

AMERICANS REMAIN SPLIT ON ISSUES

by Carl P. Leubsdorf
and Wayne Slater
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Gore, Bush offer rival visions on domestic issues in first debate

BOSTON--Presidential rivals George W. Bush and Al Gore challenged each other's proposals and intentions on issues ranging from prescription drugs to abortion in an intense and wide-ranging presidential debate Tuesday night.

Mr. Bush accused the vice president of practicing "old-style Washington politics" and said his Democratic rival was advocating a "big, exploding federal government that wants to speak in your behalf."

"It's time for a fresh start," he said, declaring that Mr. Gore was making promises the Democratic administration had failed to achieve in the last eight years. "You've had your chance, vice president -- you've been there eight years, and nothing has been done," he said.

Mr. Gore, zeroing in on the Bush tax plan from the outset, charged that the Texas governor "would spend more money on tax cuts for the wealthiest 1 percent than all of the new spending he proposes for health care, prescription drugs and national defense all combined."

"Those are the wrong priorities," Mr. Gore declared.

The two challengers -- in nearly identical dark suits, white shirts and red ties -- stood at lecterns just a few feet apart on the carpeted stage.

The debate, the first of three sponsored by the presidential debate commission, came at a time when polls were indicating this to be the closest presidential race in 20 years. The two men displayed sharp differences on a variety of domestic and international issues.

The candidates repeatedly challenged each other's assertions about the potential effect of their plans for producing tax cuts, prescription-drug coverage and energy independence.

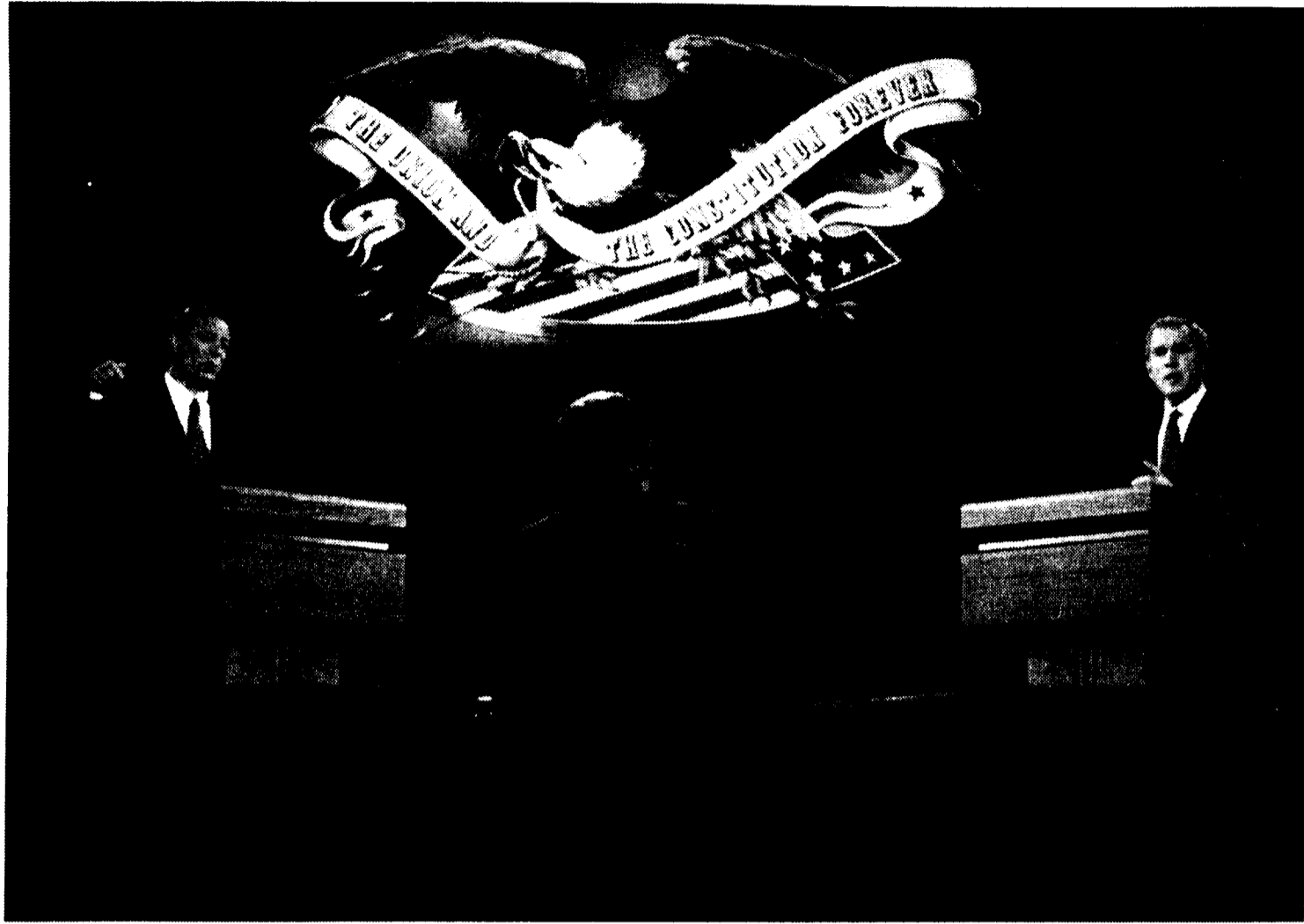
One of the sharpest exchanges came toward the end of the 90-minute encounter when the moderator, PBS' Jim Lehrer, asked Mr. Bush whether there were differences in character between him and the vice president.

