

# Republican presidential candidates debate in New Hampshire

**Patrick Martin**  
**15 June 2011**

Seven announced candidates for the Republican presidential nomination in the 2012 elections held a debate Monday night in New Hampshire. The two-hour affair saw the candidates all declaring themselves fervent defenders of corporate America, while criticizing the Obama administration from an ultra-right perspective.

The candidates included the nominal frontrunner, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, as well as former Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty, former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum, former House speaker Newt Gingrich, current House members Michelle Bachmann of Minnesota and Ron Paul of Texas, and the former CEO of the Godfather's Pizza chain, Herman Cain.

Two potential candidates, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former Alaska governor Sarah Palin, were invited to participate in the debate but declined. Another former governor, Jon Huntsman of Utah, also passed up the debate but announced the day after that he was joining the race.

None of these candidates has any genuine mass following. Romney is the early leader, partly because he is better known, having run unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination in 2008, but largely because he has by far the largest campaign war chest. He raised over \$10 million in a single day last month and has access to a personal fortune estimated at nearly \$500 million.

Pawlenty and Bachmann are both seeking to become the ultra-right Tea Party alternative to Romney, with Pawlenty advancing the most radical tax cuts for the wealthy, and Bachmann most closely aligned with the religious agenda of the Christian fundamentalist elements. The rest are a mixture of the obscure (Huntsman, Cain and Santorum), and the quixotic (Gingrich, whose campaign self-destructed with the resignation of his entire staff last week, and three-time candidate Paul).

The initial media response to the debate was to elevate Bachmann at the expense of Pawlenty. The former Minnesota governor, who attacked Romney for authoring a statewide health care plan in Massachusetts similar to the Obama plan, was invited by the moderator, CNN anchorman John King, to repeat his criticism, but refused to do so, claiming he was only interested in criticizing Obama. Post-debate coverage lashed Pawlenty for this U-turn, while praising Bachmann as the new

“star” of the Republican field.

The contest for the presidential nomination of either of the two corporate-controlled parties in America is not, in any real sense, an opportunity for the American population to make a political choice. Both parties are controlled by big business, and the nomination process is thoroughly manipulated by the corporate media.

No candidate can make a serious showing, let alone actually win the presidential nomination, without being completely vetted by the multimillionaires who dominate American society. That was true of Obama in 2008 and it is equally true of those now competing for the Republican nomination to oppose him in 2012.

In some cases, as with Romney, the candidate is himself a multimillionaire and a charter member of the corporate financial aristocracy. It is remarkable that less than three years after the Wall Street crash devastated the US and world economy, touching off the worst global slump since the Great Depression, a prominent investment banker could become, at least temporarily, the leading candidate of one of the two major parties.

Even more remarkably, Romney is basing his campaign precisely on his experience in high finance, presenting himself as a competent economic manager who knows how to restore prosperity in America. None of his competitors sought to make an issue of it, because they all worship at the shrine of unfettered laissez-faire capitalism, blaming “big government” and “over-regulation,” not Wall Street, for the destruction of nearly 10 million jobs in less than four years.

In the two hours of discussion among seven candidates, only the moderator King even mentioned Wall Street by name. None of the candidates made any reference to the financial crash of September 2008.

All of them called for repeal of the Dodd-Frank bill, the financial regulation bill passed by the Democratic-controlled Congress last year, presenting this toothless measure, which has not caused a single banker or CEO to lose his job, let alone go to jail, as far too harsh a response to the biggest orgy of financial swindling in world history.

It was notable that King never asked the candidates whether they supported the bailout of Wall Street, begun under the Bush

administration and escalated under Obama. Bachmann and Paul actually voted against the bailout in Congress, and Santorum and Cain now claim to oppose it in order to make a right-wing populist appeal for Tea Party support.

Romney, for obvious reasons, was a strong supporter of the bank bailout, but he was questioned only about his opposition to the bailout of the auto companies. All seven Republican candidates declared their opposition to Obama's intervention in the auto industry, portraying it as a violation of market principles and a government handout to auto workers, although the wages of new-hires were slashed by 50 percent at the insistence of the White House.

None of the Republican candidates proposed any special measures to create jobs, instead invoking endlessly the power of the "free market," claiming that deregulation of business and slashing taxes on the wealthy would produce full employment. They seemed content to blame the ongoing economic slump on the White House and rely on mass disaffection with the Obama administration to produce a swing to the Republicans, as in the 2010 congressional elections.

From the standpoint of economic policy, however, Obama would have been perfectly comfortable with the course of the debate. The White House has flatly rejected any measures to directly create jobs through public works or other government hiring, and, like its nominal opponents in the Republican Party, declares that private business is the only conceivable "job creator."

Both parties are committed to the defense of corporate profits and private wealth, which means the driving down of working class living standards through the deliberate maintenance of mass unemployment at levels unseen since the 1930s, all the while posturing, purely for electoral purposes, as being committed to creating jobs.

The bulk of the Republican debate was a tedious unanimity of reaction. All seven candidates pledged to repeal the Obama health care reform legislation adopted last year by a Democratic Congress, not because it cuts Medicare and undermines workers' health benefits, but because it doesn't cut Medicare and undermine workers' health benefits *enough*.

All seven pledged to support the plan drafted by House Republican Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, which abolishes Medicare for all those under 55—even Gingrich, who came under intense attack last month for observing, truthfully, that the Ryan plan was "radical" and "right-wing social engineering."

At one point or another during the evening event, held at St. Anselm's College in Manchester, the Republican hopefuls called for the privatization or abolition of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Labor Relations Board, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and NASA, the space agency.

All seven pledged allegiance to the litmus test issues of the

Christian fundamentalist right: all oppose a woman's right to abortion, all oppose gay marriage, all pledge to appoint Supreme Court justices who will approve prayers in the public schools and public funds for religious schools.

There were odd notes and bizarre statements throughout the evening. In one of the strangest responses, Cain beat the drum for anti-Muslim prejudice, declaring that he would not have a Muslim in his cabinet and raising the specter that sharia (Muslim religious law) was a major danger in the United States.

Actually, the Republican Party is committed to the Christian fundamentalist equivalent of sharia, imposing right-wing religious precepts on the American people. Pawlenty, for example, reiterated his claim that the Founding Fathers had not really intended to separate church and state. The First Amendment was "designed to protect people of faith from government, not government from people of faith," he said.

In other words, the separation of church and state applies in only one direction. The state should not interfere with churches, but churches should be free to impose their doctrines on the state, and through the state, on the entire population.

In a sign of why the American ruling elite may still be leaning towards the retention of Obama, his potential Republican opponents barely discussed foreign policy, and when they did they tended towards an isolationist posture on the multiple military interventions being conducted by the administration.

Romney called for US troops to return from Afghanistan quickly, saying, "Our troops shouldn't go off and try to fight a war of independence for another nation." Bachmann said the US role in Libya was not advancing "any vital American interest."

Nonetheless, should any of these Republicans end up in the White House in 2013, they will be no less ferocious advocates of militarism than Obama and George W. Bush. Their foreign policy, like their domestic policy, will be determined by the dictates of corporate America, not the votes of the American people.



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