

CNN/YouTube Republican presidential debate transcript

- Story Highlights
- Two-hour debate hosted by CNN in conjunction with YouTube Web site
- GOP candidates fielding video questions from public via YouTube
- Democratic White House candidates debated under same format in July

ST. PETERSBURG, Florida (CNN) -- The eight candidates vying to be the Republican nominee for president in the 2008 elections answered questions submitted by CNN and YouTube users in a debate Wednesday night. Here is a full transcript of the event:

Florida Republican Party Chairman Jim Greer: Welcome to tonight's presidential debate, co-sponsored by the Republican Party of Florida. It is my pleasure tonight to introduce the man who has brought new ideas to state government, and whose leadership has been embraced by the voters of Florida, and who has become the nation's most popular governor.

Ladies and gentlemen, Governor Charlie Crist.

Charlie Crist: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. And welcome to the Sunshine State. It's great to have this debate in Florida, in my home town of St. Petersburg.

It's an important evening. We're going to hear from some great candidates, great Republicans. And we should have fun with it. The questions come from the people, as Anderson said. This is truly the people's debate.

But it's also important to understand what we're talking about: the future of America; about integrity; about honor; about duty; and about loyalty. That's what America always has stood for and always will.

So let's meet some of these great candidates. First, Congressman Duncan Hunter. Congressman Ron Paul. Senator John McCain. Senator Fred Thompson. Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Governor Mitt Romney. Governor Mike Huckabee. And Congressman Tom Tancredo.

Anderson Cooper: OK, John King is standing by, as well as Gloria Borger.

Gloria, a lot of elbows being thrown on the campaign trail the last couple of days. What are you expecting tonight?

Gloria Borger: Well, I think tonight you might see a lot of elbows being thrown at Mitt Romney. He's really the guy to beat out there. He's been ahead in Iowa and New Hampshire. He's looking in his rearview mirror now. He sees Mike Huckabee moving up on him in Iowa, and every other candidate has a shot in New Hampshire, so he's the target.

Cooper: John King, this Rasmussen poll shows Mike Huckabee right now in the lead in Iowa.

John King: He is moving up in Iowa, Anderson. And that is part of the debate, about which Republican Party -- what will the Republican Party look like when it picks its new leader?

Mike Huckabee is someone who is running on the anti-abortion agenda, as are so many of the other candidates tonight. But the national frontrunner is Rudy Giuliani, who favors abortion rights.

Not since Ronald Reagan won in 1980 has the Republican Party even brokered the notion of having a nominee who supported abortion rights.

You also have a Republican president at this moment and one of the candidates on stage, Senator McCain, who were behind that big so- called comprehensive immigration reform that would give legal status to 12 million or more illegal immigrants in the United States. Well, now opposition to that legislation is one of the defining debates in the Republican Party.

So, from a personality standpoint and a substantive standpoint, this is a fascinating time as the Republican Party decides who its leader will be and what its agenda will be after George W. Bush passes from the stage, Anderson.

Cooper: Gloria, the clock is ticking toward Iowa.

Borger: Absolutely. And they know that right now, starting with this debate, they've really got to define themselves, differentiate themselves, because the voters in Iowa still pretty much are undecided. So, it's anyone's game right now.

The holidays are coming up. And this is one opportunity for each of these candidates to tell the voters who he is and why he's different from the other guy.

Cooper: We are just watching the traveling press pool leave the auditorium. We'll get started in just a moment.

Welcome, candidates. Good to have you all on the stage. Thanks for being here.

Now, as there was last time with the Democratic candidates, there's been some concern among the campaigns about what kind of questions are going to be asked tonight.

And with 5,000 questions to choose from, we certainly had a lot of options.

Take a look.

(Begin videotape)

Cooper (voice over): Many groups tried to organize submissions. Will Dick Armey's question be seen tonight?

Dick Armey: I will put that together as a YouTube...

Snowman cartoon character: And this is a question for Mitt Romney...

Cooper: How about the much maligned snowman? Will he rear his frozen head here in sunny Saint Pete?

UFO cartoon character: So he wants to know what you would do about me and other kids like me -- the unwitting children of illegal -- well, you know.

Cooper: Dennis Kucinich may have seen a UFO, but we'll have no little green men here in Florida.

Actor as "The Ghost of Richard Nixon": I am the ghost of Richard Nixon!

We won't be seeing Richard Nixon, or little kids used to make adult points.

Though, there is one question where kids may make an appearance. And don't worry, we tried to keep out of most of the Abe Lincolns and Ben Franklins, and all the animals, both stuffed...

Sparky: My name is Sparky.

Cooper: ... and real.

Schmoopsy: Schmoopsy here with a question for the Republican candidate.

(End videotape)

Cooper: Sadly, Schmoopsy will not be heard from tonight.

The candidates will have 90 seconds to answer the YouTube questions, the questions that are asked direct to them, 30 seconds for any follow-up questions that I may ask.

There are no lights, no bells, no buzzers, no electric shocks. We prefer the honor system here. We'll warn the candidates when they need to wrap things up.

We also will insist that candidates stay on the question that was being asked and not stray off to an earlier or another topic. Americans put a lot of time into submitting these questions. We think they deserve direct answers.

Finally, tonight we are not in the business of discouraging applause from our audience here, or passion, but please, if it gets out of control, we will ask the crowd here to keep it down just a little bit.

All right, let's begin.

(The governor introduced the candidates.)

Cooper: He did a very good job of it, but one Republican wanted to do that also, and he does it in a way that reminds us this is definitely a new kind of a debate.

Here is Chris Nandor from Snohomish, Washington.

Chris Nandor (singing): The grand old party's looking for somebody who can lead, someone who is electable and adheres to our creed.

Some say the group is not diverse; they're white, they're men, but wait. The Dems have just one candidate, Republicans have eight.

Rudy's leading all the polls, but can he win the base?

Mitt changed on abortion; history he can't erase.

Ron Paul would end the FDA and that is just a start.

Fred has just begun to run, but sure does look the part.

Hunter tells us what to do in foreign policy debates.

Huckabee's compassionate and lost a lot of weight.

Tancredo says let's build a fence across the whole Southwest.

McCain is loved by many and hated by the rest.

We don't know who we're voting for; we don't know who will win. That's why we use YouTube to ask our questions of these men.

Time is short, we're voting soon, and I just thought I'd mention. If we don't reach consensus, then we'll decide at convention.

Cooper: All right, enough of the singing, enough of the snowmen. Let's begin the debate.

From one tough-talking New Yorker, a question to another tough-talking New Yorker.

Ernie Nardi: This is Ernie Nardi from Dyker Heights in Brooklyn, New York, with a question for the ex-Mayor Giuliani.

Under your administration, as well as others, New York City was operated as a sanctuary city, aiding and abetting illegal aliens.

I would like to know, if you become president of the United States, will you continue to aid and abet the flight of illegal aliens into this country?

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: Ernie, that was a very good question. And the reality is that New York City was not a sanctuary city. (OFF-MIKE) single illegal immigrant that New York City could find that either committed a crime or was suspected of a crime. That was in the executive order originally done by Ed Koch, continued by David Dinkins and then done by me.

The reason for the confusion is, there were three areas in which New York City made an exception. New York City allowed the children of illegal immigrants to go to school. If we didn't allow the children of illegal immigrants to go to school, we would have had 70,000 children on the streets at a time in which New York City was going through a massive crime wave, averaging 2,000 murders a year, 10,000 felonies a week.

The other two exceptions related to care -- emergency care in the hospital and being able to report crimes. If we didn't allow illegals to report crimes, a lot of criminals would have gone free because they're the ones who had the information.

But, most important point is, we reported thousands and thousands and thousands of names of illegal immigrants who committed crimes to the immigration service. They did not deport them. And what we did, the policies that we had, were necessary because the federal policies weren't working.

The federal policies weren't working, stopping people coming into the United States. If I were president of the United States, I could do something about that by deploying a fence, by deploying a virtual fence, by having a BorderStat system like my COMSTAT system that brought

down crime in New York, and just stopping people from coming in, and then having a tamper-proof ID card.

Cooper: Time.

Governor Romney, was New York a sanctuary city?

Romney: Absolutely. It called itself a sanctuary city. And as a matter of fact, when the welfare reform act that President Clinton brought forward said that they were going to end the sanctuary policy of New York City, the mayor actually brought a suit to maintain its sanctuary city status.

And the idea that they reported any illegal alien that committed a crime -- how about the fact that the people who are here illegally have violated the law? They didn't report everybody they found that was here illegally.

And this happens to be a difference between Mayor Giuliani and myself and probably others on this stage as well, which is we're going to have to recognize in this country that we welcome people here legally.

But the mayor said -- and I quote almost verbatim -- which is if you happen to be in this country in an undocumented status -- and that means you're here illegally -- then we welcome you here. We want you here. We'll protect you here.

That's the wrong attitude. Instead, we should say if you're here illegally, you should not be here. We're not going to give you benefits, other than those required by the law, like health care and education, and that's the course we're going to have to pursue.

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: It's unfortunate, but Mitt generally criticizes people in a situation in which he's had far the -- worst record.

For example, in his case, there were six sanctuary cities. He did nothing about them.

There was even a sanctuary mansion. At his own home, illegal immigrants were being employed, not being turned into anybody or by anyone. And then when he deputized the police, he did it two weeks before he was going to leave office, and they never even seemed to catch the illegal immigrants that were working at his mansion. So I would say he had sanctuary mansion, not just sanctuary city.

Cooper: All right. I have to allow Governor Romney to respond...

Romney: Mayor, you know better than that.

(Laughter)

Giuliani: No ...

Romney: OK, then listen. All right? Then listen. First of all ...

Giuliani: You did have illegal immigrants working at your mansion, didn't you?

Romney: No, I did not, so let's just talk about that. Are you suggesting, Mr. Mayor -- because I think it is really kind of offensive actually to suggest, to say look, you know what, if you are a homeowner and you hire a company to come provide a service at your home -- paint the home, put on the roof. If you hear someone that is working out there, not that you have employed, but that the company has.

If you hear someone with a funny accent, you, as a homeowner, are supposed to go out there and say, "I want to see your papers."

Is that what you're suggesting?

Giuliani: What I'm suggesting is, if you ...

(Crosstalk)

Giuliani: If you're going to take this holier than thou attitude, that your whole approach to immigration...

Romney: I'm sorry, immigration is not holier than thou, Mayor. It's the law.

Giuliani: If you're going to take this holier than thou attitude that you are perfect on immigration...

Romney: I'm not perfect.

Giuliani: ... it just happens you have a special immigration problem that nobody else up here has. You were employing illegal immigrants. That is a pretty serious thing. They were under your nose.

(Applause)

And ...

Romney: I ask the mayor again. Are you suggesting, Mayor, that if you have a company that you hired who provide a service, that you now are responsible for going out and checking the employees of that company, particularly those that might look different or don't have an accent like yours, and ask for their papers -- I don't think that's American, number one.

Number two ...

Cooper: We got to move on.

Romney: Let me tell you what I did as governor. I said no to driver's licenses for illegals.

I said, number two, we're going to make sure that those that come here don't get a tuition break in our schools, which I disagree with other folks on that one.

(Applause)

Number three, I applied to have our state police enforce the immigration laws in May, seven months before I was out of office.

It took the federal government a long time to get the approvals and we enforced the law. And Massachusetts is not a sanctuary state, and the policies of the mayor of pursuing a sanctuary nation or pursuing a sanctuary city...

Cooper: We've got a number ...

Romney: ... are, frankly, wrong.

Cooper: We've got a number of questions from our viewers on this topic, so we have a lot more to talk about on this. You will have another chance to respond.

(Applause)

Giuliani: And it's really hard -- it's really hard to have employer sanctions...

(Audience booing)

Cooper: All right. Let's play this next video from the same topic.

(Begin video clip)

Michael Weitz: Good evening. There are thousands of people in Canada and Mexico waiting to come to America legally. They want to become American citizens. They want to be part of the American dream. Yet, there are those in the Senate that want to grant amnesty for those that come here illegally.

Will you pledge tonight, if elected president, to veto any immigration bill that involves amnesty for those that have come here illegally?

Thank you.

Cooper: Senator Thompson?

(Applause)

Thompson: Yes, I pledge that. A nation that cannot and will not defend its own borders will not forever remain a sovereign nation. And it's unfair...

