

President Obama Comes Through In Second Debate

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HEMPSTEAD, NY - When President Barack Obama and former Governor Mitt Romney met Tuesday night in their second debate, it was almost as if the Obama Campaign had taken a page directly out of TV's "West Wing", as they implemented the strategy of "Let Obama be Obama" to perfection.

In this debate, the President was fully direct and quick on his feet. He challenged Mitt Romney's assertions from the beginning. He scored points and clearly left Romney reeling on the defensive.

The President started out hard, listing the many accomplishments and kept promises of his first four years in office. He was strong, steady and decisive and offered an affirmative vision to move this country forward and build the economy from the middle out, not the top down. When Romney tried to change the discussion to his view of the state of the economy, the President forced him to defend himself instead.

"Governor Romney doesn't have a five-point plan. He has a one-point plan, and that plan is to make sure folks at the top play by a different set of rules," Obama said. "That's been his philosophy in the private sector, that's been his philosophy as governor, that's been his philosophy as a presidential candidate."

Pacing back and forth on a stage at Long Island's Hofstra University in New York, Obama and Romney talked over each other at times and quarreled periodically over whose turn it was to speak and how much time they had coming.

"I want to make sure our timekeepers are working here," Obama said at one point.

At another, Romney condescendingly told the President, "You'll get your chance in a minute. I'm still speaking."

Both men played their part in a hard-hitting, contentious debate that touched on taxes, jobs, health care, equal pay, energy, immigration and other issues. Moderator Candy Crowley tried to manage the give-and-take. Over a roughly 90-minute debate, it appeared that President Obama wound up with about 4 more minutes of speaking time than Romney did.

This reporter watched the debate on CNN, which featured a running reaction graph from men and women as the debate proceeded. The dancing line appeared to jump higher and more often toward positive feelings when the President spoke.

Asked by a member of the audience how he would differ from President George W. Bush, Romney clearly dodged the question. He would only say, "President Bush and I are different people and these are different times."

Perhaps the two high points of the debate came in the discussions on foreign policy and the role of women in the economy.

In one sharp exchange, Romney criticized President Obama's handling of the aftermath of the assault on U.S. diplomats in Libya, chiding him for traveling to campaign fundraisers, suggesting his administration was too slow to explain what happened because it feared the election fallout.

Obama said Romney was trying to politicize the event.

"The suggestion that anybody on my team, the secretary of state, the U.N. ambassador, would play politics . . . when we lost four of our own, governor, is offensive. That's not what we do. That's not what I do as president," said Obama.

When Romney continued to try press a claim often stated from inside the conservative media bubble by insisting the President had not called the assault on U.S. diplomats in Libya an act of terrorism, Moderator Crowley had to interrupt Romney to tell him he was mistaken.

When asked about equal pay for equal work, the President talked about women as breadwinners for American families. Romney refused to answer the question. Instead he talked about women as resumes in "binders." He didn't seem to understand the challenges women face or believe in helping them fight for equal pay.

President Obama knew that when women make less than men for the same work, it threatens the economic security of entire families. That's why the first bill he signed was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which helps women fight for the equal pay they earned.

Romney's plan would turn women's health decisions over to their bosses and politicians in Washington. President Obama believed women and their doctors should make women's health decisions.

President Obama closed the debate by reminding voters of Romney's 47% comment.

"I believe Governor Romney is a good man. Loves his family, cares about his faith. But I also believe that when he said behind closed doors that 47% of the country considered themselves victims who refuse personal responsibility, think about who he was talking about," said Obama, referring to retirees, veterans, students and low-wage workers. "I want to fight for them. That's what I've been doing for the last four years."

The election is three weeks away. The third and final debate is Monday in Boca Raton, Fla.

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