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Debate at UI provides three sides to presidential election

BY STACEY MURRAY | OCTOBER 24, 2012

Outside the arena of a formal political debate, right and left politics still don't mix — and adding a third party won't improve the odds.

But a debate hosted on the University of Iowa campus Tuesday night did just that in order to offer students a more varied display of political opinions following the conclusion of this year's presidential debates.

The Young Americans for Liberty, along with the UI College Republicans and Democrats held a debate Tuesday featuring members of the Democratic, Republican, and Libertarian Parties in which the panel was encouraged to discuss the views for their part of the political spectrum.

Frank Durham, a UI associate professor, represented the liberal end of the political spectrum, while Jack Hunter, a columnist for the *American Conservative*, expressed views for the right end.

Most debates solely feature Democratic and Republican views, but this educational discussion featured libertarian views — a third party not represented in presidential debates.

Jim Harper of the Cato Institute represented the Libertarian Party — a party not featured on every ballot for the upcoming election.

While the political enthusiasts said they were alike in many instances, they clashed on some issues including health care and social issues.

The Affordable Care Act brought the first disagreements for the panel.

Durham, a journalism professor at the UI, supports the act, saying it was a step in the right direction.
His fellow panelists disagreed.

Hunter, an outspoken adversary of the Affordable Care Act, dubbed the piece of legislation incompetent that will follow in the footsteps of the programs before it — including Social Security and Medicaid.

“Obamacare is the most monstrous and most frightening thing that has come down the pike in some time as far as an entitlement we cannot afford,” Hunter said.

Harper took a similar stance, saying the country needed to restore a marketplace as a financial service. If the health-care system continued, it would become increasingly expensive, preventing Americans from seeking health care until absolutely necessary.

“That system isn’t going to work,” he said. “It’s going to get even worse before the market reforms come in and fix it.”

On social issues, a signature differentiation among the three parties, the three disagreed even more.

Hunter said the states should use the 10th Amendment and allow each state to make decisions regarding social issues.

“It is tyranny for people in California to tell people in the south what they must do about abortion, and it’s tyranny for people in the south to tell people in Vermont and Massachusetts they can’t be married if they happen to be same-sex couples,” he said.

On the opposing side, Harper said he doesn’t know why America involves politicians in social issues at all.

“It doesn’t need to be a political fight,” he said. “That’s something for society to handle. Distribute this problem back to the people who can handle it perfectly. The last thing we should do is look to politicians for moral guidance — they’re some of the worst.”

Christopher Bjork, a North Liberty native, said the debate featuring a third-party candidate served the audience well with its knowledge and format. With the in-depth look at the views of the parties, the candidates themselves were taken out of the picture to identify the parties separate from the candidates that represent them.

“I think it was a very good learning too, especially for those college kids who maybe thought they were liberal and decided they were libertarian — or maybe who thought they were conservative and are really liberal,” he said.