(Applause)

We have -- we have thousands of people standing in line at embassies around the world to become United States American citizens, to come here to get a green card, to come here and to assimilate and be a part of our culture. They are part of what has made our country great. Some of our better citizens. We all know them and love them.

Now, it's our country together -- their's and ours, now together. It's our home. And we now get to decide who comes into our home.

And to place somebody above them or in front of them in line is the wrong thing to do.

We've got to strengthen the border. We've got to enforce the border. We've got to punish employers -- employers who will not obey the law. And we've got to eliminate sanctuary cities and

say to sanctuary cities, if you continue this, we're going to cut off federal funding for you, you're not going to do it with federal money.

(Applause)

Now, there are parts of what both of these gentlemen have just said that I would like to associate myself with.

First of all, of course, Governor Romney supported the Bush immigration plan until a short time ago. Now he's taken another position, surprisingly.

(Laughter)

As far as Mayor Giuliani is concerned, I am a little surprised the mayor says, you know, everybody's responsible for everybody that they hire, but we'll have to address that a little bit further later. I think we've all had people probably that we have hired that in retrospect probably is a bad decision.

(Laughter)

He did have a sanctuary city. In 1996, I helped pass a bill outlawing sanctuary cities. The mayor went to court to overturn it. So, if it wasn't a sanctuary city, I'd call that a frivolous lawsuit.

(Applause)

Cooper: All right, because this was a direct...

(Applause)

Cooper: Because this was a direct mention of Mayor Giuliani, we have to allow you to respond. Thirty seconds, please.

Giuliani: New York City was not a sanctuary city. New York City did three exceptions. The three exceptions were to allow children to go to school, to allow those illegal immigrants who were the victims of crime to report the person who assaulted them, beat them up, mugged them.

And third, to allow emergency care in the hospitals, which we were required to do by federal law. We had a policy of reporting every single illegal immigrant other than those three who commit any kind of crime or were suspected of crime, and we reported thousands of them to immigration service. Few of them were deported.

Cooper: Senator McCain, let me bring you back to the question that was asked by the YouTube user. Would you willing to veto any immigration bill that involved amnesty for those who have come here illegally?

McCain: Yes, of course, and we never proposed amnesty. But you know, this whole debate...

Cooper: Come on, please. Let him answer.

McCain: You know, this whole debate saddens me a little bit because we do have a serious situation in America. In 1986, we passed a law that said we would enforce our borders, and gave

amnesty to a couple of million people. We gave the amnesty. Now we have 12 million people and still borders that are not enforced.

I came to the Senate not to do the easy things, but to do the hard things. Mel Martinez and I knew this was going to be a tough issue, but we thought the status quo was unacceptable: broken borders; 12 million people here illegally; a need for a temporary worker program, certainly in my state in the agricultural section, certainly in this state of Florida.

And we tried to get something done. We said we'd enforce the borders. The American people didn't believe us. They don't believe us because of our failure in Katrina, our failure in Iraq, our failures in reining in corruption and out of control spending.

So we tried and we failed. And I appreciate the president's efforts. He comes from a border state too. And what we've learned is that the American people want the borders enforced. We must enforce the -- secure the borders first.

But then you've still got two other aspects of this issue that have to be resolved as well. And we need to sit down as Americans and recognize these are God's children as well.

(Applause)

And they need some protection under the law. And they need some of our love and compassion.

Cooper: Thank you, Senator.

McCain: And I want to assure you that I'll enforce the borders first, that as president of the United States, we'll solve this immigration problem. And we won't demagogue it. And we won't have sanctuary cities.

Cooper: OK.

McCain: And we won't have all this other rhetoric that unfortunately contributes nothing to the national dialogue.

Cooper: Thank you, senator.

Michael Weitz who actually asked that question is here in the audience.

Michael, do you feel you got an answer?

Weitz: Am I happy with the answer?

Cooper: Yes.

Weitz: One yes, one no and one sort of.

(LAUGHTER)

Cooper: All right.

Well, let's -- Congressman Tancredo?

Tancredo: Yes.

Well, I tell you, this has been wonderful. Senator McCain may not be happy with the spirit of this debate. For a guy who usually stands on the bookend here, aside, and just listens all the time, that's kind of frustrating, you know, in other debates. I have to tell you, so far, it's been wonderful.

(Laughter)

Because all I've heard is people trying to out-Tancredo Tancredo.

It is great. I am so happy to hear it. It is a wonderful thing. It's a good message, yes. We want to secure the borders.

Cooper: Our next question is actually directly to you, so let's bring it up.

Tancredo: Let me go ahead and answer that next question.

Jack Brooks: Hammered by competition with imports, our family- owned business struggles each year to find seasonal workers. We've been working with a seasonal guest-worker program, the H2B program, bringing in and sending home workers every year.

But with Congress failing to enact a comprehensive immigration and guest worker bill, I want to know whether I'll have a job next year. What are you going to do to keep these guest workers coming to the U.S. to save our business?

Cooper: Congressman Tancredo?

Tancredo: OK, the gist of the question, as I understand it, is, what I'm going to do stop guest workers from coming in here?

Cooper: No, no, to help. This small business needs guest workers.

Tancredo: I'm sorry. I could not hear that. I'm sorry. Well, I'll tell you, I'm not going to aid any more immigration into this country, because in fact, immigration...

(Applause)

... massive immigration into the country, massive immigration, both legal and illegal, does a couple of things.

One of it is, makes it difficult for us to assimilate. The other thing is that it does take jobs.

I reject the idea -- I reject the idea, categorically, that there are jobs that, quote, "No American will take." I reject it.

(Applause)

Now, what they will do...

(Applause)

... what you can say -- what you absolutely can say to these people is that there are no -- there are some jobs Americans won't take for what I can get any illegal immigrant to do that job for. Yes, that's true.

But am I going to feel sorry if a business has to increase its wages in order for somebody in this country to make a good living? No, I don't feel sorry about that and I won't apologize for it for a moment. And there are plenty of Americans who will do those jobs.

(Applause)

Cooper: Congressman Hunter?

Hunter: Yes. Cooper, a great debate. It's nice to listen to lots of statements about what the other candidates will do with respect to the borders.

I built that border fence in San Diego and it does work. It's a ...

(Applause)

You know, we built a double fence. We had the number one smuggler's corridor in America with most of the illegal aliens and most of the drugs that came into the entire country coming in through that number one corridor between Tijuana, Mexico, and San Diego, California.

We built the double-border fence with a road in between, and we reduced the smuggling of people and drugs by more than 90 percent. And as a result of that, the crime rate...

(Applause)

... the crime rate in the city of San Diego went down by 53 percent by FBI statistic. And as a result of that, I wrote the law that the president signed last October 26, incidentally, passed the Senate 80-19, that mandates 854 miles of double-border fence across Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

Now, the administration has \$800 million on hand right now, cash on hand. They haven't built a linear inch of that fence in Texas.

As president of the United States, I would bill the double-border fence, all 854 miles, in six months.

Cooper: Next question is ...

(Applause)

Hunter: That is my commitment.

(Applause)

Cooper: ... on immigration as well is going to go to Governor Huckabee.

(Applause)

Ashley: Governor Huckabee, while governor of Arkansas, you gave a illegal aliens a discount for college in Arkansas by allow them to pay lower in-state tuition rates. However, we have

thousands of military members currently serving our country in Iraq with children at home. If these children chose to move to Arkansas to attend college, they would have to pay three times the tuition rate that illegal aliens pay.

Would you support a federal law which would require any state that gives these tuition rates to illegal aliens to give the same rates to the children of our military members?

Cooper: Governor Huckabee, you have 90 seconds.

Huckabee: Thank you very much.

Ashley, first of all, let me just express that you're a little misinformed. We never passed a bill that gave special privileges to the children of illegals to go to college.

Now, let me tell you what I did do. I supported the bill that would've allowed those children who had been in our schools their entire school life the opportunity to have the same scholarship that their peers had, who had also gone to high school with them and sat in the same classrooms.

They couldn't just move in in their senior year and go to college. It wasn't about out of state tuition. It was an academic, meritorious scholarship called the Academic Challenge Scholarship.

Now, let me tell you a couple of provisions of it. And, by the way, it didn't pass. It passed the House but got in the Senate and got caught up in the same kind of controversy that this country is caught up in.

And here's what happened. This bill would've said that if you came here, not because you made the choice but because your parents did, that we're not going to punish a child because the parent committed a crime.

That's not what we typically do in this country.

It said that if you'd sat in our schools from the time you're five or six-years old and you had become an A-plus student, you'd completed the core curriculum, you were an exceptional student, and you also had to be drug and alcohol-free -- and the other provision, you had to be applying for citizenship.

It accomplished two things that we knew we wanted to do, and that is, number one, bring people from illegal status to legal status.

And the second thing, we wanted people to be taxpayers, not tax-takers. And that's what that provision did.

And finally, would we give that provision to the children of veterans, personally? What we've done with not just the children of veterans, but most importantly, veterans is disgraceful in this country.

And that's why I proposed a veterans bill of rights that, if anything, would give our veterans the most exceptional privileges of all, because they are the ones who have earned all of our freedom -- every single one of them.

Cooper: Governor, you called Governor Huckabee a liberal on immigration.

(Applause)

Romney: Well, you know, I like Mike. And I heard what he just said. But he basically said that he fought for giving scholarships to illegal aliens. And he had -- he had a great reason for doing so.

It reminds me of what it's like talking to liberals in Massachusetts, all right? They have great reasons for taking taxpayer money and using it for things they think are the right thing to do.

Mike, that's not your money. That's the taxpayers' money.

(Applause)

And the right thing here is to say to people that are here legally as citizens or legal aliens, we're going to help you. But if you're here illegally, then you ought to be able to return home or get in line with everybody else. But illegals are not going to get taxpayer-funded breaks that are better than our own citizens, those that come from other states or those that come from your state.

Cooper: You have 30 seconds to respond.

Huckabee: Well, but they didn't get something better. They had to earn it.

And, you know something, I worked my way through college. I started work when I was 14 and I had to pay my own way through.

I know how hard it was to get that degree. I am standing here tonight on this stage because I got an education. If I hadn't had the education, I wouldn't be standing on this stage. I might be picking lettuce. I might be a person who needed government support, rather than who was giving so much money in taxes I want to get rid of the tax code that we've got and make it really different.

Romney: Well ...

Huckabee: Mitt, let me finish. Let me finish, Mitt.

In all due respect, we are a better country than to punish children for what their parents did. We're a better country than that.

(Applause)

Cooper: Another question -- we have one more question for...

Romney: I get a chance to just respond to that. We are not punishing children for what their parents did. I respect the fact that you worked your way through college. That's the way you are. That's wonderful. A lot of people in this country do tremendous things to get their education. But the question is, are we going to give taxpayer-funded benefits to kids that are here illegally and put them ahead of kids that are here legally?

There is only so much money to go around, and ...

Huckabee: No, there is ...

Romney: Let me finish, too.

Huckabee: Well, but let's just be factual.

Cooper: You've got 30 seconds. Your time is up.

Romney: There's only so much money. Are we going to say that kids that are here illegally are going to get a special deal? Are they going to get a deal better than other kids? Do they get benefits by virtue of coming here illegally? And the answer is no.

Huckabee: Because they're earning it. That was the difference. They had to earn it by their...

Cooper: We've got another question from a YouTube watcher. Let's watch, please.

YouTube question: Good evening, candidates. This is (inaudible) from Arlington, Texas, and this question is for Ron Paul.

I've met a lot of your supporters online, but I've noticed that a good number of them seem to buy into this conspiracy theory regarding the Council of Foreign Relations, and some plan to make a North American union by merging the United States with Canada and Mexico.

These supporters of yours seem to think that you also believe in this theory. So my question to you is: Do you really believe in all this, or are people just putting words in your mouth?

Cooper: Congressman Paul, 90 seconds.

Paul: Well, it all depends on what you mean by "all of this." the CFR exists, the Trilateral Commission exists. And it's a quote, "conspiracy of ideas." This is an ideological battle. Some people believe in globalism. Others of us believe in national sovereignty.

And there is a move on toward a North American union, just like early on there was a move on for a European Union, and it eventually ended up.

