



Unmentioned Debate Issues

BY RICHARD W. RAHN

'GOTCHA' QUESTIONS MUST GIVE WAY
TO QUESTIONS ABOUT GOVERNING PHILOSOPHY

Do you know what type of person the various presidential candidates would appoint to the Supreme Court? The next president is likely to be able to pick several Supreme Court justices, and those decisions will influence the direction of the American republic for decades in the future.

Despite the fact that we have had numerous "debates" between the candidates, we still know little about their governing philosophies. It would be helpful if the moderators for this week's debate delved more deeply into the way they would conduct themselves as president than just asking questions about current events or what they think about the other candidates.

Most of the candidates have set forth their tax plan proposals in sufficient detail for a campaign, so we know that all of the Republican proposals would likely increase economic growth and the Democratic ones would likely decrease economic growth — which is useful. We know that the U.S. government is now above the optimum size to maximize job creation, the general welfare and economic growth. But most of the candidates have

been, at most, vague as to how they would downsize the government.

It would be helpful if the moderators asked the candidates to identify which Supreme Court justice most closely matches their ideal of the philosophy and the type of decisions they would hope their appointments would make.

Most of the candidates have been very critical of Hillary Clinton's many apparent untruthful statements — e.g., the sudden spontaneous appearance of the Whitewater billing records, coming under sniper fire, Benghazi being caused by a video, and her personal server containing no classified information. At the same time, some of the candidates, notably Donald Trump, have been caught in some gross exaggerations. It is true that misstating statistics is not at the same level as lying about one's actions, particularly involving likely criminal behavior, but it would be useful for the moderators to ask if it is appropriate for candidates and officeholders to lie or misstate facts, and if so, when and why. (Note: There are times when it is appropriate for a president to lie, for instance, when it involves national security and what we know and do not know about a potential adversary.)

President Obama is being criticized for overuse and inappropriate use of "executive orders." It would be helpful if the candidates were asked to precisely define when and if they believe that "executive orders" are appropriate and legal — and when and if they would use them — for example, to clarify existing law but not to create new law. Such questions ought to be part of a much broader inquiry into what each candidate believes about the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

Thomas Jefferson stated: "The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and governments to gain ground." This has clearly been happening in the United States. Thus, it would be helpful if the candidates were asked what they would specifically do to reverse course to make sure that

liberty grows — for example, specifying what they see as destructive or inappropriate regulations.

In recent years, there have been increasing attacks on free speech; for example, university speech codes and restrictions on so-called hate speech, as well as legal restrictions on campaign speech. Free speech, even speech that we do not like, is the cornerstone of liberty. It would be nice to know how each of the candidates proposes to deal with existing and potential restrictions on free speech.

Donald Trump has called for a 45 percent tariff on Chinese imports, yet he has also claimed that he believes in free trade. How does he reconcile those two conflicting statements? Benjamin Franklin wrote: "No nation was ever ruined by free trade." A 45 percent tariff on Chinese goods would cause higher prices for both consumers and businesses, and damage jobs in the service sectors while saving few U.S. jobs in manufacturing — particularly given that there are other foreign sources of most goods. All of this leads to the basic question of which economist each candidate most often listens to and takes his or her advice from.

"Gotcha" questions for candidates are fun, but more important are questions about philosophy and management style. Again, it would be useful to let the candidates know what some of the more substantive questions will be in advance, so they can provide a clear, one-minute answer and, if they wish, provide a more detailed answer on their websites.

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