



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on October 24, 2012

Alternative Candidates Offer Different Issues, Few Specifics

Four lesser known candidates for president sparred sparingly with one another, while aiming their rhetorical blows on the major party candidates who weren't there in the Alternative Candidates Debate in Chicago Tuesday night. The forum, sponsored by the [Free and Equal Elections Foundation](#), brought together four candidates of parties unfamiliar to most voters. But Gary Johnson of the Libertarian Party, Jill Stein of the Green Party, Justice Party candidate Rocky Anderson, and Virgil Goode of the Constitution Party raised a wide range of issues that received little to no attention in the three presidential debates between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney.



"Look, there is only a couple of voices being heard here and its Tweedledee and Tweedledum," said Johnson, the former Republican governor of New Mexico. Johnson chided the major party candidates for "speaking about who's going to spend more money on Medicare when Medicare is system that you and I pay \$30,000 into and get 100 thousand in benefits. It's a 3-1, what you pay in and what you get out. It's not sustainable."

Anderson, a former mayor of Salt Lake City and one-time Democratic nominee for Congress in Utah, knocked both Obama and Romney on military spending and for supporting more drilling for oil both on land and offshore. "And neither of them even dares to talk about getting rid of this disastrous, failed war on drugs," he said. "Neither of them talks about catastrophic climate change and neither of them talks about poverty when we've got the worst poverty rate in this country since 1965. So we need to open up the choices."

Stein offered "a green New Deal to create 25 million jobs, end unemployment, jump start the green economy, and that means putting a halt to climate change and making wars for oil obsolete." A physician residing in Lexington, Massachusetts, the Green Party candidate is also calling for universal health care coverage and for public financing of political campaigns. She would favor eliminating private contributions with a constitutional amendment that would make clear that "money is not speech and corporations are not people" She called for free public higher education, arguing that the government should be "bailing out the students, not the banks," a phrase she repeated several times during the 90-minute debate.

Johnson argued that government loans and loan guarantees have made colleges and universities "immune to pricing," driving up tuition and leaving students burdened with heavy debts. "That's one of government's unintended consequences," he said in rebutting Stein's call for free college education. " 'Free' comes with a cost," he said. "Free is simply accumulating more to the \$16 trillion in debt that we currently have.... This is what has to stop in this country, is this notion of 'free,' " said Johnson, who



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warned several times of a “monetary collapse.” Anderson, like Stein, argued for “free and equal educational opportunity” in either college or technical schools.

“This is not a radical idea,” he said “It’s done in many parts of the world and it pays off huge dividends.”

Goode, the plain-speaking former congressman from Virginia, addressed the issue with characteristic bluntness

“You may not get what you want to hear from me, but you’re going to get straight talk,” the Constitution Party candidate said. “We can’t afford more subsidized student loans and can’t afford any more Pell grants. Our debt of \$16 trillion is bearing down on us and as Governor Johnson said, we could well be like Germany after World War I.”

Both Johnson and Anderson were vigorous in denouncing the federal war on drugs, and Stein joined them in calling for the legalization of marijuana. Johnson said the nation is now “at the tipping point,” with half the country in favor of making marijuana use legal.

“It’s because we’re talking about it. It’s because debates and discussion have been raging at dinner tables,” Johnson said. “Fifty percent of the kids graduating from high school have smoked marijuana. That’s an issue that belongs with families, not in the criminal justice system,” he said to enthusiastic applause from the audience.

“We have more people in jails in this country on drug offenses than Western Europe has in their prisons and jails on all offenses,” Anderson said. “We the American people need to come together — right, left, it doesn’t matter about partisanship — we need to demand immediately and end to this insane war on drugs.” But one who was not about to join that coalition was Goode, who said he would not end federal drug enforcement, though he favors spending less on it.

“I’m not for legalizing drugs. If you want that, vote for one of them, ” Goode said as someone in the audience could be heard saying, “We will.”

Goode also distanced himself from the other candidates on the issue of immigration, calling for a moratorium on green-card admissions to the United States until unemployment is under five percent. “It makes no sense to bring in so many foreign workers when our unemployment is so high in this country,” he said. Johnson disagreed.

“Let’s make it as easy as possible for somebody who wants to come into his country and work to get a work visa,” Johnson said. “Not a green card, not citizenship, but a work visa so that applicable taxes would get paid and that we would have no criminals working in this country.”

All four candidates agreed that what Anderson called “the imperial presidency” is endangering constitutional liberties and needlessly dragging the country into foreign wars.

“Dropping bombs on weddings and funerals is not the way to win the hearts and minds of people in the Middle East,” said Stein, who called for an end to the use of drones, either in warfare or as surveillance planes for “spying on the American public” in domestic law enforcement. Johnson warned that with either an Obama or a Romney victory, we will be on a “continued heightened police state in this country.”

“We are on the road to totalitarianism and that is not an exaggeration,” Anderson said, recalling that Obama as U.S. Senator voted for the law that gave retroactive immunity to telecom companies that assisted the government in conducting a program of warrantless surveillance. “That shows such utter disregard for the rule of law,” he said.



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The four were unanimous in denouncing the provision of the current National Defense Authorization Act that allow the President to imprison terror suspects indefinitely, including U.S. citizens, without charges or trial. Goode, typically, was the most succinct.

"If I were President I would have vetoed NDAA," he said. Goode also said he would not keep our troops in Afghanistan, much less go to war in Syria or Iran without a declaration of war by Congress. Johnson also called for pulling troops out of Afghanistan immediately.

"I would argue that after having been in Afghanistan for six months, we wiped out al Qaeda," he said. "We should have gotten out of Afghanistan 11 years ago."

All the candidates agreed on cutting military spending, with Anderson criticizing the Congress for funding production of the F-22 fighter plane, a weapon the Pentagon considers obsolete, he said. Johnson called for a 43 percent reduction in the Pentagon budget that, he said, would preserve military spending at the 2003 level.

The questions were submitted electronically, via the "social media," and chosen by a team of editors. Moderator Larry King, the retired CNN talk show host, held to a firmer line than the moderators in the major-party debates in keeping participants within the time limits and on the subject of each question. ("We're on drugs, we're on drugs," King interjected when Goode veered away from the "war on drugs" question to talk about other issues.) But the format, requiring two-minute answers to each question and one minute for rebuttals, offered the candidates little opportunity to expound on the solutions they offered to the problems they decried. Aside from proposals to eliminate comparatively small budget items like student loans and funding for Planned Parenthood and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, there were few specifics offered for the non-defense budget cuts needed for Johnson's and Goode's proposals to balance the budget in one year. Nor did Stein or Anderson explain how they would pay for the universal health care and free higher education they proposed or how they would halt the climate change they warned is threatening the country and the planet. And while the spirited opposition to violations of the Bill of Rights was refreshing, there was no mention of limiting the role of the federal government to those powers enumerated in the Constitution.

The Free and Equal campaign encouraged people to vote for the candidates online, with the top two vote getters to meet in a similar debate next Tuesday. In his closing statement, Gary Johnson summed urged voters to ignore the counsel of those who say voting for an alternative party candidate is "wasting your vote."

"Wasting your vote is voting for someone you don't believe in," he said. "I'm asking everybody here, I'm asking everybody watching this nationwide, to 'waste' your vote on me."



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