And there is a move on toward a North American Union, just like early on there was a move on for a European Union, and eventually ended up. So we had NAFTA and moving toward a NAFTA highway. These are real things. It's not somebody made these up. It's not a conspiracy. They don't talk about it, and they might not admit about it, but there's been money spent on it. There was legislation passed in the Texas legislature unanimously to put a halt on it. They're planning on millions of acres taken by eminent domain for an international highway from Mexico to Canada, which is going to make the immigration problem that much worse.

So it's not so much a secretive conspiracy, it's a contest between ideologies, whether we believe in our institutions here, our national sovereignty, our Constitution, or are we going to further move into the direction of international government, more U.N.

You know, this country goes to war under U.N. resolutions. I don't like big government in Washington, so I don't like this trend toward international government. We have a WTO that wants to control our drug industry, our nutritional products. So, I'm against all that.

But it's not so much as a sinister conspiracy. It's just knowledge is out there. If we look for it, you'll realize that our national sovereignty is under threat.

Cooper: Congressman Paul, thank you.

(Applause)

Cooper: We've got a question -- moving on to another topic, the economy, money. Next question.

Sarah Lederach: My name is Sarah Lederach. I'm 18 years old. I'm from Scarsdale, Pennsylvania. And I'm a student at Penn State University.

Often, I've heard both politicians and voters express their concern with providing a better future for their children. A concern of my generation is the trillions of dollars of national debt and what kind of responsibility we will have for that in the future.

My question for you all is, if elected, what measures will you take to tackle the national debt and control spending?

Cooper: Senator McCain, have Republicans forgotten how to control spending?

McCain: Absolutely. Absolutely.

When we came to power in 1994, the government ...

(Applause)

... changed government and the government changed us.

We let spending lurch completely out of control. We spent \$3 million to study the DNA of bears in Montana -- I don't know if that was a paternity issue or a criminal issue.

(Laughter)

We presided over a great expansion of government, the latest being the SCHIP, which was going to be paid for, supposedly, with a dollar-a-pack increase in the tax on a pack of cigarettes.

So, we're going to help children with their health insurance and hope that they continue to smoke.

(Laughter)

So, I have the record of fighting against wasteful spending. I have a clear record of winning. I saved the taxpayers \$2 billion on a bogus Air Force Boeing tanker deal, where people went to jail.

I led in the Abramoff hearings in the -- in the obscure Indian Affairs Committee, for which people are still testifying and going to jail.

As president of the United States, I'd take an old veto pen that Ronald Reagan gave me, and I'd veto every single pork barrel bill that comes across my desk. I'd make the authors famous.

And we've got to stop it and stop it now. And I can do it. And I've done it. And I've got the record.

(Applause)

And I know how Washington works. And I look forward to it.

Cooper: Governor Romney, what would you do to the pork spending?

Romney: Well, the senator is absolutely right. Every bill that comes forward that's got pork in it and earmarks that are unnecessary, we've got to veto them and send them back. And that's a -- that's a lesson that's going to have to be done.

But it's gotta be broader than that. We're going to have to see fundamental change in the way Washington works. We're just -- we're just not going to get out-of-the-box thinking with inside-the-Beltway politics.

And we're going to have to fundamentally go at something like our entitlements and say we've got to reform those. I took on a major issue, which was health care, found a way to get people health insurance without having to expand government, without having to raise taxes.

We are going to have to after entitlements. We are going to have to set a cap, as I have proposed, on all nonmilitary discretionary spending, and inflation less 1 percent. Anything above that, we veto it.

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: I think you have to across-the-board spending cuts the way Ronald Reagan did, a 5, 10 percent per civilian agency should be done right now, actually. President Bush should do it to strengthen the dollar. We should commit not to rehire half of the civilian employees that will retire in the next 10 years. That is 42 percent of the federal workforce that will retire in the next 10 years. Don't rehire half of them. Use technology, one person doing the job of two or three.

Every business has done it. The government has to do it. And we should look at those programs. There are about 3 percent of programs that OMB finds every year are failing. They should be zeroed out. Twenty-two percent are found to be not able to be evaluated. They should be looked at. We need that kind of approach.

Cooper: The next question is going to go to Senator Thompson, as well as Ron Paul.

Emily: Hi, I am Emily and I am from Los Angeles.

The Republican Party once stood for limited government, which meant reduced federal spending because we tax less and we spent less.

However, over the past decade, real discretionary federal spending has in fact increased 40 percent, more than half of which has been non-defense related.

So my question is: What are the names of the top three federal programs you would reduce in size in order to decrease...

(Applause)

Cooper: Senator Thompson?

Thompson: Well, it's a target-rich environment, there's no question about it. What most of these gentlemen have said absolutely correct. The difficulty is, most of the programs that we talk about, most of the ones get the headlines, would not begin to solve the problem.

Mitt's right when he mentions entitlement. That's why I have laid out a program to not attack entitlements, but to save Social Security. Everybody talks about wanting to do something about it.

Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid are the ones that we're really going to have to reform if we're going to make any headway into spending.

Cooper: So of the top three you would say Social Security?

Thompson: No. I didn't say that. There is -- the OMB has come out with a list of over 100 programs. I would take all 100 of them, the ones that are full of waste, fraud and duplication. I filed a report in 2001, when I was chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee, and identified billions of dollars that we should be saving.

But my point is that we're going to have to reform Social Security, we're going to have to reform Medicare. I've laid out a detailed plan that will give individual retirement accounts for people, matched by the government, and also re-index the way benefits are calculated initially when a person retires. And together, that program has been said by the experts already -- to say that -- have said that it would, after 75 years, make Social Security actuarially sound.

I've got the only program out there that really addresses specifically one of the programs that's going to have to be reformed.

Cooper: Congressman Paul, the question was three programs.

Can you name three?

Paul: Yes, and I would like to state that, to the statement earlier made that we all went to Washington to change Washington and Washington changed us, I don't think that applies to me; Washington did not change me.

(Applause)

I would like to change Washington, and we could by cutting three programs, such as the Department of Education -- Ronald Reagan used to talk about that -- Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security is the biggest bureaucracy we ever had.

(Applause)

And besides, what we can do is we can have a stronger national defense by changing our foreign policy. Our foreign policy is costing us a trillion dollars, and we can spend most of that or a lot of that money home if we would bring our troops home.

(Applause)

Cooper: Governor Huckabee, 30 seconds, three programs.

Huckabee: Anderson, the first thing that I would get rid of would be the Internal Revenue Service.

(Applause)

We'd have a complete -- getting rid of a \$10-billion-a-year industry.

I'm not being facetious. If we enacted the fair tax, one of the most researched ways to revive our economic future ...

(Applause)

... we will get rid of the IRS. Secondly, I agree we need to revamp homeland security. It's a mess, and we have a real problem with the way that it's currently structured. And the third...

Cooper: Thirty seconds is up.

Huckabee: What's that?

Cooper: Thirty seconds is up.

Huckabee: Oh, OK. Get rid of the IRS, and that would account for most of the problems. Most people in this country are more afraid of an audit than they are of a mugging, and there's a reason why.

Cooper: We've got more questions on this topic.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

Cooper: This next question is for Senator McCain.

Ronald Lanham: My name is Ronald Lanham from Mobile, Alabama. And I want you to tell me, do you support the elimination of the federal income tax in favor of a national retail sales tax, also known as the fair tax? Thank you.

Cooper: Governor Huckabee supports it. Do you?

McCain: I do not, and I think we should look very carefully at it. And I think we should look very carefully at some of the provisions, which according to The Wall Street Journal would increase an individual's tax rate up into the 30s.

Obviously, we need a simpler, fairer tax code. Everybody knows that. We need to have a commission that reports out a credible proposal. And then we do what we do with the base closing commissions. Congress can't fool around, they either vote yes or no.

If Congress can't fix the tax code, give me the job and I'll fix it.

I just want to also say that Congressman Paul, I've heard him now in many debates talk about bringing our troops home, and about the war in Iraq and how it's failed.

(Applause)

And I want to tell you that that kind of isolationism, sir, is what caused World War II. We allowed...

(Applause)

We allowed ...

(Audience booing)

Cooper: Allow him his answer. Allow him his answer, please.

McCain: We allowed -- we allowed Hitler to come to power with that kind of attitude of isolationism and appeasement.

(Audience booing)

And I want to tell you something, sir. I just finished having Thanksgiving with the troops, and their message to you is -- the message of these brave men and women who are serving over there is, "Let us win. Let us..."

(Applause)

Cooper: We will -- please. We will get to Iraq...

(Applause)

All right. Let me just remind everyone that these people did take a lot of time to ask these questions, and so we do want direct questions to -- the answers. We will get to Iraq later, but I do have to allow Congressman Paul 30 seconds to respond.

Paul: Absolutely. The real question you have to ask is why do I get the most money from active duty officers and military personnel?

(Applause)

What John is saying is just totally distorted.

(Protester shouts off-mike)

Paul: He doesn't even understand the difference between non-intervention and isolationism. I'm not an isolationist, (shakes head) em, isolationist. I want to trade with people, talk with people, travel. But I don't want to send troops overseas using force to tell them how to live. We would object to it here and they're going to object to us over there.

(Applause)

Cooper: All right. We will have a lot more on Iraq coming up. It is obviously a very heated topic. Sticking on the economy, though, a familiar face asking a very simple question.

Governor Norquist: President Bush made a commitment when he ran for president in 2000 and 2004 that he would oppose and veto any tax increase that Congress sent him. My question to each of the candidates is: Would you promise to the people watching this right now, that you will oppose and veto any efforts to raise taxes as long as you're president?

Cooper: I doubt you can do it, but very short answers. Congressman Tancredo?

Tancredo: Yes, I can. I have the highest rating, by the way, from the American Conservative Union of anybody on this stage, and yes to Grover because he knows I have the highest rating from the Americans for Tax Reform.

(Applause)

Tancredo: Thank you very much, Grover. Appreciate it.

Cooper: Governor Huckabee?

Huckabee: I would, Anderson. In fact, I signed a pledge to that effect and would keep that pledge.

Cooper: Governor Romney?

Romney: I've signed Grover's pledge as well. I believe I was the first person on this stage to do so.

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: Yes, I would. I did it as mayor. I would do it as the president. I had one of the best records in the country for lowering taxes while I was mayor. I expect to have a great record as president.

Cooper: Senator Thompson?

Thompson: Cut -- tax cuts for eight years when I was in the United States Senate. Never met a tax I liked. I've got a tax-cut bill on the table. But I don't do pledges to anybody but the American people.

Audience: Go, Fred, go.

(Applause)

Cooper: Senator McCain?

McCain: I have a 24-year record of opposing tax increases and supporting tax reductions. And, no, I'm like Fred. My pledge and my record is up to the American people, not up to any other organization.

Cooper: Congressman Paul?

Paul: I have never voted for a tax increase; never will. But the tax issue is only one-half of it.

You can easily pledge not to raise taxes, but you have to cut spending.

(Applause)

Cooper: Congressman Hunter?

Hunter: You know, I came in with Ronald Reagan in 1980 to cut taxes, and I probably voted for more tax cuts than anybody here.

But you could have an emergency, a time of war, and I think it would be wrong to say, "Absolutely, I would pledge to Grover Norquist that I would never raise taxes." Could have a national emergency.

Cooper: All right, next question.

Ted Fatusos: Hi, I'm Ted Fatusos from Manhattan Beach, California.

Mmmmmm, nothing says delicious like cheap corn subsidized by the American taxpayer. For a lot of Americans, however, a bitter taste is left in their mouth when they learned about how the U.S. taxpayer bankrolls billions of dollars in farm subsidies that mostly go to large item business interests.

I'm curious which candidate could label themselves fiscally responsible, will endorse the elimination of farm subsidies if they are elected president in 2008.

Cooper: Governor Romney, a lot of folks in Iowa interested in this answer.

(Laughter)

So I hear.

Romney: Not to mention Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and so forth. We don't want to find ourselves, with regards to our food supply, in the same kind of position we're in with regards to our energy supply. And so it's important for us to make sure that our farmers are able to stay on the farm and raise the crops that we need to have a secure source of food. And so I believe in supports that will allow us to do that.

And the same time, I recognize that we're also investing in new technologies to get ourselves energy independent. And I happen to believe that some of the best sources for having renewable energy come from the farm. And so we're investing with subsidies in those areas to create new technology that otherwise wouldn't be ready for the market yet. So I support these programs.

