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Candidate, U.S. Congress, TN-01



Following the July 23 debate among GOP candidates, Blair responded to topics addressed, and has the following comments on replies given by the candidates on stage.

Blair
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Dear Friends,

With so many candidates running on one side, negativity and attacks like we saw last night are inevitable. Instead of working behind the scenes to decide on a small number of candidates to present to voters, they demonstrate a lack of unity by running 16 like-minded people, which leads me to conclude that the driving force in this race for the nomination is ego. If they can't work together with members of their own party right here in Tennessee, can we really count on them to work with colleagues in Congress, let alone work across the aisle to help heal the divisiveness and represent all Americans? I'm not running to become something; I'm running because OUR lives depend on it.

There was a lot of talk last night about money. Candidates boasted how much money Tennessee has, how big our rainy day fund is, and how this state has the resources to do whatever needs to be done. This was particularly true when the discussion was centered on incentivizing corporate interests. On bread and butter issues, however, those things that impact voters of this district every day, then they were suddenly concerned about fiscal responsibility. That should tell us all we need to know about their priorities. The money in any government treasury, state or federal, belongs to US.

I'd like to talk about moral responsibility. On the subject of social issues, the candidates emphasized that it's up to each of us to be respectful and make patriotic choices just because it's the right thing to do. At the same time, they advocate throwing tax dollars at corporations to incentivize them to do right by the American people rather than placing the moral burden on corporate leadership. Clearly, they don't trust corporations to make decisions that are good for Americans, and yet their answer is to keep throwing our hard earned dollars at them. I will advocate for a new approach, and educate leaders of big business about how their decisions to move jobs abroad are damaging our economy and our labor force. Big businesses are so used to getting our money that it works in their favor to depend on government handouts instead of bearing the moral responsibility of choosing America first. America First means choosing the people of this nation over special interests.

I was surprised that the candidates didn't spend more time talking about increasing jobs via renewable energy. Only one candidate mentioned nuclear energy and I believe it's important to frame any discussion about economic development with conversations about industries whose growth in our area can diversify our ability, as a region, to respond to innovation and a focus on the future.

Love,
Blair

BLAIR'S RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS IN THE DEBATE

On the pandemic:

Our government can't protect us from nature. It can, however, have a plan in place that mitigates the impact of such events. Leadership CAN control the messaging to eliminate confusion and division like that which occurred with COVID. Mixed messaging coming out of the White House led to partisan responses instead of a united response which would have helped us respond faster, protect ourselves, our communities, and shorten the duration of the spread of the virus.

But my plan would minimize the impact of such disasters on every single American without bureaucratic solutions, and without applications and long waits for relief.

On Restoring Confidence in Law Enforcement

Hawk wants us to believe that it's "one or two rogue law enforcement individuals" who have led to these riots. That's absurd. Our police are under enormous pressure and they need training. But they also need the right policies to hold them accountable for excessive force, and our citizens need policies that protect them from being victimized by the very people who are supposed to protect and serve communities. I will not defund the police, but I will support initiatives that decriminalize social issues so that law enforcement officers who do not have degrees in social work are no longer responsible for handling every dispute and call that involves non-violent citizens who simply need help. We need alternatives to incarceration, to end qualified immunity, and we need to decriminalize drugs that account for too many altercations between police and community members, undermining the ability of law enforcement to establish a positive, protective relationship with members of communities.

The role of the federal government in race relations

It's great to focus on creating conversations, but when a disenfranchised community has been having a conversation for hundreds of years, and still suffers from policies that undermine its ability to access equal opportunity and financial well-being, you will see social unrest. This is not just true of communities of color. There have been labor movements throughout the years when white workers have set fire to buildings and demonstrations turned violent because people in power were not listening. Clark says it's up to all of us to treat each other with respect, but respect means that you don't just listen, you act in ways that actually produce change. This problem does not belong to one party or the other. Democrats have thrown money at these racial issues, but have not succeeded in implementing actual policies that address the root cause of the problems.

On Amtrak

I will work for improving sustainable, affordable regional transportation to help make our local economy more accessible for business development. Several candidates emphasized that if the region wants Amtrak, we will find the money. Darden said, "I would challenge the premise that the money is not available." Gapp says the capital is there, we just need to figure out how to access it. Hill says the money is there.

These same voices tell us that we can't afford to expand healthcare, or that we can't afford to fully fund our schools. They say we don't have the money to raise teacher and state trooper salaries. They say we can't afford the communications system and towers that would allow our paramedics in the mountains to communicate with medical professionals when they are responding to emergencies. We can't afford to expand broadband.

When it comes to Amtrak, suddenly the money is there, but when it comes to bread and butter issues, they say we don't have the money.