"I don't know the man well, but I have been disappointed about how he and his administration has conducted the fund-raising affairs -- you know, going to a Buddhist temple and then claiming it wasn't a fund-raiser is just not my view of responsibility," he said.

Mr. Bush, quoting Mr. Gore's comment that there was "no controlling legal authority" covering his 1996 fund-raising role, said the vice president should have shown "a better responsibility for what was going on in the Oval Office."

Mr. Gore replied that, "I think we ought to attack our country's problems, not each other." Looking at Mr. Bush, he said, "You have attacked my character and my credibility, and I'm not going to respond in kind."

The issue then turned to campaign reform and, when Mr. Gore repeated his endorsement of a ban on "soft money" contributions, Mr.



Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush squared off Tuesday, October 3, 2000 during the first 2000 presidential debate at the University of Massachusetts/Boston.

PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Bush replied, "The man has no credibility on the issue."

On energy policy, Mr. Bush repeated that he favored incentives to increase domestic fuel production, including some drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge. Mr. Gore also called for domestic incentives but said he favored measures to curb fuel consumption and criticized Mr. Bush's plan to drill in Alaska.

"It's not the right thing," Mr. Gore said. "It is the right thing," Mr. Bush countered. After the debate, both sides claimed victory.

"Al Gore won the debate on issues," said Bob Shrum, a Gore strategist. "I do not believe that coming out of this debate that George Bush gave people a very powerful reason why they would want to elect him president."

"And in terms of being presidential and showing knowledge of the office, Al Gore won the debate again," Mr. Shrum added.

Stuart Stevens, a Bush strategist, said the Texas governor succeeded in presenting himself as a leader.

"If you were a voter watching this, you

came away much more comfortable with George Bush," he said. "Bush seemed on certain subjects, particularly like education, much more passionate. I don't think there was any subject that he didn't seem equally knowledgeable as Gore."

Thomas Mann of the nonpartisan Brookings Institution said the debate did not change the essential calculus of the race. "Both did well in presenting their pitch to a national audience," he said. "My view is that it will reinforce the current structure of the race."

Much of the evening was devoted to questions and disagreements about their various domestic-policy proposals. Mr. Gore often detailed the figures in both his and Mr. Bush's plans, often drawing allegations from Mr. Bush that he was using "fuzzy math."

"This is a man who has great numbers," Mr. Bush said at one point. "I'm beginning to think that not only did he invent the Internet, he invented the calculator."

On prescription drugs, Mr. Gore said his plan would provide coverage for all senior citizens under Medicare while Mr. Bush would require all but poor seniors to wait for

four or five years before they get coverage.

"I guess my answer to that is the man is running on Medicare," Mr. Bush replied. "I want all seniors to have prescription drugs in Medicare. This administration has failed to do it."

When Mr. Gore cited the example of a Milwaukee couple earning \$25,000 a year and said they would not receive coverage under Mr. Bush's plan, the Texas governor disagreed.

"All seniors are covered in the first year," Mr. Bush replied.

"Middle-class seniors are not covered," Mr. Gore shot back.