And finally, I'd say this. We have, in our nation, about one out of three acres that are planted are for sale overseas.

We send products around the world. We're competing with European and Brazilian and other farmers, and we're competing in a marketplace where they are heavily subsidized, at great disadvantage for our farmers. And so, if we're going to change our support structure, we want to make sure that they change their support structure.

And we do this together, as opposed to unilaterally saying: We're going to put our farmers in a tough position and have the farmers in the rest of the world continue to be subsidized.

So, open markets, let our goods go around the world and secure our source of food.

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani, 30 seconds.

Giuliani: The governor's right. It isn't a level playing field. The subsidies in Europe are far higher than they are in the United States. We could reduce subsidies here if they would do it there. But we shouldn't do it on our own.

And also, we have to be very aware of the fact that we have to have our own supply of food. We can't be dependent on foreign countries for our food.

So, both of those reasons would say that although simplistically, it might seem like you'd want to get rid of all the subsidies, you've got to do this very carefully, and you have to do it in concert with these free-trade agreements and other agreements you're making so that European countries reduce their much heavier subsidies.

Cooper: Since we're on fiscal matters, I would be remiss if I didn't ask this question, since it did just break a couple hours ago. This is to Mayor Giuliani. Politico broke a story a few hours ago questioning your accounting of taxpayer dollars as mayor.

They say that as mayor, the report says you took trips to the Hamptons and expensed the cost of your police detail to obscure city offices.

One, is that true? And, if so, was it appropriate?

Giuliani: First of all, it's not true. I had 24-hour security for the eight years that I was mayor. They followed me everywhere I went. It was because there were, you know, threats, threats that I don't generally talk about. Some have become public recently; most of them haven't.

And they took care of me, and they put in their records, and they handled them in the way they handled them. I had nothing to do with the handling of their records, and they were handled, as far as I know, perfectly appropriately.

Cooper: We have asked all the campaigns, we should point out, to submit 30-second or so campaign-style videos, YouTube-style videos. It was open to them to do it in any format they wanted.

Our first video -- and we're going to be playing them throughout the night, some of them out of commercials, some of them during the program -- is from Congressman Tancredo.

(Begin videotape)

Tancredo: This issue of immigration is one of the most serious public policy issues we face.

Sen. Hillary Clinton: What do we do now?

Tancredo: We have got to actually begin the process of assimilating people.

Clinton: They may not talk to you if they think you are also going to be enforcing the immigration laws.

Tancredo: We are obfuscating and using words like: Well, I am not for amnesty, but I am for letting them stay.

Clinton: Well, I don't have enough time to tell you all the mistakes I have made.

Tancredo: The Republicans can stop this.

(End videotape)

(Applause)

Cooper: All right, let's have our next question from a YouTube viewer.

LeeAnn Anderson: My name is LeeAnn Anderson and I am from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and these are my kids Evan and May. Maya is from China and we adopted him to give her a better life. We never dreamed that she would that she'd be exposed to lead after leaving China, and now we find trains like this that are covered with lead in our home.

My question for the candidates are, what are you going to do to make sure that these kind of toys don't make their way into our homes and that we have safe toys that are made in America again and we keep jobs in America?

Cooper: Congressman Tancredo, you have 90 seconds.

Tancredo: It is illegal to import that kind of thing. The problem is, of course, no one really pays a lot of attention to a lot of our laws, with regard to immigration of both people and, now in this case, of course, items, goods and services.

I voted against permanent normalized trade relations with China -- this is one reason why. It wasn't -- that was never devised simply to be a place for us to sell our products; it was devised to be a place where we could get cheap labor to then import products to the United States.

So, one of the things you'd have to do, and I certainly would intend to do, is to change our trade arrangement entirely -- with China, by the way, in particular, but with other countries, as well, that violate those agreements.

Cooper: Congressman Hunter, you have 30 seconds.

(Applause)

Hunter: China is cheating on trade, and they're using that \$200 billion trade deficit over the United States to buy ships, planes and missiles. They are clearly arming.

And it's in the interest of the United States...

(Applause)

... to stop China's cheating. My bill, incidentally, that's up right now would do that.

But what we all ought to do in this Christmas season, with about a month to go before Christmas is buy American.

That might hire the young person. That'll result in a...

(Applause)

You know, that just might keep your neighbor from losing his job, and it might help that young person coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan in uniform to have a job when they get back.

Let's buy American this Christmas season.

Cooper: All right. We're going to have three commercial breaks throughout this entire debate. This is the first one. And as we go to it, we go to another campaign-style video, this one from Senator Fred Thompson.

(Begin videotape)

Romney: I believe that abortion should be safe and legal in this country. I believe that since Roe v. Wade has been the law for 20 years, that we should sustain and support it.

Huckabee: Others have suggested a surcharge on the income tax. That's acceptable. I'm fine with that. Others have suggested, perhaps, a sales tax. That's fine.

(End videotape)

Cooper: Actually, given the nature of that video, we're not going to go to break right now.

(Laughter)

I think it's something we should talk about.

Senator Thompson, what's up with that?

(Laughter)

Thompson: I just wanted to give my buddies here a little extra airtime.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

Listen, I mean, what do you mean what's up with it? These are their words.

Cooper: OK. I should allow time to respond.

Governor Romney?

Romney: I'm not sure who that young guy was at the beginning of that film, but I can tell you this, which is, I don't know how many times I can tell it. I was wrong. All right. I was effectively pro-choice when I ran for office.

(Applause)

If people in this country are looking for someone who's never made a mistake on a policy issue and is not willing to admit they're ever wrong, why then they're going to have to find somebody else, because on abortion I was wrong.

(Applause)

And I changed my mind as the governor. This didn't just happen the last couple of weeks or the last year. This happened when I was governor the first time a bill came to my desk that related to life. I could not sign a bill that would take away human life. I came down on the side of life every single instance as governor of Massachusetts. I was awarded by the Massachusetts Citizens for Life with their leadership award for my record.

I'm proud to be pro-life, and I'm not going to be apologizing for people for becoming pro-life.

(Applause)

Cooper: Governor Huckabee, 30 seconds to respond.

Huckabee: Well, I was governor nearly 11 years, and in that time I cut 90 taxes. Over that period of time, the income tax remained exactly what it was. The sales tax is one penny higher.

But I did do a number of tax cuts that helped a lot of people all over the place, like eliminating the marriage penalty, doubling the child care tax credit, getting rid of capital gains on the sale of a home, cutting capital gains on other things.

I have a great record on fiscal conservatism. But one thing I've learned, you know, when you get attacked, it's not always bad. It's like my old pastor used to tell me, when they're kicking you in the rear, it's just proving you're still out front.

(Applause)

Cooper: I'm sure there's some campaign chair who might want to change their videos that they've given us after seeing Senator Thompson's, but it's too late to do that. We're going to take a short break. We'll be right back.

(Commercial break)

Jay Fox: I'm Jay Fox, lifetime member of the NRA. Now, I am from a small town and as in any small town, we like our big guns. My question to you is: What is your opinion of gun control? And don't worry, you can answer however you like.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

Cooper: Congressman Hunter? You have 90 seconds.

Hunter: Well, first I've got to inform Jay that as a guy who got his first hunting license at the age of 10 and really believes in the right to keep and bear arms, and used them in the military, as my son did in Fallujah, you should never throw a gun to a person. He should have taken that gun handed-off from his fellow hunter. So you have to be safe with guns, Jay.

But the right to keep and bear arms is an important element of community security, home security, and national security. I think it is a tradition of the American soldier.

From Bunker Hill to New Orleans to the rooftops of Fallujah, the right to keep and bear arms and use them effectively is an important part of America's security. And I will strongly enforce the Second Amendment as president of the United States.

Cooper: All right. On the same topic, another question. Let's watch.

Andrew Fink: Hello. My name is Andrew Fink, and I have a question for Rudy Giuliani.

Mr. Giuliani, at a recent NRA convention, you stated that it's every American's right to be secure. Yet, on March 21 of the year 2000, The Boston Globe quoted you as saying, "Anyone wanting to own a gun should have to pass a written exam."

Considering the Constitution grants us the right to bear arms as a means of protection, why do you believe that citizens should be required to pass an exam in order to exercise their right to protect themselves and their families?

Thank you.

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani, 90 seconds.

Giuliani: Andrew, what I believe is that we have to be very aggressive about enforcing the gun laws that exist. I had a city in which, when I took over, there were 2,000 murders a year, 10,000 felonies a week. And I enforced the gun laws very aggressively.

I enforced all laws very aggressively. And that's the reason we reduced shootings by 74 percent. We reduced homicide by 67 percent. And we went from being one of the most dangerous cities in the country to being one of the safest.

As far as that's concerned, what I believe is, the Second Amendment gives people an individual right to keep and to bear arms. Government can impose reasonable regulations. Generally, those reasonable regulations would be about...

(Audience booing)

Cooper: Let him answer.

Giuliani: Let me finish. Generally, those reasonable regulations would be about criminal background, background of mental instability, basically the ones that are outlined in the opinion of the judge who wrote the Parker decision, Judge Silverman. And if those regulations go beyond that, then those are unconstitutional.

I think states can have a little bit of leeway. New York could have a somewhat stricter rule than, let's say, Kentucky. Texas might have different rules than Ohio. But generally, you've got to comply with this rule.

Now, the Supreme Court's going to decide this. The Supreme Court's going to decide this, probably within the next six months. The Parker (ph) case has been taken to the Supreme Court. They're going to decide whether it's a right that pertains to the militia -- which I don't believe it is -- or is it a right that is a personal right. I believe that it is.

And I will live by that. And people will be allowed to have guns. I'm not going to interfere with that. Generally, decisions are going to be made on a state basis. And they're going to have to comply with the Constitution.

Cooper: Senator Thompson, last week you said that you don't think Mayor Giuliani's ever been a supporter of the Second Amendment. Why did you say that -- 30 seconds.

Thompson: Well, the mayor has supported a wide array of gun control laws. I'm not sure there's ever one that didn't come up for consideration in terms of legislation that he didn't support -- signing ceremonies with people from President Clinton's Cabinet and that sort of thing when they came up.

The Second Amendment is not a choice thing. I mean, it's in the Constitution of the United States -- that's the protection that the people have against...

(Applause)

The case that the mayor refers to is the Washington D.C. case, and they were taking the same position, basically, the mayor took, as far as the city of New York is concerned.

They said, "You know, it will make a safer city if we outlaw law-abiding citizens having the right to possess a firearm." It didn't make them a safer city.

The D.C. Court of Appeals held that it was a violation of their Second Amendment rights and, hopefully, the Supreme Court will uphold the D.C. court.

Cooper: Mayor?

Giuliani: I agree with the senator that it didn't make it a safer city. And some of these gun laws do not make a city a safer city.

The things we did in New York, indisputably, made New York City a much safer city. And the law in the District of Columbia and the law in New York are different.

The law in the District of Columbia made it impossible for you to have a firearm. And if New York City went that far, it should also be declared unconstitutional.

The Second Amendment clearly gives you the right to carry and to bear arms. In my reading of it, it's an individual right, and I believe the Supreme Court will declare that. And that protection comes from the Constitution, not just a president.

Cooper: Staying on the topic, another question from a viewer.

Eric Bentson: Hi there. I'm Eric Bentson from Phoenix, Arizona. Got a quick question for all you candidates.

Any of you all want to tell us about your gun collection, roughly how many you own, what your favorite make, model and caliber is, if any of them require a tax stamp?

Cooper: (Off-mike) if you have a machine gun or a silencer.

Senator Thompson?

Thompson: I own a couple of guns, but I'm not going to tell you what they are or where they are.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

Cooper: Senator McCain?

McCain: For a long time I used a lot of guns, including carrying a .45 as a pilot flying in combat over Vietnam.

I know how to use guns. I don't own one now.

Cooper: Congressman Hunter?

Hunter: I have an old 20-gauge L.C. Smith that is just like the gun that my dad used to carry when I would walk behind him as a 9-year-old kid and pick up the shells when he was hunting quail. I finally got a chance to buy one of those a few years ago, the same gun that he had had and given to me when I was nine or ten year old when I bought my first hunting license.

The right to keep and bear arms in the Second Amendment is a large part protection. It is also a large part family tradition.

