

Final Debate: Challenging Each Other Face To Face

BY DAVID ESPO AND KASIE HUNT
Associated Press

BOCA RATON, Fla. — President Barack Obama sharply challenged Mitt Romney on foreign policy in their final campaign debate Monday night, saying, “Every time you’ve offered an opinion you’ve been wrong.” The Republican coolly responded, “Attacking me is not an agenda” for dealing with a dangerous world.

Romney took the offensive, too. When Obama said the U.S. and its allies have imposed crippling sanctions on Iran to halt nuclear weapons development, the Republican challenger declared the U.S. should have done more. He declared repeatedly, “We’re four years closer to a nuclear Iran.”

The president and his rival found agreement, as well, as they sat at close quarters 16 days before the end of an impossibly close election campaign. Each stressed unequivocal support for Israel when asked how he would respond if the Jewish state were attacked by Iran.

“If Israel is attacked, we have their back,” said Romney — moments after Obama vowed, “I will stand with Israel if Israel is attacked.”

Both also said they oppose direct U.S. military involvement in the brutal attempt to topple Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The event produced none of the finger-pointing and little of the interrupting that marked their debate last week, when Obama needed a comeback after a listless performance in their first meeting on Oct. 3.

But there was no mistaking the urgency. The two men frequently sniped at one another even on issues where they agree, and reprised their campaign-long disagreements over the economy, energy, education and other domestic issues despite ground rules that stipulated the debate cover international affairs.

Obama and Romney are locked in a close race in national opinion polls. The final debate behind them, both men intend to embark on a final two-week whirlwind of campaigning. The president is slated to speak in six states during a two-day trip that begins Wednesday and includes a night aboard Air force One as it flies from Las Vegas to Tampa. Romney intends to visit two or three states a day.

Already four million ballots have been cast in early voting in more than two dozen states.

On the Middle East, Romney said that despite early hopes, the ouster of despotic regimes in Egypt, Libya and elsewhere over the past year has resulted in a “rising tide of chaos.” He said the president has failed to come up with a coherent policy to grapple with change sweeping the Middle East, and he added ominously that an al-Qaida-like group has taken over northern Mali.

Anticipating one of Obama’s most frequent campaign assertions, Romney said of the man seated nearby, “I congratulate him on taking out Osama bin Laden and taking on the leadership of al-Qaida. But we can’t kill our way out of this. ... We must have a comprehensive strategy.”

Obama said he had ended the war in Iraq, was on a path to end the U.S. combat role in Afghanistan and has vowed to bring justice to the attackers of the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi last month — an assault that killed the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans.

He also jabbed at Romney’s having said during the campaign that Russia is the United States’ No. 1 geopolitical foe.

“Governor, when it comes to our foreign policy you seem to want the policies of the 1980s, just like you want to import the social policies of the 1950s and the economic policies in the 1920s,” Obama said.

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Barring a last-minute change in strategy by one campaign or the other, Obama appears on course to win states and the District of Columbia that account for 237 of the 270 electoral votes needed for victory. The same is true for Romney in states with 191 electoral votes.

The battlegrounds account for the remaining 110 electoral votes: Florida (29), North Carolina (15), Virginia (13), New Hampshire (4), Iowa (6), Colorado (9), Nevada (6), Ohio (18) and Wisconsin (10).

The televised debate brought no cessation to other campaigning.

Obama’s campaign launched a television ad in Florida that said the president ended the war in Iraq and has a plan to do the same in Afghanistan, accusing Romney of opposing him on both. It was not clear how often the ad would air, given the fall’s overall focus on the economy.

Vice President Joe Biden, campaigning in Canton, Ohio, emphasized differences between the two candidates on the war in Afghanistan.

“We will leave Afghanistan in 2014, period. They say it depends,” he said. “Ladies and gentlemen, like everything with them, it depends. It depends on what day you find these guys.”

Romney’s running mate, Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan, was in Colorado. “We are in the midst of deciding the kind of country we’re going to be, the kind of people we’re going to be, for a generation,” he said.

Whatever the outcome of the final face-to-face confrontation, the

debates have left an imprint on the race. Romney was widely judged the winner of the first debate over a listless president on Oct. 3, and he has risen in polls in the days since. Obama was much more energetic in the second.

Monday night marked the third time in less than a week that the president and his challenger shared a stage, following the feisty 90-minute town-hall-style meeting last Tuesday on Long Island and a white-tie charity dinner two night later where gracious compliments flowed and barbs dipped in humor flew.

