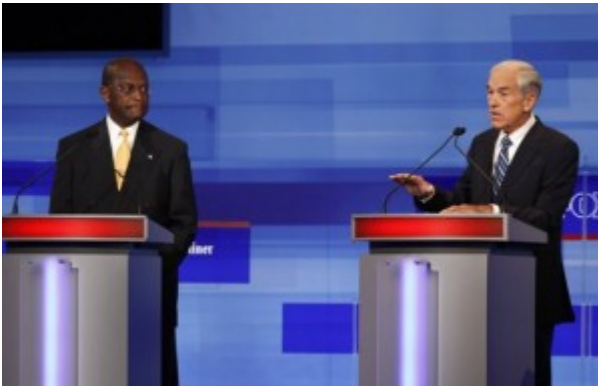




Welcome to the race, Rick! Other candidates tweak absent Perry at Iowa debate

Rick Perry wasn't on the stage in Ames, Iowa tonight, but he was on the minds — and tongues — other Republican presidential candidates.

Fellow Texan Ron Paul and Georgia businessman Herman Cain blasted the Texas governor, who did not participate in the first Republican debate in the first-in-the-nation caucus state.



Herman Cain (left) and Ron Paul (right) were the sharpest in their comments about Rick Perry. (Charlie Neibergall/Associated Press)

Paul, a Republican congressman from Lake Jackson, said Perry “represents the status quo” while he represents change. And Cain, a former CEO of Godfather’s Pizza, said Perry was “one more politician” in the race, something that would help the only never-elected candidate on the stage.

Others took sideswipes at Perry. Former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman joked that “we all need prayers,” a not-so-veiled allusion to the Texas governor’s Reliant Stadium prayer session. Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty noted that he was one of a handful of governors to receive the libertarian Cato Institute’s top grade for fiscal performance — and that “the others aren’t running, they aren’t thinking of running.” (That eliminates Perry, we guess.)

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, in a preview of [the anti-Perry theme he will be pursuing in coming months](#), said America needs a candidate who knows “how the private sector worked” rather than one who has spent a “whole life in government.”

Guess which candidate has been in office for the past 26 consecutive years? Yep, you guessed it: Rick Perry.

But a couple of the Republican hopefuls decided not to take a whack at their newest rival. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., said that “there’s room in the race for Sarah Palin, Rick Perry” and even the Fox News host who asked the question.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich called the Texas Republican “a very formidable person.”

“Governor Perry has a great record of job creation in Texas,” he said.