Cooper: Is there anyone here besides Senator McCain who does not own a gun? Mayor Giuliani? Governor Romney?

Romney: I have two guns in my home. They are owned by my son Josh.

Cooper: All right, there you have it.

We have another question on a similar topic.

Romney: He buys expensive things for me.

YouTube question: Hi, this is me and my son Prentiss. We're from Atlanta. I want to ask you guys a question (inaudible) every year. But what about the war going on in our country, black on black crime? Two hundred to 400 black men die yearly in one city alone. What are you going to do about that war? It feels like the (inaudible) is right outside.

Cooper: He's talking about black-on-black crime, crime in the inner cities.

Governor Romney?

Romney: Well, first of all, Printes is pretty fortunate because he's got a dad standing next to him that apparently loves him by all appearances there, and that's probably the best thing you can do for a kid is to have a mom and a dad.

(Applause)

And it's time in this country that we go back to the kind of values that allow kid to have moms and dads. In the African-American community today, 68 percent of kids born are born out of wedlock. And so we're going to try and once again reindulcate in this country the try of values that have made us so strong: family values.

Secondly ...

Cooper: The question is, what are you going to do about the war in the inner city?

Romney: Well, one, about the war in the inner city -- number one is to get more moms and dads. That's number one. And thank heavens Bill Cosby said it like it was. That's where the root of crime starts.

Number two, we've got to have better education in our schools.

I think that the civil rights issue of our time is the failure of inner-city schools to prepare kids in the inner city for the jobs of tomorrow. And number three, of course, you have to do a better job with our policing. And I was very proud that I added one state police class after another.

We had the largest state police in the history of our state during my term. We put in place tough laws related to drunk driving. Sex offenders, they have their pictures now posted on the Internet. We took actions to be tough on crime. And I was pleased that violent crime in my state during my term reduced by 7 percent.

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani, your campaign manager week called Governor Romney a mediocre one-term governor. On the issue of fighting crime, is he a crime fighter?

Giuliani: The governor has a mixed record in fighting crime. For example, murder went up by 7.5 percent. Burglary went up. One other category of violent crime went up. Some categories of violent crime went down. So, it would be fair to say it's a mixed record.

The reality is, I had a very strong record in doing precisely what the young man was asking about. And that is reducing crime in specifically neighborhoods that would be regarded as poor neighborhoods, the neighborhoods that had the most crime.

For example, in Harlem, we reduced crime by about 80 percent. We reduced shootings, overall in the city, by 74 percent.

The city of New York was one of the most dangerous cities in America, and particularly in the neighborhoods this young man is worried about, they were really dangerous.

They are not that way anymore and we made the changes with the CompStat program, the broken windows theory and with very, very good leadership.

Cooper: Governor Romney, I have to allow you 30 seconds to respond.

Romney: I think we all recognize that the mayor did a wonderful job at reducing crime in the City of New York.

I'm not a mayor, I'm not running for a mayor's job; I didn't have a police commissioner. But I did take the actions that I could, as a state governor, to improve our state police, to strengthen our state police, to be able to put in place the DNA laboratory -- we more than tripled the size of our DNA laboratory -- and did the things we could to improve crime -- our crime enforcement.

And I'm proud of the fact that we were able to reduce crime during my tenure.

Cooper: The next topic is abortion.

Next question?

Journey: Hi. My name is Journey. I'm from Texas. And this question is for all (inaudible) pro-life candidates.

In the event that abortion becomes illegal and a woman obtains an abortion anyway, what should she be charged with, and what should her punishment be? What about the doctor who performs the abortion?

Cooper: Congressman Paul, 90 seconds.

Paul: You know, it's not a federal function to determine the penalties for a crime of abortion if it's illegal in a state. It's up to the state, it's up to the juries. And it should be up to discretion because it's not an easy issue to deal with. But the first thing we have to do is get the federal government out of it. We don't need a federal abortion police. That's the last thing that we need.

(Applause)

But for the ...

Cooper: Should a woman be charged with a crime?

Paul: Pardon me?

Cooper: Should a woman be charged with a crime?

Paul: I don't personally think so. I'm an O.B. doctor, and I practiced medicine for 30 years, and I of course never saw one time when a medically necessary abortion had to be done.

But so I think it certainly is a crime. But I also understand the difficulties. I think when you're talking about third trimester deliberate abortion and partial birth abortions, I mean, there has to be a criminal penalty for the person that's committing that crime. But I really think it's the person who commits the crime. And I think that is the abortionist.

Cooper: So you're saying a doctor should be punished.

What sort of punishment should they get?

Paul: Well, I think it's up to the states. I'm not in the state -- I'm not running for governor. And I think it's different, and I don't think it should be all 50 states the same way. So, I don't think that should be up to the president to decide that.

Cooper: Senator Thompson?

Thompson: Yes. The young lady's question is...

(Applause)

... the young lady's question is premised on if abortion becomes illegal. That presumes Roe v. Wade is overturned, which I think should be our number one focus right now. And that has to do with the kind of Supreme Court justices we put on the bench.

(Applause)

I'm getting there. I'm getting there.

That would mean that it goes back to the states, and then the states would have to outlaw it at an earlier stage than they outlaw it now. Then the question would be, who gets penalized and what should the penalty be.

I think it should be fashioned along the same lines it is now. Most states have abortion laws pertain and prohibit abortion after viability. It goes to the doctor performing the abortion, not the girl, or the young girl, or her parents, whoever it might be. I think that same pattern needs to be followed. It could just be moved up earlier, or much earlier in the process if the state so determined.

Cooper: Another question.

Questioner: Hello, my name is AJ. I'm from Millstone, New Jersey. I would all of the candidates to give an answer on this. If hypothetically, Roe v. Wade was overturned, and the Congress passed a federal ban on all abortions and it came to your desk, would you sign it? Yes or no?

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: If Congress passed a ban on all abortions throughout the United States?

Cooper: If Roe v. Wade was overturned and Congress passed a federal ban on all abortions and it came to your desk, would you sign it, yes or no?

Giuliani: I probably would not sign it. I would leave it to the states to make that decision.

(Applause)

I think that that -- the problem with Roe against Wade is that it took the decision away from the states. If Roe against Wade were overturned because it was poorly decided, if the justices decide that, it would them go back to the states, and it would seem to me that that would be the answer.

The answer is that each state would make a different decision. I don't believe, in the circumstance that you asked before, that it should be criminalized. I think that would be a mistake unless we're talking about partial birth abortion or late-term abortion.

I think you should have parental consent. I think we should have access to adoptions instead of abortion. But, ultimately, I think these decisions should be made on a state-by-state basis.

Cooper: Governor Romney?

Romney: I agree with Senator Thompson, which is we should overturn Roe v. Wade and return these issues to the states.

I would welcome a circumstance where there was such a consensus in this country that we said, we don't want to have abortion in this country at all, period. That would be wonderful. I'd be delighted.

Cooper: The question is: Would you sign that bill?

Romney: Let me say it. I'd be delighted to sign that bill. But that's not where we are. That's not where America is today. Where America is is ready to overturn Roe v. Wade and return to the states that authority. But if the Congress got there, we had that kind of consensus in that country, terrific.

Cooper: All right. The next question is for Governor Huckabee. Let's listen.

Tyler Overman: Hi. This is Tyler Overman from Memphis, Tennessee. And I have a quick question for those of you who would call yourselves Christian conservatives. The death penalty, what would Jesus do?

Cooper: Governor Huckabee?

Huckabee: You know, one of the toughest challenges that I ever faced as a governor was carrying out the death penalty. I did it more than any other governor ever had to do it in my state.

As I look on this stage, I'm pretty sure that I'm the only person on this stage that's ever had to actually do it.

Let me tell you, it was the toughest decision I ever made as a human-being. I read every page of every document of every case that ever came before me, because it was the one decision that came to my desk that, once I made it, was irrevocable.

Every other decision, somebody else could go back and overturn, could fix if it was a mistake. That was one that was irrevocable.

I believe there is a place for a death penalty. Some crimes are so heinous, so horrible that the only response that we, as a civilized nation, have for a most uncivil action is not only to try to deter that person from ever committing that crime again, but also as a warning to others that some crimes truly are beyond any other capacity for us to fix.

(Applause)

Now, having said that, there are those who say, "How can you be pro-life and believe in the death penalty?"

Because there's a real difference between the process of adjudication, where a person is deemed guilty after a thorough judicial process and is put to death by all of us, as citizens, under a law, as opposed to an individual making a decision to terminate a life that has never been deemed guilty because the life never was given a chance to even exist.

Cooper: Governor?

Huckabee: That's the fundamental difference.

(Applause)

Cooper: I do have to though press the question, which -- the question was, from the viewer was? What would Jesus do? Would Jesus support the death penalty?

Huckabee: Jesus was too smart to ever run for public office, Anderson. That's what Jesus would do.

(Applause)

Cooper: Congressman Tancredo, 30 seconds.

Tancredo: The question is: What would Jesus do? Well, I'll tell you this. I would pray to him for the wisdom and the courage to do the right thing. And I believe that with prayer, he would give it to me.

And I believe that justice was done in the situations that the governor has explained. And, as I say, I look to him for guidance in all those kinds of situations.

Cooper: Time. A similar question. Let's watch.

Joseph: I am Joseph. I am from Dallas, Texas, and how you answer this question will tell us everything we need to know about you. Do you believe every word of this book? Specifically, this book that I am holding in my hand, do you believe this book?

Cooper: I think we've got a question.

Mayor Giuliani?

Huckabee: Do I need to help you out, Mayor, on this one?

(Laughter)

(Applause)

Giuliani: Wait a second, you're the minister. You're going to help me out on this one.

Huckabee: I'm trying to help you out.

Giuliani: OK. The reality is, I believe it, but I don't believe it's necessarily literally true in every single respect.

Giuliani: I think there are parts of the Bible that are interpretive. I think there are parts of the Bible that are allegorical. I think there are parts of the Bible that are meant to be interpreted in a modern context.

So, yes, I believe it. I think it's the great book ever written. I read it frequently. I read it very frequently when I've gone through the bigger crises in my life, and I find great wisdom in it, and it does define to a very large extent my faith. But I don't believe every single thing in the literal sense of Jonah being in the belly of the whale, or, you know, there are some things in it that I think were put there as allegorical.

Cooper: Governor Romney?

Romney: I believe the Bible is the word of God, absolutely. And I try...

(Applause)

... I try to live by it as well as I can, but I miss in a lot of ways. But it's a guide for my life and for hundreds of millions, billions of people around the world. I believe in the Bible.

Cooper: Does that mean you believe every word?

Romney: You know -- yes, I believe it's the word of God, the Bible is the word of God.

The Bible is the word of God. I mean, I might interpret the word differently than you interpret the word, but I read the Bible and I believe the Bible is the word of God. I don't disagree with the Bible. I try to live by it.

Cooper: Governor Huckabee?

Huckabee: Sure. I believe the Bible is exactly what it is. It's the word of revelation to us from God himself.

(Applause)

And the fact is that when people ask do we believe all of it, you either believe it or you don't believe it. But in the greater sense, I think what the question tried to make us feel like was that, well, if you believe the part that says "Go and pluck out your eye," well, none of us believe that we ought to go pluck out our eye. That obviously is allegorical.

But the Bible has some messages that nobody really can confuse and really not left up to interpretation. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

And as much as you've done it to the least of these brethren, you've done it unto me. Until we get those simple, real easy things right, I'm not sure we ought to spend a whole lot of time fighting over the other parts that are a little bit complicated.

And as the only person here on the stage with a theology degree, there are parts of it I don't fully comprehend and understand, because the Bible is a revelation of an infinite god, and no finite person is ever going to fully understand it. If they do, their god is too small.

Cooper: We've got a lot more coming up. We're going to take a short break, and as we go to the break, we'll watch a video, this time from the campaign of Governor Romney.

(Begin videotape)

Announcer: It's an election like no other. An enemy lurks, waiting to strike. Our Main Street economy is competing with mainland China. Legal versus illegal doesn't seem to matter. Basic values like marriage are suddenly open to debate.

For these challenges, ordinary isn't good enough. We need the leader who gets the big stuff done. Take charge, demand results, no excuses. Mitt Romney, the right experience, the right values, the right time.

Romney: I'm Mitt Romney, and I approve this message.