At the Al Smith charity dinner, Obama previewed his all-purpose fallback to criticism on international affairs.

“Spoiler alert: We got bin Laden,” he said, a reminder of the signature foreign policy triumph of his term, the death at the hand of U.S. special operations forces of the mastermind behind the terror attacks on the United States more than a decade ago.

The president and his challenger agreed long ago to devote one of their three debates to foreign policy, even though opinion polls show voters care most about economic concerns.

Growth has been slow and unemployment high across Obama’s tenure in the White House. Romney, a wealthy former businessman, cites his experience as evidence he will put in place policies that can revive the economy.

In recent weeks, the former Massachusetts governor has stepped up his criticism of the president’s handling of international matters, although his campaign hasn’t spent any of its television advertising budget on commercials on the subject.

Wife Told Court Husband Terrorized Her

MILWAUKEE (AP) — A Wisconsin man terrorized his wife for years, threatening to throw acid on her face, dousing her car with tomato juice and slashing her vehicle’s tires before finally going to the spa where she worked, opening fire and killing her and two others.

The shooting spree stunned the middle- to upper-class Milwaukee suburb where it happened, but court records show the conflict between Radcliffe Houghton and his wife had been escalating for years.

The 45-year-old former car salesman ultimately shot seven women at the spa before turning the gun on himself. Three remained hospitalized Monday.

Houghton, of Brown Deer, was charged with disorderly conduct last year after police officers responding to a 911 call saw Houghton point what appeared to be a gun at his wife, Zina, from a window at their home. Officers took cover, and a 90-minute standoff ensued.

Brown Deer police said Monday the standoff ended peacefully, and they were never able to confirm a gun was involved because Zina Houghton wouldn’t allow them into the couple’s home. The charge against Radcliffe Houghton was dropped when a police officer failed to appear in court.

France To Send Drones To West Africa

PARIS (AP) — France will move surveillance drones to West Africa and is holding secretive talks with U.S. officials in Paris this week as it seeks to steer international military action to help Mali’s feeble government win back the northern part of the country from al-Qaida-linked rebels, The Associated Press has learned.

France and the United Nations insist any invasion of Mali’s north must be led by African troops. But France, which has six hostages in Mali and has citizens who have joined al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, is playing an increasing role behind the scenes.

Many in the West fear that northeast Mali and the arid Sahel region could become the new Afghanistan, a no-man’s-land where extremists can train, impose hardline Islamic law and plot terror attacks abroad. And France, former colonial ruler to countries across the Sahel, is a prime target.

“This is actually a major threat — to French interests in the region, and to France itself,” said Francois Heisbourg, an expert at the Foundation for Strategic Research, a partially state-funded think tank in Paris. “This is like Afghanistan 1996. This is like when Bin Laden found a place that was larger than France in which he could organize training camps, in which he could provide stable preparations for organizing far-flung terror attacks.”

France is turning its attention to the Sahel just as it is accelerating its pullout of combat troops from Afghanistan ahead of other NATO allies.

City

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He pointed to snow removal satisfaction only increasing one point to a 70 in 2012, despite the fact that there were few times plows had to be deployed last winter.

“I’m not sure where someone would have cause to complain last year, because there was no snow,” he said. “Make sure that we try and get the information we really need out of people.”

Viereck said he was happy to see scores related to drinking water up this year despite the challenges staff faced this past summer. It will be a challenge to maintain that satisfaction in future years as rates go up to address capital needs, he stated.

“I think it’s important that we try to communicate to citizens more that it’s not city staff or engineers that are driving this capital improvement,” Viereck said. “It’s to make sure you have reliable and safe drinking water. That’s why we’re exploring these options. The rates are not pleasant or fun, but it is what you have to have to pay for these improvements.”

In other business Monday, the commission:

- heard a presentation from Library Director Kathy Jacobs about space needs at her facility;

- approved costs related to fountains in the ponds located at West Side Park and along Fox Run Parkway should Keep Yankton Beautiful raise \$5,000 for each project;

- agreed to change the boundaries of the Business Improvement District to apply only to hotels that have 25 or more rooms. Those with fewer rooms will be able to voluntarily join the district. The board for the district is still debating whether to implement a fee for overnight stays that could go toward a use of its choosing;

- was told that September sales tax numbers were 11.6 percent higher than September 2011. The accumulated total for the year so far is 10.46 percent, the highest among first-class cities in the state; and

- heard a presentation about the impact of pancreatic cancer after declaring November Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month.

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