



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on September 6, 2011

DeMint's Freedom Forum: Bachmann Trips Up, Perry Cancels

Bachmann was asked by panelist and Princeton Professor Robert George why she believes a government mandate to buy healthcare insurance is unconstitutional. She simply said it's "inherent" in the Constitution, but couldn't cite any particular provision of the Constitution. In point of fact, the federal government is a government of few and defined powers, and the specified powers do not include the power to force Americans to buy healthcare insurance.



Bachmann's ignorance of the Constitution was highlighted by subsequent candidate interviews, especially those of Newt Gingrich and Ron Paul, who were able to hold detailed discussions of the 14th amendment with Professor George.

The American Principles Project that Professor George founded formally sponsored "Palmetto Freedom Forum," but Tea Party favorite Senator Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) brought the star-power as a panelist, along with fellow panelist U.S. Congressman Steven King (R-Iowa). The Tea Party credentials of the panelists led Democratic Party consultant Donna Brazile to quip on CNN after the forum: "What they were running for tonight was not President of the United States, but president of the Tea Party."

The forum was not a formal debate, as candidates appeared on the stage one at a time to answer questions from the three panelists. The forum was limited to those candidates who ranked at least five percent in national polls, so only six candidates were invited: Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, Texas Governor Rick Perry, Texas Congressman Ron Paul, Minnesota Congressman Michele Bachmann, businessman Herman Cain, and Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Texas Governor Rick Perry had been scheduled to appear, but canceled at the last minute because of the Texas wildfires. "The Governor is in close contact with emergency operations officials regarding fires in Texas, including calls with his emergency management chief this morning," Perry's campaign communications secretary Ray Sullivan [told CNN](#).

As with other debate sponsors, Senator DeMint requested that the candidates leave their talking points at the door. And because of the much more serious questions by the panelists, a longer than one-minute response time, or perhaps a more circumspect audience, DeMint and company mostly succeeded where other debates have failed.

Many of the candidates sounded the most conservative they've ever sounded, perhaps not a surprise at an event before a very conservative Tea Party audience. All of the candidates who were asked called for the repeal of ObamaCare, Dodd-Frank financial regulation, Sarbanes-Oxley, and the Community Reinvestment Act. All also favored Right to Work legislation.



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Bachmann, the first candidate on the stage, was asked, "What federal agencies would you abolish?" Bachmann responded with a list that included ObamaCare and the Department of Education.

Herman Cain, second on stage, was far more vague about which agencies he would abolish and instead talked about studying cuts and promoting what he called his "999 plan." The 999 plan consists of reducing to nine percent taxes on corporate income and personal income and enacting a new nine percent national sales tax. Cain, a former Federal Reserve official, reiterated his endorsement of a gold standard and called Congress to take away either the mandate for currency stability or full employment from the Fed. Cain also said the United States should follow Chile's example on privatization of Social Security.

Newt Gingrich used much of his time on stage to attack the U.S. Supreme Court for usurpation of the right to life and other issues, such as putting crosses on public land. He suggested that Congress make use of Article III, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution to deny the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court from ruling on issues of abortion. The thrice-married Gingrich also had the most awkward statement of the afternoon in stating — on the issue of government recognition of marriage — that "I do believe marriage is between a man and a woman."

Ron Paul seemed the most at ease with the panelists, and DeMint and King both used the term "we" or "us" with Paul in conversation about topics such as calling for an audit of the Federal Reserve. DeMint even volunteered that Paul's audit legislation revealed important information about multi-trillion dollar Fed bailouts that included foreign banks. Rep. Paul made a bold economic prediction that "by next summer, the big tax is going to come. The inflation tax."

Rep. Paul also engaged in a spirited discussion about whether the "due process" and "equal opportunity" provisions of the 14th amendment could be used to force states to ban abortion. Paul pointed out that state laws already banned abortion and had been blocked by the federal government's Supreme Court. "I don't see why we would have to turn that into a federal issue," Paul said, saying he'd rather the issue be returned to the states where abortion would be abolished. "You're sort of asking for more policemen at the federal level." Rep. Paul — who was in a sequestered room during Gingrich's remarks — also urged use of Article III, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution to negate *Roe v. Wade*.

Paul got the biggest audience laugh of the afternoon when asked what federal agencies he'd abolish to balance the budget: "Well, that's a difficult question because that's a long list. I'd rather you give me the list of the things we should keep. That would be a short list."

Last on the stage was Mitt Romney, who rejected use of Congress to get around the states on abortion: "That could create a constitutional crisis," Romney told Professor George. "That's something that I would not precipitate." Romney did not distinguish between use of the 14th amendment and Article III, Section 2 and instead said he would appoint justices who "would follow the Constitution." Romney, asked about how he would address the healthcare mandate issue, claimed he hadn't raised taxes in Massachusetts ([not true](#)) and claimed Obama had handled the mandate wrongly.

Photo of Rep. Michele Bachmann: AP Images

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