(End videotape)

(Commercial break)

(Begin videotape)

Announcer: As mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani faced unheard of challenges: runaway taxes, out of control crime, and, of course, the city's nemesis, King Kong.

Yet, Rudy prevailed. Crime down by half, taxes cut, and annual snowfall dramatically reduced.

Time called Rudy person of the year. Newsweek -- the new mayor of America. And when asked, Hillary Clinton called him -- but she probably planted the question.

(End videotape)

(Laughter)

(Applause)

Cooper: That was the campaign commercial by the Giuliani campaign. Obviously, we are playing these commercials all throughout this two-hour debate.

Let's go to our next topic, which is foreign policy.

Our first question:

Yasmin: Good evening, gentlemen. My name is Yasmin and I hail from Huntsville, Alabama.

My question has to do with the current crisis in Iraq, as well as the U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.

After living abroad, personally, in the Middle East for a year, I realized just how much damage the Iraq war and the perception of invasion has done to the image of America. What would you do as president to repair the image of America in the eyes of the Muslim world?

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani, 90 seconds?

Giuliani: Well, the most important thing to do is to make certain we remain on offense against Islamic terrorism.

(Applause)

And then make it clear that what that means is this is a small group of people, Islamic terrorists, who have defiled a great religion, that the vast majority of people who are Islamic, the vast majority of people who are Arabs, the vast majority of people living in these countries are good people. We should be trading with them. We should have contact with them. We should expand our contacts with them. We should have cultural exchanges with them.

The night of September 11th, 2001, when we were beginning to recover -- or, not really recover, but maybe just first catch our breath after the attack of September 11th, you'll see one of the first things I said was I said to the people of my city and then probably to the people of America that we should not engage in group blame.

We shouldn't do the thing that we're being attacked for. We shouldn't blame an entire group of people for the horrible acts of a few people who have distorted a great religion. They have turned it into an ideology of hatred and an ideology of violence.

By the same token, we can't do what the Democrats do. We can't put our head in the sand. You've got a Democratic debate and not a single one of those Democratic candidates used the word "Islamic terrorism." I don't know who they think they're offending. The people they're offending are the people we want to offend -- the Islamic terrorists ...

(Applause)

... and not decent people like Yasmin. We are intelligent enough and good enough as Americans to make this distinction.

Cooper: Senator McCain?

McCain: Well, I would do a lot of things, but the first and most important and vital element is to continue this surge which is succeeding and we are winning the war in Iraq.

(Applause)

That's the first thing I would do. I would make sure that we do what we can to help reconstruct the country, to help the Maliki government move forward as rapidly as possible to train the police.

But I'll tell you one other thing we're -- I'm going to do, is we're going to fight back the Democrats' efforts to set a date for withdrawal which is a date for surrender.

(Applause)

Now, my friends, I'm the only one on this stage -- I'm the only one on this stage -- that said that the Rumsfeld strategy was failing and was doomed to failure. I'm the only one on this stage that said we've got to have a new strategy, and that's the strategy we're employing now.

And I got a lot of heat when I said that that strategy was failing and it had to be changed, because I've had the experience and the background and the knowledge of every national security issue we've faced in the last 20 years.

And I'm telling you, that if we continue this strategy, we can succeed. And if we had done what the Democrats said to do six months ago, Al Qaida would be telling the world they beat America.

Cooper: Time.

McCain: There's a lot at stake here, my friends, and thank God for the young men and women who are sending the message I repeat to you again, after having been there over Thanksgiving weekend, let me win, let us win.

(Applause)

Cooper: Thirty seconds, Congressman Hunter. The question is, how do you repair the image of America in the Muslim world?

Hunter: Cooper, Cooper, very simply, to the critics of America I would say this. When you were faced with disease and starvation, the Americans brought food and medicine. When you had earthquakes and tsunamis and floods, the Americans came and helped you. And when you were threatened from outside, the Americans left the safety of their own homes to come and defend you.

I will never apologize for the United States of America.

(Applause)

Cooper: Our next question -- our next question comes from Seattle, Washington.

Andrew Jones: Hello, gentlemen. I'm Andrew, and I'm a college student from Seattle, Washington.

Recently, Senator McCain has come out strongly against using waterboarding as an instrument of interrogation.

My question for the rest of you is, considering that Mr. McCain is the only one with any firsthand knowledge on the subject, how can those of you sharing the stage with him disagree with his position?

Cooper: Governor Romney?

Romney: Well, he certainly is an expert and I certainly would want to get his counsel on a matter of this nature, but I do not believe that as a presidential candidate, it is wise for us to describe precisely what techniques we will use in interrogating people.

I oppose torture. I would not be in favor of torture in any way, shape or form.

Cooper: Is waterboarding torture?

Romney: And as I just said, as a presidential candidate, I don't think it's wise for us to describe specifically which measures we would and would not use.

And that is something which I would want to receive the counsel not only of Senator McCain, but of a lot of other people.

And there are people who, for many, many years get the information we need to make sure that we protect our country.

And, by the way, I want to make sure these folks are kept at Guantanamo. I don't want the people that are carrying out attacks on this country to be brought into our jail system and be given legal representation in this country. I want to make sure that what happened ...

(Applause)

... to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed happens to other people who are terrorists. He was captured. He was the so-called mastermind of the 9/11 tragedy. And he turned to his captors and he said, "I'll see you in New York with my lawyers." I presume ACLU lawyers.

(Laughter)

Well, that's not what happened. He went to Guantanamo and he met G.I.s and CIA interrogators. And that's just exactly how it ought to be.

(Applause)

Cooper: Senator McCain?

(Crosstalk)

(Unknown): There were reports Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was waterboarded.

McCain: Well, governor, I'm astonished that you haven't found out what waterboarding is.

Romney: I know what waterboarding is, Senator.

McCain: Then I am astonished that you would think such a -- such a torture would be inflicted on anyone in our -- who we are held captive and anyone could believe that that's not torture. It's in violation of the Geneva Convention. It's in violation of existing law...

(Applause)

And, governor, let me tell you, if we're going to get the high ground in this world and we're going to be the America that we have cherished and loved for more than 200 years. We're not going to torture people.

We're not going to do what Pol Pot did. We're not going to do what's being done to Burmese monks as we speak. I suggest that you talk to retired military officers and active duty military officers like Colin Powell and others, and how in the world anybody could think that that kind of thing could be inflicted by Americans on people who are held in our custody is absolutely beyond me.

Cooper: Governor Romney, 30 seconds to respond.

(Applause)

Romney: Senator McCain, I appreciate your strong response, and you have the credentials upon which to make that response. I did not say and I do not say that I'm in favor of torture.

I am not. I'm not going to specify the specific means of what is and what is not torture so that the people that we capture will know what things we're able to do and what things we're not able to do. And I get that advice from Cofer Black, who is a person who was responsible for counterterrorism in the CIA for some 35 years.

I get that advice by talking to former generals in our military...

Cooper: Time.

Romney: ... and I don't believe it's appropriate for me, as a presidential candidate, to lay out all the issues one by one...

Cooper: Time.

Romney: ... get questioned one by one: Is this torture, is that torture?

Cooper: Senator McCain...

Romney: And so, that's something which I'm going to take your and other people's counsel on.

Cooper: Senator McCain, 30 seconds to respond.

McCain: Well, then you would have to advocate that we withdraw from the Geneva Conventions, which were for the treatment of people who were held prisoners, whether they be illegal combatants or regular prisoners of war. Because it's clear the definition of torture. It's in violation of laws we have passed.

And again, I would hope that we would understand, my friends, that life is not "24" and Jack Bauer.

Life is interrogation techniques which are humane and yet effective. And I just came back from visiting a prison in Iraq. The Army general there said that techniques under the Army Field Manual are working and working effectively, and he didn't think they need to do anything else.

My friends, this is what America is all about. This is a defining issue and, clearly, we should be able, if we want to be commander in chief of the U.S. Armed Forces, to take a definite and positive position on, and that is, we will never allow torture to take place in the United States of America.

(Applause)

Cooper: Staying on this issue, let's watch.

Buzz Brockway: Hello. My name is Buzz Brockway from Lawrenceville, Georgia. All the talk about the war in Iraq centers around how quickly we can get out. I think that's the wrong question. We need to make a permanent or long-term military commitment to the region.

By staying in Iraq, we provide long-term stability to the region, we provide support for our allies, and we act as a deterrent to the trouble-makers in the region. Which presidential candidate will make a permanent or long-term military commitment to the people of Iraq?

Thank you.

Cooper: Senator Thompson?

Thompson: We shouldn't be in there longer than necessary, and we don't know how long that will be. But we should be there absolutely as long as it takes to complete our mission there. It will make for a safer United States of America.

We're all focused, understandably, on Iraq and Afghanistan right now, but it is part of a much bigger picture. Islamic terrorism has declared war on us and Western civilization. They would like nothing better than to kill millions of people as they bring us down. They would like to be able to advertise to young radicals around the world that, "You, too, could help bring down the United States of America."

Iran is waiting there to fill that vacuum. You think \$90, \$100 a barrel is high for oil now, wait until that happens.

But more importantly, it would make for a less secure United States of America. We have to do what's necessary. We have to take the opportunity that we have now.

John's absolutely right. What's going on there is progress; it's called progress.

Too many people in this country are vested in a scenario of defeat. I'm vested in a scenario of victory and I see it happening there in Iraq today.

(Applause)

Cooper: Congressman Paul, 30 seconds.

Paul: The best commitment we can make to the Iraqi people is to give them their country back. That's the most important thing that we can do.

(Applause)

Already, part of their country has been taken back. In the south, they claim the surge has worked, but the surge really hasn't worked. There's less violence, but al-Sadr has essentially won in the south.

The British are leaving. The brigade of Al Sadr now is in charge, so they are getting their country back. They're in charge up north -- the Shia -- the people in the north are in charge, as well, and there's no violence up there or nearly as much.

So, let the people have their country back again. Just think of the cleaning up of the mess after we left Vietnam. Vietnam now is a friend of ours -- we trade with them, the president comes here.

What we achieved in peace was unachievable in 20 years of the French and the Americans being in Vietnam.

So it's time for us to take care of America first.

(Applause)

Cooper: Senator McCain?

McCain: Well, let me remind you, Congressman, we never lost a battle in Vietnam. It was American public opinion that forced us to lose that conflict.

(Applause)

I think it's important for all Americans to understand the fundamental difference. After we left Vietnam, they didn't want to follow us home. They wanted to build their own workers' paradise. If you read Zarqawi, if you read bin Laden, if you read Zawahiri, read what they say. They want to follow us home. They want Iraq to be a base for Al Qaeda to launch attacks against the United States. Their ultimate destination is not Iraq.

Their ultimate destination is New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago and Phoenix, Arizona. This is a transcendent challenge of our time.

(Audience booing)

McCain: I believe that we can meet it and we will defeat it.

(Applause)

Cooper: Congressman Paul, I know -- we'll get everyone in on this. Congressman Paul, just wanted to allow you to respond.

Paul: Shortly after the Vietnam War ended, Colonel Tu and Colonel Summers met, and they were talking about this. And our -- and the American colonel said, "You know, we never lost one battle." And Colonel Tu, the Vietnamese says, "Yes, but that's irrelevant."

And it is irrelevant. But we have to realize why they want to come here. Wolfowitz even admitted that one of the major reasons that the Al Qaida was organized and energized was because of our military base in Saudi Arabia.

He says, "Oh, now, we can take the base away." He understood why they came here. They come here because we're occupying their country, just as we would object if they occupied our country.

(Audience booing)

Cooper: Well, it's Congressman Tancredo. And we're running short on time. So, please, let's try to get to these.

You have 30 seconds.

Tancredo: I wish that we lived in the world that Ron is describing -- I wish that we lived in a world where we did not have to worry. By simply removing our forces, we would be safe.

Unfortunately, Ron, honest to God, I don't believe that that is the case. We are living in a world where we are threatened. It is radical Islam.

(Applause)

It is -- the ideology, the political and religious ideology of radical Islam is a threat to America, and it would be a threat to America if we never had a single person serving anywhere outside this country.

Cooper: We've got another question for Mayor Giuliani.

Sam Garcia: Hi. My name is Sam Garcia.

I'm from Colorado Springs, Colorado. The following question is for Rudy Giuliani. Mr. Giuliani, a while back, a friend and I were having a discussion about you and some of the other Republican candidates.

