

VP debate: Kaine and Pence fight for their running mates

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Democratic vice presidential nominee Senator Tim Kaine (left) and Republican vice presidential nominee Governor Mike Pence (right) stand before the audience during the vice presidential debate at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia, October 4, 2016. Photo: AP Photo/Steve Helber

FARMVILLE, Va. — Virginia Senator Tim Kaine aggressively challenged Republican Donald Trump's qualifications for the presidency Tuesday night. Kaine, who is running with Democrat Hillary Clinton, cast the Republican presidential nominee as a "me-first" mogul who refuses to share his business record with American voters. Indiana Governor Mike Pence, Trump's running mate, lashed back. He criticized Clinton. He didn't dispute, however, that running mate Trump had not paid federal taxes for years.

With Kaine On Attack, Pence Stays Calm

The two men have received little attention in a race focused on the top two candidates. The debate last night was the only vice presidential debate of the campaign.

On taxes and Trump, Pence declared that Trump "used the tax code just the way it's supposed to be used, and he did it brilliantly."

Kaine, Clinton's usually easygoing running mate, went on the attack from the start. He repeatedly interrupted Pence, an equally genial politician. Pence countered Kaine with mostly measured responses.

Kaine pressured Pence to answer for some of his running mate's often controversial statements. He asked about Trump's demeaning comments about women. He also challenged Pence on Trump's decision to break with decades of campaign tradition by not releasing his tax records.

"Donald Trump must give the American public his tax returns to show he's prepared to be president, and he's breaking his promise," Kaine said.

VP Picks Defend Their Running Mates

Seeking to draw a contrast with Clinton and Kaine, Pence said Trump was "a businessman, not a career politician." He criticized the Democrats for offering frustrated Americans "more of the same." He also leapt on former President Bill Clinton's criticism this week of Obamacare, saying Trump would repeal the measure. However, Pence did not specify what he would replace it with.

Kaine, too, defended his running mate, especially the public's questions about her honesty and trustworthiness. He said that while Trump was "selfish," Clinton had devoted her career to helping children and families.

Chance To Convince Undecided Voters

Kaine and Pence are far less familiar to most Americans than their running mates, who are among the most well-known figures in the country. Both vice presidential candidates have spent years in politics and are well-liked by colleagues. They are also both deeply religious.

Their performances were unlikely to dramatically change the way voters view Clinton and Trump. Still, the debate on national television was a chance for them to introduce themselves to Americans, create excitement with loyal Democrats and Republicans, and possibly change the minds of undecided voters.

Tuesday's debate comes as a close White House race appears to be tipping in Clinton's favor. She gained popularity following her strong showing in the first presidential debate. After an uneven debate performance, Trump spent much of the week defending comments he had made 20 years earlier about a beauty queen's weight.

Trump has five weeks until Election Day to regain his footing but early voting is already underway in some states.

After First Presidential Debate, Clinton Pulls Ahead

Trump said he would be live-tweeting the debate. During a rally in Arizona, he said the contest would be "a contrast between our campaign of big ideas and bold solutions for tomorrow versus the small and petty Clinton campaign that is totally stuck in the past."

Clinton, campaigning in Pennsylvania, said she'd been keeping in touch with Kaine over email about his debate preparations.

"I think America is going to be very impressed and really feel positive about Tim Kaine as our next vice president," she said.

Clinton was widely viewed as the winner of her opening debate with Trump. She rattled the real estate businessman with jabs about his business record and his demeaning statements about women. She responded to his attacks with calm rejoinders. New public opinion polls have showed her improving her standing in nearly all swing states.

At least some of Clinton's success is likely attributable to Trump's conduct coming out of the debate. He stood behind his former criticism of a beauty queen and her weight, one of the topics Clinton raised in the debate, and then went on Twitter to insult her even more.

Then, the New York Times did an investigation which showed that Trump suffered more than \$900 million in losses in 1995. The losses, the Times said, could have allowed him to avoid paying federal income taxes for as many as 18 years.

Why Pence And Kaine?

Pence was picked as Trump's running mate in part because he has the conservative credentials that businessman Trump lacks. Conservative leaders in Washington cheered when Pence was added to the ticket. Trump's supporters are hoping his debate performance will be similarly appealing for Republican voters who may still be unsure about Trump's views.

Kaine, who served as Virginia's governor before becoming senator, is largely in step with Clinton on key issues. While he voted to give President Barack Obama fast-track authority for the Trans Pacific Partnership, he's since joined Clinton in opposing the final version of the trade pact.