



Rubio and Cruz Put Trump on Defense in Sometimes Raucous Debate

In the 10th Republican presidential candidates' debate in Houston on February 25, the leading contenders, Senators Marco Rubio (left) of Florida and Ted Cruz (right) of Texas, went on the offensive against the frontrunner, real estate magnate Donald Trump (center). At times, two-way exchanges between the contenders and Trump became three-way exchanges among Rubio, Trump, and Cruz, with all three candidates sometimes talking at the same time to the extent that moderator Wolf Blitzer tried in vain to restore some semblance of order.



At the beginning of the evening, Blitzer had stated: “We know you all want to jump [in] and debate these critically important issues, but please wait until you’re called on. These are the rules all of the candidates have agreed to.” During several heated exchanges, Blitzer reminded the candidates of these guidelines, the first being during a discussion about the candidates’ positions on healthcare and what they would do to end ObamaCare.

The transition from a one-speaker-at-a-time debate to one that bypassed the moderator began when Cruz told Trump directly that he had once said the government should pay for everyone’s healthcare. After a back-and-forth exchange during which Trump repeatedly said he would not let people “die on the streets” — trying to evade Cruz’s questions about whether he believes that the government should pay for everyone’s healthcare — Rubio jumped into the one-on-one debate.

This was too much for Blitzer, who had bent the rules to accommodate Trump and Cruz’s interchange, and he attempted to end the free-for-all and enforce the rules:

BLITZER: Gentleman, please.

RUBIO: Wolf, no. I want to clarify something.

BLITZER: Gentlemen please. I want to move on.

RUBIO: This is a Republican debate, right? Because that attack about letting people die in the streets...

BLITZER: I want to talk about the economy.

(CROSSTALK)

BLITZER: Gentleman, gentleman. All of you have agreed — Senator Cruz...

TRUMP: You know what? Call it what you want.

CRUZ: It’s a yes or no.



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on February 26, 2016

TRUMP: Call it what you want, people are not going to be dying on the sidewalk.

BLITZER: All of you have agreed — all of you have agreed to the rules. I want to move on. We're talking about the economy right now.

While that segment may appear to be inconsequential, we repeat it here because it provides an example of the overall tone of the debate and how freely the participants chose to depart from the prescribed protocol. Since this writer clearly remembers the 1960 presidential debates between former Vice President Richard Nixon and Senator John F. Kennedy, we could not help noticing the comparative difference in demeanor between 1960 candidates and this year's candidates.

Back in 1960, the question asked of the candidates that most sticks in our mind was whether each candidate would use U.S. military force to aid Taiwan in defending the Taiwanese islands of Quemoy and Matsu in the event of an attack by the Communist Chinese. (The candidates' positions differed only slightly.)

Unlike last night's debate, Nixon and Kennedy spoke only when called on by the moderator and neither interrupted the other. It was definitely a different era — an era of greater formality and closer adherence to proper protocol than in today's society.

The most serious "violation" of the debate rules in 1960 occurred when, just before the debate started, Kennedy took some out some papers and read them over. Nixon was shocked that Kenedy would bring notes to the debate, which was in violation of the agreed-upon rules. Following the debate, the Republican leadership criticized Kennedy for using his notes. JFK said that he used a photocopy of a page from a book by General Matthew Ridgeway and had written brief quotes from President Eisenhower and from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in case he needed to quote their exact language. In a message to the press, Nixon said that he was disappointed with Kennedy and that they needed to read through their debate agreements again before the fourth debate took place the following week.

Despite this "infraction" of the rules, the Kennedy-Nixon debates were generally as calm and orderly as a church lecture. In contrast, the presidential debates this year have often disintegrated into verbal free-for-alls that — in a high school debate — would probably result in several of the debaters being sent to the principal's office! (Or so it seems to this 67-year-old writer.)

This debate saw an escalation in the candidates' personal attacks on each other. This was sometimes encouraged by questions from the moderators, as when María Celeste Arrarás of Telemundo said to Rubio that he had accused Cruz in a previous debate of lying when he said that you said one thing in Spanish and another one in English and asked: "So in what sense did he lie?"