He blatantly made this statement somewhere along the line: Rudy Giuliani is using September 11, 2001, to propel himself into the White House. My question to you is: How do you respond to this accusation and other accusations similar to it?

Cooper: Ninety seconds.

Giuliani: Sam, what I say is, I would like people to look at my whole record. Long before September 11, 2001, I was the third-ranking official in the Reagan justice department.

During that period of time, I actually did something about illegal immigration. I played a large part in stopping the Haitian illegal immigration into south Florida. I negotiated the agreement with the Haitian government that allowed us to put a Coast Guard cutter in the waters outside Port-au-Prince, as well as the legal agreements that were necessary to do the examinations there.

And this terrible problem that was going on that was also leading to the loss of life was ended, or at least ameliorated tremendously.

I was United States attorney in the Southern District of New York. I prosecuted thousands of organized crimes figures. I prosecuted Sicilian Mafia members, never done before in an American court.

I was mayor of a city that was described as one of the greatest turnarounds of any city in the history of America. George Will said I ran the most conservative government in this country, most successful conservative government in this country in the last 50 or 60 years. This is all before September 11th, 2001. I reduced taxes. I reduced spending. I reduced welfare. I reduced abortions, increased adoptions.

These are all things that I did before September 11, 2001. And the reason that I believe I'm qualified to be president of the United States is not because of September 11th, 2001. It's because I've been tested. I've been tested in a way in which I ran the third-largest government in this country, the 17th-largest economy in the world, and I got very, very remarkable results.

And that is the evaluation of other people, not me.

Cooper: All right. We've got a question ...

(Applause)

Definitely a reminder this is a YouTube/CNN debate. Let's watch.

Nick Anderson as Dick Cheney cartoon character: Yes. Will you grant your vice president as much power and influence as I've had?

And remember, before you answer, I'm watching you.

(Laughter)

Cooper: Funny video, serious question.

Senator Thompson, would you have a vice president ...

Thompson: First of all, I'm greatly relieved. For a second there, I thought that was me.

(LAUGHTER)

Cooper: The power of the vice president.

Thompson: I think that the vice president, of course, has a dual role. He has a place in the executive branch of government. He also presides over the Senate, so he has a place in the legislative branch also.

But a vice president ought to be chosen, basically, on his ability to serve as president of the United States, if that situation were called for.

Therefore, he needs to be brought into the administration. I think that a vice president ought to have substantial authority; I think especially on national security areas. Expertise in that area is especially beneficial to a president who is having to deal with all the issues a president has to deal with, but certainly some expertise either in the domestic area or the national security area.

Some legal training also might be helpful. I think one of the most important things that we're going to be facing for this next president is the selection of United States judges to the Supreme Court. So I think that all those are things that you have to take into consideration in deciding what kind of authority the vice president should have.

Basically, he should have the authority that the president gives him, and he should adhere to that authority.

Cooper: Senator McCain, has this president given too much authority to the vice president?

McCain: Look, I am going to give you some straight talk. This president came to office in a time of peace, and then we found ourselves in 2001.

And he did not have as much national security experience as I do. So he had to rely more on the vice president of the United States, and that's obvious. I wouldn't have to do that. I might have to rely on a vice president that I select on some other issues. He may have more expertise in telecommunications, on information technology, which is the future of this nation's economy. He may have more expertise in a lot of areas.

But I would rely on a vice president of the United States -- but as Fred said, the primary responsibility is to select one who will immediately take your place if necessary. But the vice president of the United States is a key and important issue, and must add in carrying out the responsibilities of the president of the United States.

Cooper: We've got a short break, our last break of the debate. We'll watch a video, this one from the Hunter campaign, as we go to break.

(Begin videotape)

Gen. Chuck Yeager (USAF, Ret.): Yes, I'm General Chuck Yeager, retired Air Force, and I support Duncan Hunter for president of the United States.

Announcer: Duncan Hunter -- he built the border fence between California and Mexico. As chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, he kept our military strong and kept defense jobs in America. And when liberal judges tried to take down the Veterans' Memorial, Duncan Hunter's bill saved it.

For a real conservative for president, join our team now. Gohunter08.com.

Hunter: I'm Duncan Hunter, and I approved this message.

(End video clip)

(Commercial break)

(Begin videotape)

Huckabee: Faith doesn't just influence me. It really defines me. I don't have to wake up every day wondering what do I need to believe?

Let us never sacrifice our principles for anybody's politics. Not now, not ever.

I believe life begins at conception.

We believe in some things. We stand by those things. We live or die by those things.

I'm Mike Huckabee, and I approve this message.

(End video clip)

Cooper: A campaign commercial from the Huckabee campaign. 11:00 tonight eastern time on CNN Campbell Brown has a one-hour special, a "Broken Government" special called "Campaign Special."

It's about attack ads. It's an interesting show starting at 11:00 East Coast time tonight.

All right, let's get back to the debate. Another question from a YouTube viewer. Let's watch.

Brigadier Gen. Keith Kerr (Ret.): My name's Keith Kerr, from Santa Rosa, California. I'm a retired brigadier general with 43 years of service. And I'm a graduate of the Special Forces Officer Course, the Commanding General Staff Course and the Army War College. And I'm an openly gay man.

I want to know why you think that American men and women in uniform are not professional enough to serve with gays and lesbians.

Cooper: I want to point out that Brigadier General Keith Kerr is here with us tonight. I'm glad you're here.

(Applause)

Again, the question to Congressman Hunter.

Hunter: General, thanks for your service, but I believe in what Colin Powell said when he said that having openly homosexual people serving in the ranks would be bad for unit cohesion.

The reason for that, even though people point to the Israelis and point to the Brits and point to other people as having homosexuals serve, is that most Americans, most kids who leave that breakfast table and go out and serve in the military and make that corporate decision with their family, most of them are conservatives.

They have conservative values, and they have Judeo-Christian values. To force those people to work in a small tight unit with somebody who is openly homosexual goes against what they believe to be their principles, and it is their principles, is I think a disservice to them. I agree with Colin Powell that it would be bad for unit cohesion.

Cooper: I want to direct this to Governor Huckabee.

Thirty seconds.

Huckabee: The Uniform Code of Military Justice is probably the best rule, and it has to do with conduct. People have a right to have whatever feelings, whatever attitudes they wish, but when their conduct could put at risk the morale, or put at risk even the cohesion that Duncan Hunter spoke of, I think that's what is at issue. And that's why our policy is what it is.

Cooper: Governor Romney, you said in 1994 that you looked forward to the day when gays and lesbians could serve, and I quote, "openly and honestly in our nation's military." Do you stand by that?

Romney: This isn't that time. This is not that time. We're in the middle of a war. The people who have...

Cooper: Do you look forward to that time, though, one day?

Romney: I'm going to listen to the people who run the military to see what the circumstances are like. And my view is that, at this stage, this is not the time for us to make that kind of...

Cooper: Is that a change in your position...

Romney: Yes, I didn't think it would work. I didn't think "don't ask/don't tell" would work. That was my -- I didn't think that would work. I thought that was a policy, when I heard about it, I laughed. I said that doesn't make any sense to me.

And you know what? It's been there now for, what, 15 years? It seems to have worked.

Cooper: So, just so I'm clear, at this point, do you still look forward to a day when gays can serve openly in the military or no longer?

Romney: I look forward to hearing from the military exactly what they believe is the right way to have the right kind of cohesion and support in our troops and I listen to what they have to say.

(Audience booing)

Cooper: All right. General Kerr is -- as I said -- is here.

Please stand up, General. Thank you very much for being with us.

Did you feel you got an answer to your question?

Kerr: With all due respect, I did not get an answer from the candidates.

(Applause)

Cooper: What do you feel you did not...

Kerr: American men and women in the military are professional enough to serve with gays and lesbians.

For 42 years, I wore the army uniform on active duty, in the Reserve, and also for the state of California. I revealed I was a gay man after I retired.

Today, "don't ask/don't tell" is destructive to our military policy.

Every day, the Department of Defense discharges two people, not for misconduct, not for the unit cohesion...

Cooper: Wait, the mike is -- you've lost me. Is the microphone not working? Please, just finish your -- what is your question?

Kerr: Not for the unit cohesion that Congressman Hunter is talking about, but simply because they happen to be gay.

Cooper: OK. Senator McCain ...

KERR: And we're talking about doctors, nurses, pilots, and the surgeon who sews somebody up when they're taken from the battlefield.

Cooper: I appreciate your comments.

Senator McCain, I want to give you 30 seconds. You served in the military.

McCain: General, I thank you for your service to our nation. I respect it. All the time, I talk to our military leaders, beginning with our joint chiefs of staff and the leaders in the field, such as General Petraeus and General Odierno and others who are designated leaders with the responsibility of the safety of the men and women under their command and their security and protect them as best they can.

Almost unanimously, they tell me that this present policy is working, that we have the best military in history, that we have the bravest, most professional, best prepared, and that this policy ought to be continued because it's working.

Cooper: All right. We've got another question. Let's listen.

David Cercone: Hi, my name is David Cercone. I'd like to ask all the candidates if they accept the support of the Log Cabin Republicans, and why should the Log Cabin Republicans support their candidacy?

Cooper: Governor Huckabee, would you support -- would you allow support from the Log Cabin Republicans, a group of gay Republicans?

Huckabee: You know, in my position in this entire election, I need the support of anybody and everybody I can get.

(Applause)

(Crosstalk)

Huckabee: Sure, they should. I disagree with them, strongly disagree with them on the idea of same-sex marriage, but in a democracy we can have disagreements over some policies and still agree on the greater things that make us Republicans.

So would I accept their support? Of course. Would I change my position on same-sex marriage? No, I wouldn't. But if they're willing to support me, I'll be their president. I'll be anybody's president, but I'll be true to my convictions, and I think that's what Americans look for -- not someone they're going to agree with on everything, but somebody who at least has some convictions, sticks with them, can explain them, and can at least have respect for people who have different ones.

(Applause)

Cooper: Another question about the local economy.

Adam Florzak: This is Adam Florzak of Illinois. The national debt is now growing so quickly it will have increased by over half- million dollars in just the time it takes to ask this question. Over the

years, politicians have borrowed just under \$2 trillion from the Social Security trust fund to cover these massive budget deficits, and now the retirements of our generation are at risk. What will you do as president to help repay this money and restore the trust?

Cooper: Senator Thompson, a lot of retirees here in Florida. Ninety seconds.

Thompson: One of the things I would do for his generation is protect him from our generation.

(Applause)

He's absolutely right, we're spending his money, we're spending his children's money, and we're spending the money of kids yet to be born.

In 2017, Social Security will be in the red. Pretty soon it'll be out of money, it'll go bankrupt. In fact, our entitlement programs put together will take over the entire budget by about 2040.

So that's why I get back to the point I made earlier. All these programs that we talk about in the news every day are a thimbleful in ocean compared to the entitlement tsunami that's coming to hit us.

Now, we can do some things now, as I've proposed about Social Security, without having to really hurt anybody, and give people to invest for their future while they're still working. Or we can wait and let our grandkids or children, depending on how old they are, solve this problem that we have left them. It's not only a fiscal issue; it's a moral issue, as far as I'm concerned.

Cooper: Governor McCain?

(Applause)

I'm sorry -- Governor Romney, 30 seconds.

Romney: Thank you.

That's one of the problems we face, and a big one, which is the over-spending in Washington and the debt and the obligations we have.

We also face tough new competition coming from Asia. We face global jihad, which we just talked about very briefly. We face a whole series of extraordinary problems -- over-use of oil, entitlement is out of control.

It's time for us to recognize we're going to have to take a new course in this country -- not follow Hillary Clinton off to the left; instead, to follow the pathway Ronald Reagan blazed, which is to say we're going to have a stronger America with a stronger economy and have somebody who understands how jobs come and go, who understands what propels our economy, will strengthen our economy, strengthen our military and strengthen our families.

Cooper: I want to get as many of the YouTube questions in as possible.

Let's get another one here from another viewer.

Steve Nielson: My name is Steve Nielson. And this question comes to you from Denver, Colorado.

JFK's vision put a man on the moon from a nonexistent space program in about seven years. The new vision for space exploration has provided about 15 years for that same feat.