What's unique about the 1st District

Darden says the 1st District is the "best place to live, work, and worship." Has he driven through the towns filled with payday lenders who feed on the desperation of local individuals and businesses? Have any of them visited the homes that have no electricity or running water? Have they tried to get work or school work done from home without the internet? This is a beautiful place to live, and the people are warm and thoughtful, but after 139 years of Republican leadership, we are still stuck in poverty and the statistics show that this district needs change. Our schools are still failing us. We still don't all have healthcare, and, in fact, our leaders have done nothing to protect us from the monopoly they allowed to restrict and reduce our access to healthcare. It's time for a representative who is in touch with the daily struggles voters of this district face.

Opioids

I agree with Adkins that our drug problem is linked to our social issues. I believe that we must absolutely decriminalize addiction and provide alternatives to incarceration. We focus on the problem by providing better schools, vocational training so our young people and those whose jobs have been automated can access education to give them hope for the future. And, we hold doctors and pharmaceutical companies accountable for pushing drugs and failing to provide alternatives for pain management. This includes fully legalizing cannabis so that it can be an easy and inexpensive alternative to opioids.

On Farmers

I agree with Gapp that we should be very concerned about the next generation of farmers. Sadly, the suicide rate of farmers is five times that of other Tennesseans, and the bankruptcy rates are staggering. What we need to focus on is making sure that our farms have what they need to survive, and that their livelihood remains an attractive option for future generations. To do that we open up the cannabis and hemp industries to provide another avenue for financial prosperity, increase storage so our farmers don't have to dump their hard work when up against economic downturns and trade disputes, expand the internet, and make sure that our roads and bridges are safe for transportation of products.

How to reduce reliance on foreign products.

Many of the jobs that have been shipped overseas are likely to soon be automated anyway. We should focus on building new industries in areas like energy, support for automated systems, and hemp farming, to name a few. We should also reinforce jobs in the infrastructure sector where we never have a shortage of need. However, it is in our best interest to ensure that certain equipment, especially in the area of medical devices, are here in the United States so that we don't run into issues of shortages and have to look overseas during an emergency.

What should be the future of the TVA

The TVA produces electricity for 10 million people and is a great example of economic development, however, it is about to outsource a large number of jobs, presumably because we lack the local skill set to fill those jobs. In the short term we should be looking at ways to incentivize American workers to come to the region, and long-term, we should partner with the TVA to provide internships to grow the skillset right here in Eastern Tennessee. This comes down to our education system, and highlights why it is critical that we fully fund our schools and promote appropriate scholarships and vocational opportunities so that as a district we grow from within. The Union is advocating training, and I support them on this.

On Federal stimulus packages and bailouts.

Conservatives are talking out of both sides of their mouth right now. On one hand they are boasting how they saved businesses with the stimulus package, but on the other hand they are saying that Americans are taking advantage of the system and should be cut off. Let's face it, true capitalism would dictate that our government not pick winners and losers, so any stimulus package bears a hint of the evil socialism most of my opposition talks about non-stop. I advocate for balanced capitalism, human-centered capitalism, where we focus on more than just corporate profits -- we focus on people. I'm comfortable with providing aid, especially to small businesses who got the short end of the stick with bureaucracy and minimal benefits compared to their large corporate competitors. My plan for the Freedom Dividend, a universal basic income, would ensure continuity in Americans' income. It's time to stop thinking that corporations are looking out for us and all we have to do is give them more money and it will somehow magically end up in our pockets. It just doesn't.

On Student loan debt

We bail out corporations, farms, banks and we do it because we say they are too big or too important to fail. And that's often true. But we don't sit there and talk about how they were irresponsible to over leverage their assets, or if we do, it's in passing while we hand out money that came from the taxpayer's pockets. And yet, not one Republican candidate was willing to consider that some number of Americans with student loan debt might be deserving of loan forgiveness. I don't disagree with Tim Hill when he said that the large federal loans allowed for colleges and universities to inflate tuition. That may be true, though I would have to do more research into it. But to argue that the federal government should not provide any student loans or that if you work hard you can pay it all off, is an absolute lack of connection to the reality of most Americans. Eliminating federal loans would deepen socioeconomic disparity and further divide access to opportunity into haves and have nots. That is not a racial issue; that is an issue that all middle class families face. We must absolutely lower interest rates on all loans. Our graduates are paying higher interest rates than any other borrower. And, we might consider forgiving loans under certain circumstances, and where possible, recuperating their money from institutions that have not declared bankruptcy. I do not advocate for blanket loan forgiveness.

Other Comments

I have deep respect for Jay Adkins view that we must be more than pro-birth, we must be pro-life. To do that we must protect our moms and give them the means to raise a child through paid maternity leave, family leave, equal wages in the workforce, implementing the Freedom Dividend, provide quality affordable childcare, and the means to care for a child with access to healthcare. Saving the lives of all Americans should be our top priority. We will never eliminate abortion, even if it were illegal, until we ensure that babies brought into this world have a bright future.