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Gore, Bradley begin debates

Candidates spar over budget surplus, presidential role

DEBATE from page 1

Bradley, who again did not answer.

Instead, Bradley explained his opposition to ethanol subsidies during his time in the U.S. Senate. Although Bradley now supports the subsidies, he said he opposed them in the Senate because they were not in New Jersey's interests.

In contrast to Gore's tough question, Bradley did not attack his opponent's record when given an opportunity to ask him a question. Bradley asked Gore why the public had lost faith in government.

In his toughest shot at Gore and the Clinton administration, Bradley borrowed rhetoric from former President Ronald Reagan: "I would simply ask the family farmers of Iowa today, 'Are you better off than you were seven years ago?'"

Bradley said farm policy reforms should include income supplements for family farmers, antitrust action against large corporate producers that hurt family farms and use of the World Trade Organization to open overseas markets for farmers.

As an example of the last suggestion, he cited the WTO's ruling against European countries that were attempting to block imports of hormone-treated beef from the United States.

"We need to help family farmers move up that chain and get a bigger chunk of the food dollar," he said.

Gore denounced the Freedom to Farm Act, which he called "freedom to fail."

He also called for trade disputes over genetically modified food products to be settled by sound science, not emotion.

"If it's safe, and if it enhances productivity at no risk, then we ought to be able to use them," he said.

When the debate turned to health care, the candidates disagreed sharply about their health plans.

Bradley said his plan would make prescription drugs much more affordable. Gore disagreed, saying Bradley's plan to replace Medicaid with a new system would leave poor citizens less able to afford health care payments.

Citing recent reports predicting budget surpluses of about \$800 billion in the next decade, Bradley said the United States could afford bold health care proposals.

"Al has a view that if we provide universal health coverage for everybody, we can't protect Medicare," he said. "If we protect Medicare, we can't provide universal health coverage. Now I don't agree with that. I think we can do both."

But Gore said Bradley's plan was "fiscally irresponsible" and would spend the entire surplus without preserving Medicare.

"The problem with Bill's approach of saying we can wait until Medicare is bankrupt to save it," he said, "is that it kind of reminds me of the guy who fell out of a 10-story building, and as he passed the fifth floor he shouted, 'So far, so good.'"

Bradley and Gore showed broad agreement on a number of issues, including campaign finance reform, gun control, education policy and foreign policy.

Both candidates called for campaign finance reform and full public financing of campaigns to dilute the influence of special interests.

Gore renewed his call for him and Bradley to stop airing television ads and instead hold twice-weekly debates, including one on agriculture policy in Iowa, offers Bradley again declined.

Bradley, meanwhile, accused Gore and the administration of failing to provide leadership to enact campaign finance reform.

Both candidates said they supported gun control, with Bradley suggesting handgun licensing and Gore supporting an assault weapons ban and photo identifications for gun owners. They also called for more parental attention to children and less media violence.

On foreign policy, both candidates support Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which the Senate rejected last fall.

"I think the presidency has to be a day-to-day, resolute fight for the American people."

Al Gore

Democratic candidate

They also voiced support for continuing arms control agreements to prevent a renewed arms race.

Asked when the United States should intervene in peacekeeping efforts, Bradley said the United States could not be the world's policeman and should make use of multilateral efforts, including United Nations missions.

Gore said the United States must have a national interest at stake and be convinced military action is the only solution to a given problem.

Bradley concluded by calling for the next president to show the type of leadership exercised by Franklin D. Roosevelt to enact the New Deal and Lyndon Johnson to promote the civil rights movement and create the Great Society.

"I will not rest until rural America and urban America move ahead," Bradley said. "I will not rest until we leave no one behind. Only if we leave no one behind can we bring everyone together."

Gore called Bradley a "good man" and said he was honored to be in a race for the nomination with him. But he sought to contrast his approach with Bradley's.

"I don't think the presidency is an academic exercise or a seminar on theories," he said. "I think the presidency has to be a day-to-day, resolute fight for the American people."

Also attending the debate were two U.S. senators from the Midwest who were supporting different candidates.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, said he was supporting Gore because of his support for farmers.

"Time and time again, on issues important to rural America, Al Gore has been there fighting for us, and Bill Bradley hasn't," he said.

Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., said Bradley's vision and willingness to take on big issues, such as universal health care coverage, had earned him support.

"Where have you been, Vice President Gore?" Wellstone said. "Why haven't you been fighting for campaign finance reform?"

The Des Moines Register sponsored Saturday's debate. Editor Dennis Ryerson served as moderator.

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