Meanwhile, Congress is pulling funding for human-to-Mars research altogether.

Is there a candidate amongst you willing to take a pledge on behalf of the Mars Society of sending an American to the surface of Mars by 2020? If not, what is your vision for human space exploration?

Cooper: Governor Huckabee?

NASA pumps some -- let's see, how many -- \$5 billion into Florida's economy.

Huckabee: Whether we ought to go to Mars is not a decision that I would want to make, but I would certainly want to make sure that we expand the space program, because every one of us who are sitting here tonight have our lives dramatically improved because there was a space program -- whether it's these screens that we see or the incredible electronics that we use, including the GPS systems that got many of you to this arena tonight.

(Laughter)

Some of you were late because you didn't have one, by the way. Or whether it's the medical technologies that saved many of our lives or the lives of our families, it's the direct result of the space program, and we need to put more money into science and technology and exploration.

Now, whether we need to send somebody to Mars, I don't know. But I'll tell you what: If we do, I've got a few suggestions, and maybe Hillary could be on the first rocket to Mars.

(Laughter)

Cooper: Congressman Tancredo, 30 seconds, please.

Tancredo: The question is a serious one and it deserves a serious answer, and that is this: Look, we've been -- how many times up here, how many questions have dealt with the issue of deficit spending, the debt out of control? And yet, we have somebody saying, "But would you spend more money on going to Mars?"

And the suggestion that we need to spend more money on space exploration. This is it, folks. That's why we have such incredible problems with our debt, because everybody's trying to be everything to all people.

We can't afford some things, and by the way, going to Mars is one of them.

Cooper: All right. Let's move on. Another question here from Los Angeles.

Actually, let's show -- all right.

David McMillan: Hi, my name is David McMillan, and I'm from Los Angeles, California. On a variety of specific issues -- gay marriage, taxes, the death penalty, immigration, faith-based initiatives, school vouchers, school prayer -- many African Americans hold fairly conservative views.

And yet, we overwhelmingly vote Democrat in most elections. So my question to any of the Republican candidates here is, why don't we vote for you?

(Laughter)

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani?

GIULIANI: We probably haven't done a good enough job as a party in pointing out that our solutions, our philosophy, is really the philosophy that would be the most attractive to the overwhelming majority of people in the African American and Hispanic community.

Whether they are upper middle class, rich, middle class or poor, the -- good education is something that everyone in all these communities and all communities want. The idea of choice in education is something that would totally turn around education in this country. It's something that large percentages of African American and Hispanic parents support. They would like to be able to choose a private school, a parochial school, a charter school, home-schooling for their children.

Instead, they have the government telling them that their child has to go to an inadequate school.

So there are many, many issues on which we can reach out. I found that one of the best was moving people off welfare. I moved 640,000 people off welfare, most of them to jobs. I change the welfare agency into a job agency, and all of a sudden I had people that had a future, people that had great hope in life.

I think the reason that crime not only declined in New York more than anyplace else, but continues to decline, is that many of those people who were hopeless 10, 12 years ago, now have hope. They have a future. They have gotten the genius of the American way of life. We haven't made it available to all people, and we have to do that.

We will be a very popular party in those communities.

Cooper: Time. Governor Huckabee, 30 seconds.

(Applause)

Huckabee: Well, according to your network's exit polls, some 48 percent of the African-Americans in my state did, in fact, vote for me, which is unusually high for African-Americans voting for a Republican. Here's the reason why: because I asked for their vote, and I didn't wait until October of the election year to do it.

And, while I was governor, I tried to make sure that we included people not only in appointments and employment, but also in the programs that would truly make a difference, like putting disproportionate amounts of help for health problems specifically targeted to African-Americans like hypertension and AIDS and diabetes. So there's a reason. And I just want to express that our party had better reach out not just to African-Americans, but to Hispanics and to all people of this country.

I don't want to be a part of a Republican party that is a tiny, minute and ever decreasing party, but one that touches every American from top to bottom, regardless of race.

Cooper: Our next question -- let's watch:

(Applause)

Leroy Brooks: Hello, my name is Leroy Brooks. I am from Houston, Texas and my question is for all the candidates.

Whether this flag right here represents the symbol of racism, a symbol of political ideology, a symbol of Southern heritage -- or, is it something completely different?

Cooper: He's talking about the stars and bars.

Governor Romney?

Romney: Right now, with the kinds of issues we got in this country, I'm not going to get involved with a flag like that. That's not a flag that I recognize so that I would hold up in my room.

The people of our country have decided not to fly that flag. I think that's the right thing.

(Applause)

My own view is that this country can go beyond that kind of stuff, and that instead we can do as a party what we need to do, which is to reach out to all Americans.

Every time I listen to someone like John Edwards get on TV and say there are two Americas, I just want to -- I just want to throw something at the TV, because there are not two Americas. There's one America.

We are a nation united. We face extraordinary challenges right now. And Democrats dividing us and tearing down this country are doing exactly the wrong thing.

We're succeeding in Iraq. We've got tough challenges. We can overcome them. But we do not need to have that kind of divisive talk. And that flag, frankly, is divisive, and it shouldn't be shown.

Cooper: Governor Thompson? Excuse me, Senator Thompson? Maybe one day.

Thompson: I know that everybody who hangs the flag up in their room like that is not racist. I also know that for a great many Americans it's a symbol of racism.

So, therefore, as a public place -- he's free to do whatever he wants to in his home. As far as a public place is concerned, I am glad that people have made the decision not to display it as a prominent flag, symbolic of something, at a state capitol. As a part of a group of flags or something of that nature, you know, honoring various servicepeople at different times in different parts of the country, I think that's different.

But, as a nation, we don't need to go out of our way to be bringing up things that to certain people in our country that's bad for them.

Cooper: We're running short on time. I want to get Ron Paul's video in. Let's watch.

(Begin videotape)

Paul: The people are sick and tired of what they're getting, and they want some real changes.

I don't want to run your life. We need less taxation, less regulations, a better economic system.

We were not meant to be an empire; we were meant to be a republic, protecting liberty here at home.

It's up to you to spread this message around this country. This is an American cause, it's a cause of freedom. There's something going on in this country, and it's big. It's really big.

(End videotape)

Cooper: That's part of the Paul campaign.

Let's get to another YouTube -- YouTube question.

Dr. Hank Campbell: Good evening. My name is Dr. Hank Campbell. I'm in Lake Worth, Florida. My question is our infrastructure. It's been estimated that to fix the bridges, the tunnels, the power grids, the water delivery systems in this country will be in excess of \$2 trillion -- that is "t" for "trillion" -- and it is plural.

Who among the candidates here is willing to step forward and begin to articulate the very difficult sacrifices which we need to make in order to start repairing America? Thank you.

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: Well, I faced a situation like this, a microcosm of it in New York City. New York City hadn't invested in infrastructure for a very, long time. I had kind of gotten through its fiscal crisis that way. We started a long-term capital investment program on the infrastructure. My predecessor started it. I continued it. I turned it over to my successor and it really has done I think remarkable work in rebuilding the infrastructure of New York. That's what America needs.

It can't be done by one president. This is something where you're going to need a succession of presidents to have a sustained program. Probably we should have budgeting that allows for -- we can't really have a capital budget under federal budgeting, but we could have a separate accounting.

So that kind of budgeting is long-term, because this is going to help America over a 20- or a 30-year period. Most of the time when we're spending money, as Senator Thompson said, we're spending the next generation's money and we shouldn't be doing that. Fiscal conservatism is about preventing that.

But when we're rebuilding our roads, rebuilding our bridges, building new bridges, rebuilding our infrastructure, that's actually going to benefit the next generation and the generation after. And there are ways to spread that out over a long period of time.

But it needs a sustained program, and it cannot be done just by the federal government. It needs to be done as a partnership with state and local governments. And I believe I'd be in a good position to lead that.

Campbell: Congressman Paul, 30 seconds.

Paul: The infrastructure problem in this country is very, very serious. We as Americans are taxed to blow up the bridges overseas. We're taxed to go over and rebuild the bridges overseas while our bridges are falling down in this country.

This country is going bankrupt, and we can't afford this. We need to take care of ourselves. We do not need to sacrifice one thing more. We just need to take care of ourselves and get the government out of our lives and off our back and out of our wallets.

(Applause)

Cooper: Senator McCain, 30 seconds.

McCain: First thing I'll do, my friends, is take out my veto pen and veto every single pork-barrel project that comes across my desk, and there will be no more bridges to nowhere under my administration, I promise you that. And we'll give the president of the United States the line-item veto which Rudy Giuliani opposed so that he could protect his \$250 million worth of pork.

My friends, we will take the money and give it back to the states and we'll let them make these decisions, but we'll never have another pork barrel project as long as I'm capable of wielding a veto pen.

Cooper: Time. We've got another question.

Giuliani: Anderson, may I please respond...

Cooper: Go ahead, 30 seconds.

Giuliani: ... to the little side shot?

Cooper: Thirty seconds.

Giuliani: The reality is that the line-item veto is unconstitutional.

Cooper: Quiet.

Giuliani: The line-item veto is unconstitutional.

McCain: The line-item veto is constitutional.

Giuliani: If you are a strict -- the line-item veto is unconstitutional determined not by John McCain, but by the Supreme Court. And the Supreme Court found that the line-item veto is unconstitutional.

If I hadn't challenged that, I would not have been carrying out my fiduciary duties for the people of New York City. That was money that was illegally deprived to the people of my city. I fought for them and beat Bill Clinton. Not bad to have a Republican who can beat Bill Clinton.

(Applause)

Cooper: Let's go to the next question -- it's for Ron Paul.

Mark Strauss: Mark Strauss, Davenport, Iowa.

This question is for Ron Paul.

Mr. Paul, I think we both know that the Republican party is never going to give you the nomination. But I'm hoping that you're crazy like a fox like that and you're using this exposure to propel yourself into an independent run.

My question is for Ron Paul: Mr. Paul, are you going to let America down by not running as an independent?

Thank you.

Paul: Now that's what I call a tough question, because I have no intention of doing this.

I am a Republican. I have won 10 times as a Republican and we're doing quite well. We had 5,000 people show up at a rally in front of the Independence Hall with blacks and Hispanics and a cross-section of this country.

You know that we raised \$4.3 million in one day?

(Applause)

Without spending one cent. We didn't even pay an individual to go out and they weren't professional fund-raisers. It came in here -- it was automatic.

We're struggling to figure out how to spend the money. This country is in a revolution. They're sick and tired of what they're getting. And I happen to be lucky enough to be part of it.

Cooper: I'll take that as a no.

(Applause)

We -- unfortunately, this is our last question of the night.

Chris Krul: Giuliani, can you explain why you being a lifelong Yankees fan, that this year, after the Yankees lost everything, you rooted for the Red Sox in the postseason? Can you explain that position for me?

(Applause)

Cooper: Mayor Giuliani?

Giuliani: Hey, Krul. Hey, Krul. I'm Giuliani. He's Krul. So I'll explain it to him like in Brooklyn.

I'm an American -- I'm an American League fan. I root for the American League team when they get into the World Series. I've done it for 50 years. I actually rooted for the Red Sox...

(Audience member booing)

Giuliani: Can't help it. I'm an American League fan. I rooted for the White Sox, the Tigers, the Red Sox.

As soon as the World Series are over, I rooted for the Yankees again. We're gonna beat you next year.

(Applause)

I unfortunately have lost a bet already, to John McCain, with the Arizona Diamondbacks, so I don't have a 100 record. But I do point out that when I was mayor of New York City, the Yankees won four world championships.

(Applause)

And -- wait, wait, wait.

I wanted to put this -- I wanted to put this in our reel, but they cut it out, so I'm going to get it in -- and since I've left being mayor of New York City, the Yankees have won none.

(Laughter)

Cooper: Governor Romney, very quickly, your chance.

Romney: Eighty-seven long years. We waited 87 long years. And true suffering Red Sox fans that my family and I are, we could not have been more happy than to see the Red Sox win the World Series, except by being able to beat the Yankees when they were ahead three games to none.

And so, I have to tell you that like most Americans, we love our sports teams and we hate the Yankees.

Cooper: I want to thank you all for participating tonight. I want to thank all those viewers who submitted the questions, 5,000 questions. I want to thank everyone in the audience, the Republican Party of Florida for hosting us.

Thank you very much.