Lively Biden Takes It To Ryan in Debate

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DANVILLE, KY - The “Thriller in Manila” it was not, but when Janesville Congressman Paul Ryan and Vice President Joe Biden met across the table in a lively, combative debate Thursday, the VP was not about to let Ryan get away with any of the **“malarkey”** the Republican had been spreading about his President.

Biden, 69, took after the Republicans with far more aggression than President Barack Obama had displayed in his Denver debate, questioning and challenging the other party's ideas and opinions. Ryan, 42, was far more methodical and less demonstrative than Biden. Ryan spent part of the debate on the attack, but mostly he was on the defensive.

It was the sort of debate in which both candidates likely gratified their own supporters and left the other side shouting "liar" at the TV screen. Biden presented a relentless populist critique of GOP policies, while Ryan tried to shift the debate to an indictment of the Obama administration on the economy and foreign policy. The outcome was probably in the eye of the beholder, with activists on both sides hearing what they wanted to hear.

But there is no doubt Biden succeeded in energizing the Democratic base, a factor that was missing after the Denver debate and will become critical in the final weeks of this close campaign. A snap CNN-ORC International poll showed voters who watched Thursday's debate saw it as basically a statistical draw, while a similar poll had given GOP presidential challenger Mitt Romney a clear debate victory in Denver.

The 90-minute debate moderated by Martha Raddatz of ABC News was divided between domestic and foreign policy issues. The moderator and candidates sat a few feet apart, a more intimate format that encouraged informality and interaction that often gave way to rapid-fire interruptions, especially on Biden's part.

On defense and security, Ryan talked in generalities, "We should always stand up for peace, for democracy and individual rights. And we should not be imposing these devastating defense cuts."

Biden responded: "With all due respect that's a bunch of malarkey. Not a single thing he said is accurate."

While Ryan characterized the Obama foreign policy as passive and "unraveling," Biden suggested the Republican ticket was too ready to go to war.

"The last thing America needs is to get into another ground war in the Middle East," Biden said.

Ryan seemed on the defensive over gaps in the details of the Romney tax plan and accusations it would help the wealthy at the expense of the middle class. At one point, Biden ridiculed him for attacking the stimulus plan while writing letters of support for constituents seeking stimulus funding.

Biden said Republicans would end Medicare as we know it. Ryan said they would save it from going bankrupt with market-based payout to the insurance companies.

At one point, Raddatz asked both Biden and Ryan how being Catholic would guide them in the job of Vice President. Ryan said his Catholic views would guide him on making abortion illegal for everyone, regardless of their religion, through the legislative process. Biden felt his religious views should guide him in his own life, but he did not feel his job in government gave him the right to impose them on others.

In the end, it came down to an issue of trust, with Vice President Biden looking straight into the camera and offering a career record standing up for people and middle class values as evidence of where he stands. He contrasted his record with the Republicans, who just seemed to discover 100 per cent of the people in the last few weeks of the campaign. Ryan’s closing was more prepared, a restatement of the points he had been making throughout the campaign.

Both men will be in Wisconsin in the days following the debate. Biden has a campaign event planned in La Crosse Friday, his first post-debate event. Ryan goes to Ohio Friday, but will headline a fundraiser for Senate candidate Tommy Thompson Sunday, and hold a town-hall meeting Monday morning at Carroll University in Waukesha.

The next presidential debate is Tuesday at Hofstra University in New York.

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