

Questions for the Candidates

America used to be a country of big, bold, important ideas. No more.

Where our forefathers dreamed large and thought deep, today's leaders are relentless in their efforts to generalize, trivialize, and shrink the issues that face our nation.

There is no shortage of real issues, and they are as difficult as they are important.

Maybe it's too much to expect the Lincoln-Douglas or Madison-Hamilton debates, but surely we can ask more of the presidential campaigns than what we get. In 2000, we listened as the candidates detailed their respective prescription drug plans as if they were at a legislative hearing. But we heard little serious discussion of foreign policy and absolutely nothing about terrorism. What would soon become the biggest issue of our time was not even mentioned by the men who would be President.

There is no shortage of real issues, and they are as difficult as they are important. Unbelievably, we have had little discussion of them, as the campaigns

instead deal with who did what in Vietnam or Alabama more than 30 years ago. Here are some the issues that it would interesting to hear the candidates discuss:

Health Care

Should everyone in this country have a right to health care? What would it cost and how would we pay for it? Shouldn't our country at least be able to say that every child who gets sick will see a doctor? How do we deal with malpractice insurance problems for specialists without sacrificing the rights of people who have been injured because of malpractice?

Immigration

Do we need to control the borders better? How do we do it? Why can't we enact a reasonable guest worker program that recognizes the essential role these workers play in our economy?

Foreign Policy

How should we deal with North Korea? What is the future of Pakistan and how will that affect the United States? How do we keep millions of young Muslims from hating the United States? How do we resolve the Israel-Palestine situation, or will it never be resolved? Do we accept unilateralism as acceptable? What are the parameters that would guide such a policy?

Economy

Should we protect jobs that are going overseas, or just let the market dictate? If protectionism isn't the answer, what do we do for those workers left behind?

How do we grow into the type of economy and jobs that we want for the future? What sort of investments are necessary? Without those investments, will we be able to compete in a global economy in the decades to come?

Crime

Should we continue with the death penalty? Are there safeguards, such as mandatory DNA testing, that the federal government could require or assist the states in implementing? How do we remain secure and vigilant against terrorism and not forfeit basic constitutional rights? Was the Patriot Act an overreaction? Why is there a disproportionate number of people of color behind bars in the United States?

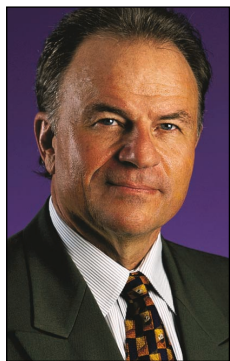
Taxes

Is it time for a national sales or consumption tax to replace the federal income tax? Could the IRS then be eliminated? Would this produce a more fair and equitable system, or are there other structural changes that should be made?

This is certainly not a comprehensive list, and greater minds than mine can undoubtedly take these things further and deeper.

I think the American public is not as dumb as politicians make it out to be. People will think about and resolve these issues if they are presented to them. But the American public is lackadaisical about its democracy, and will not demand it.

Sometime, somewhere, we will once again produce leaders willing to debate the difficult issues. Then, once again, America will find greatness that it never even imagined. **AZ AT**



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