

# The Bentley/Byrne Debate

## A Question by Question Analysis

- I. **Initiative and Referendum** – The two candidates were asked whether they were in favor of establishing an initiative and referendum law similar to the one passed by California. Initiative and referendum laws are designed to give the people as a whole the power to overturn or overrule any law voted on by the legislature of their state.
  - a. Bradley Byrne stated emphatically that he was in favor of passing an initiative and referendum law as long as it included sufficient safeguards to prevent it from being abused.
  - b. Robert Bentley explained that initiative and referendum laws present a danger to our republican form of government.
  - c. IncreasingLearning – Dr. Bentley is correct. This kind of law is designed to circumvent the republican process by allowing the people to demand a popular vote on any issue that they wish. This would effectively change our state government into a popular democracy which history reveals to be the least stable form of government known to man. Our founding fathers understood this and specifically forbade the states from passing such laws in Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution which states that “The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government.”
- II. **Gambling** – The second question consisted of two parts. The first was whether the candidates would disband the governor’s task force against gambling, and the second was whether the candidates would call for a public vote on the gambling issue.
  - a. Mr. Byrne claimed that he would work with the next attorney general to use the task force in the most effective way. He also stated that he was against the use of initiative and referendum to call for a popular vote on the issue.
  - b. Dr. Bentley claimed that he would disband the task force, and that he would call for a single popular vote to decide the fate of all gambling ventures in Alabama.
  - c. IncreasingLearning – Neither candidate is correct in his position on this issue. Mr. Byrne is incorrect in his belief that he can establish initiative and referendum in the state of Alabama while at the same time preventing the people from using that policy to force a public vote on gambling. Dr. Bentley is incorrect in his reliance on a popular vote to solve the issue. The defeat of gambling by a popular vote would do no more than amend the constitution to say that gambling is unlawful in the state of Alabama. That is what our constitution currently states anyway. If our government cannot enforce the constitution as it is currently written, then how can they hope to enforce it once it is rewritten to say the same thing? The correct answer would have been that it is the responsibility of the governor as the head of the executive branch to ensure that the requirements of the constitution are faithfully carried out and that all illegal gambling should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law in order to effectively discourage future violations.
- III. **Health Care** – The candidates were then asked about their plans to counteract the effects of the new health care law.
  - a. Mr. Byrne said that he would join forces with other governors to challenge the new law on the basis of the tenth amendment.

- b. Dr. Bentley said that he would spearhead an effort to pass a constitutional amendment against the individual mandate.
  - c. IncreasingLearning – Neither plan would successfully defeat the new law. A successful defeat must exploit the new law’s mishandling of the commerce clause of the Constitution.
- IV. **Party Politics** – The fourth question was one which seems to rear its ugly head in every primary debate. Each of the candidates was asked to explain how he would help to grow the Republican Party if he was elected to office.
- a. Mr. Byrne responded by saying that the majority of the populace already agrees with the principles of the Republican Party and that he would work to strengthen a large number of grass roots efforts across the state.
  - b. Dr. Bentley replied with the humorous comment that the Republican Party’s willingness to welcome democrats into their ranks is proven by their acceptance of former democrat Bradley Byrne. He then explained that the growth of the Republican Party is dependent on the realization that the vast majority of republicans are too busy providing for their families to attend these kinds of events.
  - c. IncreasingLearning – The correct answer is that the governor should be focused on performing his job well and to the glory of the Lord without having to worry about the health of the party. As long as the Republican Party is willing to take a stand for truth, it will not lack for members among the citizens of this state.
- V. **Property Assessments** – Both men were asked if they would reverse Governor Riley’s decision to have property values reassessed every year instead of every four years.
- a. Mr. Byrne said that he would reverse that decision.
  - b. Dr. Bentley agreed with Mr. Byrne, but he added that certain provisions should be put in place to allow for yearly appeals of those assessments in the event that property values continue to decline.
  - c. IncreasingLearning – Dr. Bentley’s answer is the best compromise between the two positions.
- VI. **Special Interests** – The candidates were asked what they would do to curb the influence of special interests over the government of the State.
- a. Mr. Byrne very emphatically stated that AEA is the only special interest in Alabama politics. He then said that the AEA is always in the wrong, and that new ethics laws need to be passed for the sole purpose of eliminating AEA’s influence.
  - b. Dr. Bentley also claimed that lobbyists are a great evil in Alabama politics, but he did not single out AEA specifically. He also did not say that the influence of lobbyists should be limited in any way. He emphasized, instead, the importance of electing leaders who make decisions based their convictions instead of allowing themselves to be swayed by special interests.
  - c. IncreasingLearning – Neither man gave the correct answer. Mr. Byrne’s answer displays the greatest weakness of his campaign. Apparently he is not seeking to take positive action as the future governor of Alabama. He seems to be focused instead on reacting to the hindrance posed by the AEA. His plans seem to consist only of vague dreams of the utopia he could create if only AEA wasn’t in his way. Dr. Bentley’s answer was the better of the two, but he still made the mistake of labeling all special interest groups as being a blight upon our political system. For most people, the phrase “special interest group” conjures up disturbing images of shady deals being made by corrupt men in smoke filled back rooms, but that is not the case at all. A special interest group is simply a group of ordinary people who seek to ensure that their elected officials are

representing them in the way that they feel they should be represented. There are many different kinds of special interest groups. Some are good, and some are bad. The proper response to these groups is not to label them all as dangers to the system, but rather to recognize that each of these groups is a representation of certain private citizens who have the right to express their opinions and desires. It is the responsibility of every elected official to listen to the desires of his constituents. He does not have to vote in accordance with those desires, but he should at least be willing to listen to them.

