’ve assembled a few questions that presidential candidates should be prepared to answer. Here’s a trigger warning: Just because the questions are hypothetical is no excuse for not answering them.

Congress will vote this month on yet another so-called free trade deal, which the Chamber of Commerce claims will finally “open markets” for American exports (even though previous trade deals mainly opened the American market to foreign-made goods). Candidates should declare their positions before Congress votes on that harmful deal, so voters can judge the sincerity of their commitment to promote U.S. jobs.

Immigration is a hot-button issue for many voters, so candidates should give their views on whether immigration should be limited in order to protect American jobs and wages, or expanded to provide more foreign-born low-wage workers for businesses to hire. Candidates should also tell us whether they will rescind Obama's executive amnesty and tell illegal aliens to return to their home countries.

In response to the uproar from parents all over the country, will the candidates pledge to use the powers available to the president to cancel the use of Common Core in public schools and restore local control of education?

All candidates say they support jobs and the economy, although Democrats complain more about "inequality" while Republicans stress "economic growth." Both parties should be required to demonstrate in detail just how their plans for taxes and spending will actually improve the economy and the growth rate, and reduce our national debt and deficit.

Should we encourage more production of oil and gas in our own country, thereby reducing our dependence on foreign sources? Should we end the EPA's war on coal?

Republicans candidates are often asked if they believe in the "science" of global warming – the theory that the earth's temperature is rising because we burn too much oil, gas and coal. A better question is whether candidates think we should try to reduce the earth's temperature by forcing everyone to reduce energy use, even if that means damaging the economic growth on which human life depends.

In the annals of candidate non-answers to legitimate questions, it is hard to top the arrogance of candidate Barack Obama's response to evangelical pastor Rick Warren in August 2008: "Answering that question with specificity, you know, is above my pay grade."

The question that produced Obama's non-answer is often mis-remembered as "When does human life begin?" – a question that depends, in part, on scientific knowledge. Actually the question that Warren put to Obama was not scientific but legal, well within Obama's presumed expertise as a former professor of constitutional law.

Warren's question to Obama was: In the context of "40 million abortions since Roe v. Wade, at what point does a baby get human rights, in your view?" Obama's

response was to babble something about “pro-choice” – in other words, the unborn baby does not get human rights at any point.

In that same 2008 interview, Rick Warren separately asked each presidential candidate to “define marriage.” The Republican and Democrat candidates gave the identical answer: “the union between a man and a woman.”

Since the Democratic Party has officially abandoned that position in favor of what they call “marriage equality,” it’s more important than ever for Republicans to state whether they believe that only the union of husband and wife should be legally recognized and rewarded for its unique contributions to the welfare of our entire society.

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