On abortion, Mr. Bush acknowledged that he was opposed to abortion rights but rejected the assertion by Mr. Gore that he would appoint Supreme Court justices who would overturn a woman's legal right to have an abortion.

"I have no litmus test on that issue or any other issue," he said. But he also said, "I will not use the bench to write social policy."

Mr. Bush said he would sign a law banning certain late-term abortions, while Mr. Gore said he would do so too, provided there

were exceptions protecting the life and health of the woman.

Mr. Bush said that, while he criticized the Food and Drug Administration's decision approving the RU-486 abortion pill, he couldn't overturn it. But Mr. Gore noted that the governor had said previously that, if elected, he would have the FDA commissioner review the decision.

Though the emphasis was heavily on domestic issues, the two contenders also clashed in responding to a question about how they would deal with the situation in Yugoslavia, where President Slobodan Milosevic has refused to concede defeat in last month's election and called for a runoff.

Mr. Bush suggested that the United States enlist Russia's help in forcing his ouster. "This would be an interesting time for the Russians to step up," he said. "The Russians have a lot of sway in that part of the world."

But Mr. Gore replied that, while that might be a good idea in some circumstances, "I'm not sure it's right for us to invite the president of Russia to mediate this dispute there" because Russia has endorsed the runoff. "We might not like the result," the vice president said.

The debate took place at the Clark Athletic Center at the University of Massachusetts-Boston campus, alongside the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. The site was chosen by the bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates to mark the 40th anniversary of the first televised debates between Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960.

The commission, which has run the debates since 1988, limited participation to Mr. Bush and Mr. Gore. The panel's guidelines require candidates to get at least 15 percent support in major polls to participate. That left out the other presidential hopefuls, most notably Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, whose support has been about 5 percent, and Reform Party nominee Pat Buchanan, about 1 percent.

The governor's wife, Laura, sat in the front row next to a number of Texans, including state Sen. Teel Bivins, R-Amarillo, Secretary of State Elton Bomer and former Dallas County Democratic Party Chairman Sandy Kress. The governor's siblings Doro Bush Koch and Marvin Bush also attended.

Tipper Gore was accompanied by family members and guests including the Rev. Jesse Jackson, former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and Massachusetts Sens. Edward Kennedy and John Kerry.

The two remaining presidential debates will take place Oct. 11 at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., and on Oct. 17 at Washington University in St. Louis. On Thursday, vice presidential nominees Dick Cheney and Joe Lieberman will meet at Centre College in Danville, Ky.

On Wednesday, the candidates planned to head to closely contested industrial states. Mr. Gore was traveling to Youngstown, Ohio, and Mr. Bush to the Philadelphia suburbs. Polls show Mr. Bush clinging to a small lead in Ohio, while Mr. Gore is leading in Pennsylvania.

WHO WON?

Behrend students debate the debate

by Liz Hayes
news editor

The first presidential debate of the 2000 campaign season took place Tuesday evening, October 3, between Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush. The University of Massachusetts at Boston hosted the debate, and Jim Lehrer was the moderator.

While the debate was greatly anticipated, many seemed to have been left with a sense of dissatisfaction over the final result. After months of arguing and compromise by both parties, many felt that all the bickering was for naught.

"What the debate showed is that if the format rules are too strict, it can stunt active discussion of an issue. Jim Lehrer was right to allow the debate to become more free-flowing instead of cutting people off when the clock buzzed," commented Dr. Robert Speel, associate professor of political science. "It is funny, however, that the candidates negotiated these strict rules, but then felt free to break those rules on debate night."

Dr. Colleen Kelley, assistant professor of speech communication, agreed: "The time constraints of the media limited the amount of discourse possible. I'd like to see a real Lincoln-Douglas debate, where the candidates interacted with each other."

Another comment on the quality of the moderator came from Ryan Peterson, COMBA 06. "I thought the moderator sucked -- he let Gore pretty much take control."

Aside from remarks on the format of the debate, comments varied on the overall quality of the candidates' performance. These opinions ranged from Gore won, Bush won, and no one won.

"I was disappointed with the whole thing. The shouting and sighing [from Gore] was really entertaining, though," stated Sarah Orr, COMBA 05. "Probably if I had to pick a winner, I would choose Al Gore because he got more of his points across."

