The Conservative Debate

by Phyllis Schlafly Oct. 20, 2004

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The presidential candidate praised abstinence at a key moment in the debate in St. Louis, and he admitted that the Kyoto global warming treaty was "flawed." He looked right into the camera and said, "Absolutely. I am not going to raise taxes."

Was this George W. Bush appealing to his base, or reprising his father's famous "read my lips" pledge? No, that was John Kerry trying to win the support of undecided voters at the second presidential debate.

The debate staged at Washington University in St. Louis was filled with conservative questions and answers that must have stunned the media. This unique dialogue between candidates and undecided voters from Middle America was a revelation to viewers accustomed to seeing only liberals control the Q and A on television.

A young attendee asked Kerry, "Suppose you're speaking with a voter who believed abortion is murder, and the voter asked for reassurance that his or her tax dollars would not go to support abortion, what would you say to that person?"

Kerry's answer was to paint himself as a lifelong Catholic, a former altar boy, and as someone who "can talk reasonably about life." But, as George W. Bush pointed out, Kerry's Senate record shows him consistently pro-abortion, even voting against the federal ban on partial-birth abortion.

Kerry was asked, "You've stated your concern for the rising cost of health care. Yet you chose the vice presidential candidate who has made millions of dollars successfully suing medical professionals." Kerry passed up this golden opportunity to defend his running mate's career and instead fell back on his mantra "I have a plan."

Bush stepped up to the plate and said that Kerry's plan "would lead to rationing [and] ruin the quality of health care in America." Bush explained to the American people that the Democrats' plan for universal health care is, in fact, government-controlled health care.

Referring again to John Edwards' career of suing doctors, another questioner asked Kerry if he would favor "capping awards on pain and suffering? Would you limit attorney's fees?" Kerry's non-answer discussed after-school programs and federal deficits.

Kerry is not fooling anyone, but it is comical to watch him trying to portray himself as a born-again middle-of-the-roader. Meanwhile, Bush was confronted with questions as to why he is not more conservative.

"You've not vetoed a single spending bill," one questioner complained. Less government is what the American people want, yet that important question had hitherto gone unasked by the media.

"Non-homeland, non-defense, discretionary spending was [increasing] at 15 percent a year when I got into office. And today it's less than one percent," Bush responded.

Bush more than held his own at the second debate. His healthy cynicism toward treaties was refreshing, something we haven't heard in years. "In order to be popular in the halls of Europe, you sign a treaty," he quipped.

Bush made it clear that his mission doesn't include trying to be popular in Europe, where many oppose our ideals. In response to a question about European hostility toward us, he said, "I recognize we've made some decisions that have caused people to not understand the great values of our country."

Bush scored points by reminding us that he "made a decision not to join the International Criminal Court in the Hague, which is where our troops could be brought in front of a judge, an unaccountable judge. I don't think we ought to join that." Kerry made no response.

Bush delivered the right goods again when, asked whom he would appoint to the Supreme Court, he said he "wouldn't pick a judge who said that the Pledge of Allegiance couldn't be said in a school because it had the words `under God' in it." Kerry didn't dare say otherwise, instead rambling on about how he would like it to be impossible to detect the religion of a judge from his opinions.

The 2004 election presents a stark choice to voters on many issues. The second debate highlighted those differences on taxes, sovereignty, values, and the courts, and confirmed the assumption of Kerry's first questioner that he is "wishy-washy."

However, remembering that ABC's Charles Gibson told us that he alone, and in secret, selected the handful of questions that were permitted to be asked in the televised debate from the two questions submitted by 140 attendees (i.e., 280 questions), one can't help but wonder why no questions were included on marriage or guns. Those two issues offer the most black-and-white differences between the candidates and are particularly hot in the Show Me state where the debate was held.

On national television, Kerry is running away from the liberal label and denouncing "labels." But Bush accurately retorted, Kerry's debate comments are "just not credible"; he can run but he can't hide from his record.