- VII. **State Reputation** – The next question consisted of a request for each candidates plan to improve the reputation of the state of Alabama. Both men praised the good reputation that our state currently enjoys and then used the remainder of their time to continue responding to the previous question.
- VIII. **Tourism** – The candidates were then asked to reveal their plans to restore the tourism industry after the effects of the oil spill.
- Mr. Byrne stated that both BP and the federal government are at fault and that they should both be forced to pay for the damage that they have caused.
  - Dr. Bentley said that his goal would be to focus on helping the citizens of Alabama and not on placing blame.
  - IncreasingLearning – Dr. Bentley’s answer is correct. There are more than enough people pointing fingers and placing blame in regards to this oil spill. What we need in a future governor is someone who is willing to take action to fix the problem regardless of who is ultimately responsible.
- IX. **Consumption Tax** – At this point in the debate, both men were asked if they would vote for a consumption tax to take the place of Alabama’s income tax.
- Mr. Byrne contradicted himself by first stating that he would not make any changes to the existing tax laws while also claiming that he somehow reduce taxes at the same time. He then insisted that he would not let the AEA have their way in this area either.
  - Dr. Bentley explained that the consumption tax is the most fair way for a state to obtain revenue because everyone has to pay it including illegal aliens and those who currently cheat their way out of taxes.
  - IncreasingLearning – Dr. Bentley’s answer is correct. Under a consumption tax, those who pay taxes would not be continually paying for the excesses of those who do not. Everyone would pay an amount proportionate to their expenditures. This would have the added advantages of encouraging saving as well as removing the great disparity which exists between the taxes on the wealthy and the taxes on the poor.
- X. **Faith** – The candidates were asked to explain what role their faith would play in their decision making process as the governor.
- Mr. Byrne explained that the AEA was responsible for the attacks on his faith. His tone then softened greatly as he spoke of how important his faith is to him and of how his faith will guide him and sustain him as the governor of Alabama.
  - Dr. Bentley’s tone never changed as he simply and resolutely stated that he would not use God in his campaign but that he would rather let God use him. He then praised the Lord for the success of his campaign claiming that it is only by God’s grace that he could have come to this point.
  - IncreasingLearning – Dr. Bentley’s answer was obviously more genuine than Mr. Byrne’s. When one’s faith is truly the central aspect of one’s life, he will tend to speak of that faith in familiar tones not in tones of contrived piety. It is also important to note that Mr. Byrne’s focus was completely on himself. He spoke of the value of *his* faith, *his* Bible and *his* prayers. Dr. Bentley, on the other hand, spoke of *God’s* grace, *God’s* mercy

and *God's* blessings. It is possible that no other question heightened the difference between these two men as much as this one.

- XI. **Coastal Insurance** – A question was then asked about the candidates' views on coastal insurance.
- a. Mr. Byrne explained that the problems surrounding coastal insurance were problems that affect every citizen of Alabama and that reform of the insurance market is necessary. He announced that he would work to create a multi-state insurance market that would ensure better practices.
  - b. Dr. Bentley also admitted to problems in the insurance industry and vowed to appoint an insurance commissioner and to increase transparency in the insurance market.
  - c. IncreasingLearning – Neither answer is correct. Mr. Byrnes solution would play directly into the hands of the democrats in Washington who plan to use the commerce clause of the Constitution to regulate and control all multi-state insurance markets. Dr. Bentley's plan to appoint an insurance commissioner would be subject to the same dangers as those found in Obama's appointment of a national health choices commissioner. The correct answer is to turn the insurance industry back over to the free market. This course would give the consumer the greatest control over the market since it will be their choices alone which determine the success of any individual insurance company.
- XII. **The Alabama Education Association** – For the final question of the evening, the two candidates were asked directly if they would allow the AEA to influence them in their role as governor.
- a. Mr. Byrne accused Dr. Bentley of being an AEA plant and stated that he himself would not be controlled by the AEA in any way.
  - b. Dr. Bentley explained that he would not allow any special interest to control him. He emphasized again that he would base his decisions as governor solely on his convictions.
  - c. IncreasingLearning – Once again, Dr. Bentley chose to take the correct position. Rather than follow Mr. Byrne's example of launching an attack against specific people and lawful organizations, Dr. Bentley kept his personal opinion to himself and displayed excellent public decorum in his answer.

### Final Tally

Out of the twelve questions, Dr. Bentley gave the better answer for seven of them; neither man gave a good answer for four of the questions; one question was not answered, and Mr. Byrne did not give a better answer for any of the questions.