Tyler Weideman, COMBA 09, was also less than impressed with Bush's performance: "I thought Bush looked stupid. His demeanor seemed too

folksy. Also, the comment 'fuzzy math' didn't work for me."

Not everyone saw Gore as the winner, however. Although he thought the debate was "pretty even" in the beginning, Peterson commented that the tides turned as the night progressed. "At first I thought Gore would win, but Bush picked up the pace in the middle."

Veronica O'Brien, MIS 07, was critical of Gore's performance. "Gore should have given Bush ample time to speak instead of interrupting him all the time." However, she also had issues with Bush's presentation: "Bush kept acting like Texas was its own little nation to itself, separate from the rest of us."

The consensus of students interviewed seems to be fairly evenly split, though a few more students seem to feel that Gore came out looking better than Bush. Almost everyone polled did have one negative thing to say about Gore's performance, however. As Nate Crawley, MIS 09, put it, "One of Gore's advisors should have told him not to sigh into the microphone."

Lieberman, Cheney likely to point to top names on ticket in debate

by David Jackson
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While presidential contenders George W. Bush and Al Gore rest up, their running mates will climb into the ring Thursday in Kentucky. But the debate between Republican Dick Cheney and Democrat Joe Lieberman will be more like shadowboxing, with many of the punches aimed at the other guy's presidential patron, analysts said. "Traditionally, they're going after the top of the ticket rather than each other," said Alan Schroeder, a journalism professor at Northeastern University and author of "Presidential Debates: Forty Years of High-Risk TV."

Aides said that Lieberman plans to "continue the conversation" Gore began during Tuesday's presidential debate, touting the economic record of the Clinton-Gore administration. During a visit Wednesday to a fire station in Richmond, Ky., the Connecticut senator said Bush's proposed tax cut would wipe out the budget surplus. "On the other hand, we've got a fiscally responsible program that pays down the debt, that gives the middle class tax cuts and invests in the things that people tell us they want help on, such as education, health care, (and) retirement security," Lieberman said.

Cheney, like Bush, argues that the surplus belongs to taxpayers and that they deserve a partial refund. After a practice session on Capitol Hill in

Washington, the former defense secretary reiterated that "we're trying to cut taxes for everybody who pays taxes." But in a potential preview of his debate strategy, he returned several times to what he called Gore's factual lapses in the debate, questioning whether he would "deal straight with the American people" if elected.

Lieberman and Cheney will meet at Centre College, a 1,054-student campus about 50 minutes south of Lexington. They will be seated at a table with a moderator, CNN news anchor Bernard Shaw. In addition to promoting Bush and Gore, the vice presidential candidates have what analysts call one other major task: Don't make yourself a political issue. "You want to avoid something that drags some brouhaha into the presidential race," said Stuart Rothenberg, publisher of a Washington-based political newsletter.

Democrats have attacked Cheney for his ties to the oil industry, including his recent stint as head of Dallas-based Halliburton Co., the world's largest energy services company. His congressional voting record during the 1980s has also come under fire, including opposition to the Head Start program, which Bush wants to expand. Republicans accuse Lieberman of flip-flopping on certain issues to appear more compatible with the more liberal Gore. They cite his past support for school vouchers and changes to the Social Security system, ideas now under attack by the

Gore-Lieberman ticket. As they prepare for their meeting -- which Cheney joked will provide more exposure than either could expect in office -- the potential veeps have taken vastly different approaches.

Lieberman, the first Jewish member of a national party ticket, has spent the week in Kentucky. Since arriving Sunday night, he has studied and participated in mock debates in a white-columned Georgian house owned by the alumni association of Eastern Kentucky University. While milling with Eastern Kentucky students, Lieberman approached the bronze statue of a musket-bearing Daniel Boone, then followed a college tradition by rubbing the famed frontiersman's left toe. "Students rub it to get A's on their finals," Lieberman said. "I hope I get an A on my test Thursday night."

Cheney flies to Kentucky on Thursday morning, though he spent about an hour in the state Tuesday night on his way to and from a presidential debate-watching party in suburban Cincinnati, whose airport is across the state line. Introducing her husband there, Lynne Cheney rejected Lieberman's boxing metaphor in favor of a Western-style shootout with Bush and Cheney as the heroes. "We got two good men that it's riding in out of the West and they're going to kick the bad guys out of town," she said to the cheers of some 200 supporters.