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BOB DOPPELT: Debates fail to address root causes of problems

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Every time I switched on the TV to watch a presidential debate, my wife told me to turn the volume down. One candidate makes her angry, and the other leaves her discouraged. Neither nominee, she feels, paints an inspiring picture of the future. She has no interest in hearing more.

After listening to the debates, I have to agree.

The economy, health care, energy and foreign policy are important. Both candidates, however, habitually talk about different ways to address the symptoms of those problems, not their underlying causes. Most of their ideas are not likely to solve much of anything, and many will make things worse.

That's because our nation is addicted to a set of harmful beliefs and practices. You can't break addictions with quick fixes. The root causes must be addressed.

Take the economy. Both candidates say their No. 1 goal is to get it growing again. Although President Obama and Gov. Mitt Romney have somewhat different approaches, they both want to recharge the same type of economy that existed before the 2008 financial collapse. Is this what we really need?

Do we actually want to expand the power of the financial markets, institutions and elites to control the economy? Over the past decades the importance of the financial sector has been elevated way above that of the real economy. As a result income has been transferred from the real economy to the financial sector, inequality has reached extreme levels, and most people's wages have stagnated.

Although Obama talks about establishing better controls over Wall Street and increasing taxes on the rich, he makes no mention of the need to reverse the financialization of our economy. Romney seems to support the current system.

And what about jobs? Both candidates claim they want to create more. But neither talks about the type of jobs they want to create. Do we really want to grow all of the same type of jobs that existed before the economy buckled?

Do we want to increase jobs that produce cancer, birth defects and obesity? Do we want more jobs that expand people's capacity to kill each other? Do we want jobs that destroy a

person's resourcefulness, sense of purpose and meaning in life?

Most people would say no. But much of our economy has been based on processes and products that injure or demean people. Have we lost our ability to distinguish between good and bad?

Neither candidate mentions this. Their jobs plans focus only on quantity, not quality. More jobs that undermine the health, creativity, and integrity of people will circle back and reduce the total number of jobs. And, what about energy and the Earth's ecological systems that support all life? Although both candidates say they support renewable energy, they also proudly boast of their commitment to expand coal, oil and gas production. Do we really want to increase our use of fossil fuels and create more hazardous pollution and climate-damaging greenhouse gases?

An "all of the above" energy policy will hasten uncontrollable climate disruption, at great economic, environmental and social cost. Every year, here in Lane County and globally, more and more people will be killed and injured, property will be damaged, food supplies will diminish, and new diseases and illnesses will materialize.

This leads to the most chilling aspect of the debates — the complete silence on the issue of climate disruption. It is already affecting our economy, national security, and every other issue discussed during the debates, and we have only experienced the early effects. Climate disruption is the most serious issue facing our nation and all of humanity today.

Both candidates seem to hope that technical solutions can solve the climate crisis. But at its core this is a moral issue. We must decide who we are as a people, and what our duties and obligations are to others, here and abroad, now and in the future. By staying silent both contenders dodged this fundamental question. So my wife has it right. Both candidates' ideas are based on outdated assumptions and beliefs that will mostly make our problems worse.

It does not have to be this way. Both men could look at today's challenges as an opportunity to establish a new direction that creates a life-enhancing rather than a life-threatening economy. That would be something to get excited about.

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