Rubio's answer was a bit roundabout. He stated:

Because it is not true that I'm not going to get rid of DACA. I am going to get rid of DACA. In the Spanish interview, you just read out the transcript in Spanish, I said, it will have to end at some point. That point will be when I eliminate the executive order and the people who have those permits when they expire will not be allowed to renew it. And new people will not be able to apply. In fact, I don't even think we should be taking new enrollees in the program now.

Trump and Rubio were then quick to enter the exchange:

TRUMP: I have to say, he lied this time. He lied. 100 percent. 100 percent.

RUBIO: You lied about the Polish workers.



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TRUMP: Yes, yes, yes. 38 years ago.

RUBIO: You lied to the students at Trump University.

ARRASAS: Let Senator Cruz jump in.

RUBIO: Oh, he lied 38 years ago. All right, I guess there's a statute of limitation on lies.

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE) CRUZ: Well, Maria, I would note you made the exact same point here that I made at the last debate, and you're right that Senator Rubio called me a liar for saying that.

This was not the only instance where candidates engaged in blatant name-calling to an extent that would have been considered beneath a presidential candidate in a more genteel age.

Examples include Trump telling Rubio: "You haven't hired one person, you liar" and Trump saying of Cruz: "What I've seen up here — I mean, first of all, this guy is a choke artist, and this guy is a liar."

Carson was left out of the debate for so long that at one point, he pleaded, half in jest: "Can somebody attack me, please?"

The remark prompted laughter from the audience.

The debate did have its serious moments, however. When moderator Hugh Hewlitt asked Cruz if he would trust Trump to nominate conservative justices to the Supreme Court to replace the late Justice Scalia or to other vacancies that might occur, Cruz, without really answering the question, responded by detailing his own qualifications to fill that role:

Well, Hugh, I agree with you that it — Justice Scalia's passing underscores the enormous gravity of this election. Justice Scalia was someone I knew personally for 20 years; was privileged to be at his funeral this weekend. And with his passing, the court is now hanging in the balance. We are one liberal justice away from a five-justice radical leftist majority that would undermine our religious liberty; that would undermine the right to life; and that would fundamentally erase the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms from the Constitution....

I've spent my whole life fighting to defend the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. I can tell you, for voters that care about life or marriage or religious liberty or the Second Amendment, they're asking the question: Who do you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, who do you know will nominate principled constitutionalists to the court? I give you my word, every justice I nominate will vigorously defend the Bill of Rights for my children and for yours.

When Hewlitt asked Trump if he would commit to voters that the defense of religious liberty would be an absolute litmus test for anyone he would appoint, not just to the Supreme Court, but to all courts, Trump used the question as an opportunity to question Cruz's support for the confirmation of Chief Justice John Roberts, who disappointed many conservatives by upholding the constitutionality of ObamaCare.

Trump linked Cruz's support of Roberts with Roberts' vote on ObamaCare, saying: "Ted very, very strongly pushed Judge Roberts, and Justice Roberts gave us something that we don't want."

Cruz defended his decision by saying that though he had supported Roberts once he had been nominated, he would not have nominated Roberts. "I would have nominated my former boss, Mike Luttig, who was the strongest proven conservative on the court of appeals," continued Cruz.



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Finally getting back to the original question, Cruz cast doubt on the kind of Supreme Court nominees Trump would appoint, saying:

You know, it's interesting now that Donald promises that he will appoint justices who — who will defend religious liberty, but this is a man who, for 40 years, has given money to Jimmy Carter, to Joe Biden, to Hillary Clinton, to Chuck Schumer, to Harry Reid.

Nobody who supports far-left liberal Democrats who are fighting for judicial activists can possibly care about having principled constitutionalists on the court.

We were impressed by Cruz's use of the term "consitutionalist," which is a more accurate label for a defender of the Consitution than the often-misused "conservative."

This 10th Republican presidential debate of the season showcased the three frontrunners Trump, Rubio, and Cruz, while Kasich and Carson, two candidates who might be described as "mild mannered," were largely relegated to the sidelines.

It will be interesting to see if Rubio and Cruz's aggressive verbal showing against Trump during this debate will translate into improved gains against the leading candidate when the voters go to the polls on Super Tuesday, March 1, the day nine states will hold primaries and another four will conduct caucuses.

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