

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

## **OPINION: Candidates should harp on my pet causes, not yours**

By: A. Barton Hinkle – October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012

---

With only a few days to go before the Nov. 6 election, the question on the mind of every thinking American today is simple: What do the candidates have to say about the international Basel Committee on Banking Supervision?

Well, OK -- perhaps not every American. Some of them may want to know how Obama and Romney view the legacy of the late Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha. Others might wonder what they plan to do about legalizing industrial hemp.

Anyhow, it's clear that a great many Americans -- read: "members of the press" -- have been sorely disappointed by the failure of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney to address the issues of most pressing importance to them personally.

For example: climate change. After the third presidential debate, on foreign policy, The Washington Post's Stephen Stromberg lamented that Obama and Romney "spent exactly no time on one of the greatest challenges the world's governments must face . . . This challenge is climate change." He isn't alone. Back in August, The Post's Eugene Robinson wrote that he would "like to hear President Obama and Mitt Romney talk about the future of the planet." A few days ago, he grumbled that "not a word has been said" about it.

The Post's Ezra Klein also has been perturbed by "how climate change disappeared from the debates." Klein was inspired by The New Yorker's Elizabeth Kolbert: "You might have thought that with the Arctic melting," she grouched, "at least one of the candidates would feel compelled to speak out about the issue." Nope, wrong again.

Elsewhere, you'll find The New York Times frowning its brow because the candidates are ignoring gun control. It has been a "phantom issue," the paper complained in an editorial -- which former editorial page editor Gail Collins soon echoed in a column on "how regularly this topic fails to come up."

Why might that be? The editorial offered one subtle clue: "The current campaign," it points out, "is now focused on a handful of states where mention of gun control is considered politically toxic." Yet despite this, Obama and Romney stubbornly refuse to bring the subject up. Talk about riddles wrapped in enigmas.

Meanwhile, it is the considered opinion of National Public Radio that the candidates are ignoring poverty. But NPR isn't about to! No, NPR is going to be the guy at the cocktail party who backs you into a corner while he holds forth on his favorite subject for half an hour and then grabs your arm when you try to slip away because he isn't finished yet.

"Both political parties virtually ignore the issue of poverty," NPR says ("Smiley, West: Poverty is a Political Issue" -- Sept. 13). And: "Poverty wasn't mentioned at all" ("What Obama and Romney Left Out in the First Debate" -- Oct. 4). And: "On the campaign trail, the issue of poverty has received surprisingly little attention" ("Candidates' Views on Poverty Get Little Attention" -- Oct. 15). And: The candidates have talked about the middle class, but "haven't spent nearly as much time talking about the poor" ("Are Candidates Ignoring the Poor?" -- Oct. 19). And so on.

If you didn't know better, you'd almost think NPR was trying to push some kind of agenda or something. Of course, the candidates do talk about poverty -- whenever they talk about revving up the economy or creating jobs. Nothing like a steady paycheck to keep you out of the poorhouse. (To be fair, this might not have occurred to NPR.)

Right-wingers also are irked that certain issues near and dear to them haven't been front and center, either. A piece in The Daily Caller teed off on third-debate moderator Bob Schieffer for failing to ask about border security and (not making this up!) Operation Fast and Furious. The nerve of Schieffer, to shut out the crucial conspiracy-minded-Class-2-Federal-Firearms-License-Holder demographic like that.

There's a lot more the candidates have ignored, according to other sources: the environment (columnist Bonnie Erbe); children's issues (the Child and Family Policy Center); the "impending senior boom and its dramatic impact on society" (the Alliance for Aging Research); poverty again (The Nation); and the "expensive catastrophe" of the war on drugs (**Cato Institute**).

It's no great mystery why the candidates ignore such issues. They are trying to win over undecided voters, and the campaigns have done oodles of research to find out what those voters care about. That's why Obama and Romney keep saying things like: Strength abroad "begins with a strong economy here at home." Undecided voters want to hear about jobs, not the validity of Japanese claims on the Senkaku Islands.

Still, it's a darn shame the candidates have given short shrift to so many issues of great importance to people who think Ralph Nader is a corporate sellout. Especially the one about Enver Hoxha. That could swing the entire election.