

Questions for Presidential Candidates

Written by Julianne Malveaux
Wednesday, 18 April 2012 15:40



Now that former Senator Rick Santorum has withdrawn from the Republican race for president, it is a foregone conclusion that former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney will be the Republican nominee. To be sure, he still has to deal with the nuisance factor of Newt Gingrich, whose lack of money has not only torpedoed his campaign, but also one of his “think” tanks. Maybe Gingrich can find work, as he suggested that inner city youth do, by taking on some janitorial tasks. So it’s down to Romney and President Obama as opponents in November. The entertainment is over. Let’s get down to business.

Those who are undecided about the political path they’d like to take ought to look at several areas of contrast, and consider what either candidate might do in three areas:

JOBS – The unemployment rate ticked down just a tiny bit last month, from 8.3 to 8.2 percent, but only 120,000 new jobs were created. We need to create at least 300,000 jobs a month for the next year or so to just begin to catch up with all the jobs that were lost. Black unemployment, at 14 percent, is at the Great Depression level of 25 percent when hidden unemployment is considered. Unemployment is trending down, if slowly, and the Obama administration has been quick to share these facts. Further, if President Obama had been able to pass job creation legislation at the end of 2011, the rate might have dropped even faster.

My question to Mitt Romney would be how he plans to accelerate the pace of job creation and lower unemployment. I’d also ask him about high Black unemployment rates, and targeting. Finally, I’d ask him whether he still enjoys firing people and what message he thinks that sends to the least and the left out.

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I'd ask President Obama at least two of those three questions. I'd certainly ask what he would do to change the pace of job creation, what kind of legislation he thinks is needed for him to implement his plan, and whether he thinks he can pull a political consensus together to pass such legislation. I'd also ask him about Black unemployment and targeting, not to put him on the spot or to play the race card, but because this is an important question. Finally, I'd ask about a focus on youth unemployment, given the fact that young people who graduate from college and cannot find jobs have lifetime effects from or two years worth of joblessness.

TAXES – Former Republican candidate Herman Cain, he of the 9-9-9 plan that just didn't add up, the foreign policy ignorance, and the fiery, if inept, blather said that Romney was being "picked apart" by the tax issue. But Romney pays a lower proportion of his income on taxes than the average – not upper income, just average – working person does, mostly because investment income is taxed at a lower rate than earnings. Romney has also called for an extension of the Bush tax cuts, while President Obama would eliminate them.

I'd ask Mitt Romney why he thinks it is fair for the rich to pay proportionately less in taxes than middle income people. I'd ask him bluntly whether he thinks he favors the rich and if so, why. I'd ask him to detail his objections to the Buffett plan, and to offer an alternative plan for tax fairness.

I'd ask President Obama (who not only pays his fair share in taxes, but also contributes generously to charitable causes, including the United Negro College Fund) to offer, beyond the Buffett plan, other keys to tax fairness. I'd ask him whether investment income should be taxed at an equal or higher rate than earnings. And I'd ask him what kind of coalition is needed to turn the Buffett plan into public policy.

STUDENTS – While President Obama has vigorously defended Pell Grants, Romney would not only eliminate these grants but many other social programs. Furthermore, students pay more than 6 percent interest on federal loans, while some of the bailout banks paid less than 1 percent interest on their loans. If we believe that children are our future, why aren't our future workers, students, more highly considered in the budget process?

I'd ask Mitt Romney what his horizon is for U.S. prosperity and what role today's students play in that prosperity. I'd ask him why he is opposed to Pell grants, and what he thinks of the interest differential between the way students are treated and bailout banks are treated.

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Before I ask President Obama anything on education, I'd thank him for his fight to protect HBCUs and other colleges. Then I'd ask about the interest differential, and about his progress on his pledge to restore the U.S. to world leadership in educational attainment.

Now that we don't have the distraction of debate about peripheral issues, maybe we can get down to business to compare and contrast the candidates.

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