



Left and Far-left: the Biden-Sanders Debate

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In advance of Tuesday's Democratic presidential primaries in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, and Ohio, with 577 delegates up for grabs, Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders began the CNN-sponsored debate bumping elbows instead of shaking hands, due to fears of the spreading coronavirus. The two men then proceeded to stake out positions that could be best described as "left" and "far-left" in front of a room with no live audience.



While Biden is casting himself as somewhat of a moderate compared to the self-described democratic socialist Sanders, the truth is that both men are taking positions that would make either of them the most openly left-wing candidates to ever run for president of the United States on a major party ticket.

Biden was able to accomplish two things in the debate. First, he was able to make himself appear more reasonable and moderate than Sanders, and thus more electable to the broader Democratic Party electorate. Secondly, Biden made no gaffes — a major achievement from a man who has made several in recent weeks. He no doubt appeared more "presidential" on the stage than Sanders.

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But, in substance, there was little to separate the two men on the issues. Biden seemed to concentrate more on answering the questions posed than Sanders, whereas Sanders was more intent in veering off on the new spending programs that he is advocating. While Sanders has lost the majority of the recent contests to Biden, he told the panel of questioners, "We are winning the generational struggle."

Sanders was correct in that assertion, as he is winning voters under 40 by significant margins. But as Sanders conceded, he needs younger people to show up in larger numbers and actually vote. Biden's advantage among older voters mirrors Sanders' advantage among younger voters, but to Sanders' detriment, those older people vote in much larger percentages.

Biden's tone was certainly much more measured than Sanders' more bellicose approach. Whereas Biden calmly stated what he would do about the present coronavirus crisis, mentioning getting more testing kits from the World Health Organization, having more drive-through testing facilities, and setting up hospital beds in public buildings, Sanders led off his answer with, "First off, we need to shut this president up right now."

Sanders saw the coronavirus as exposing our present "dysfunctional" healthcare system, arguing that it demonstrated that America needed to end private health insurance, and move to a single-payer system "like Canada." Biden scored a direct hit in his response, noting that Italy has a single-payer system and



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it is “not making any difference” in the results.

This led to the longest back-and-forth issue difference of the night, and clearly established that Sanders sees every issue through the lens of socialism.

While Biden and Sanders traded shots the rest of the debate on other issues, their differences were largely marginal. Both called for massive new spending programs on a wide range of issues — Sanders just called for a whole lot more.

On immigration, Sanders vowed to end “terrible” ICE raids immediately upon taking office, while Biden spoke more about how he would deal with those seeking asylum. Biden recalled that Sanders went on Lou Dobbs’ show years ago and bemoaned the fact that illegal aliens were taking American jobs, but Sanders said he would end “on day one the ugly demonization” of aliens.

Biden also charged that Sanders voted against the Brady gun control bill five times, and voted to exempt gun manufacturers from liability lawsuits.

Biden promised that he would name a black woman to the Supreme Court, and will have a woman on the ticket with him as his vice-president. Sanders said he was “leaning” that way, and said that his Cabinet would look like America, with about half being women.

Both candidates vowed to end fracking (which has made the United States energy-independent for the first time in decades). Sanders claimed that the fossil-fuel industry has been lying for years about the effect of oil on “climate change,” and said their executives should be “held criminally responsible.” (Exactly what statute they have violated is not clear. Making someone responsible for an action that was not a crime at the time of the act would be a violation of the Constitution’s prohibition of an *ex post facto* law). In addition to “no new fracking,” Biden touted high-speed rail, so as to “take cars off the road.” *That* might create a problem for Biden in the general election in Michigan.

What would Sanders do to replace oil and gas? He said he would invest “in an unprecedented way” in wind and solar and make buildings more green.

Biden pounded away at Sanders’ support over many years for dictatorships such as those in Cuba with Castro, Nicaragua with the Sandinistas, and in the old Soviet Union. He condemned Sanders’ praise for China’s economic record by mentioning that China has about a million people in concentration camps.

But Sanders seem to throw Biden on the defensive when he recalled that Biden had voted for the Iraq War, but that he, Sanders, had voted against it. “Everybody knew” that giving Bush and Cheney that authorization meant the United States was going to war, Sanders said. Another point of difference was that Sanders expressed pride in his vote against NAFTA, which he said had cost American workers their jobs, while Biden had voted for it.

Both men promised to support and campaign for the other if the other wins the nomination, with Biden calling President Trump “an existential threat” to the future of the country.

In the end, Biden probably did nothing to cause him to lose any ground to Sanders in the battle for the Democratic Party nomination. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the CNN panel did not ask Biden about his ugly confrontation with an autoworker in Detroit last week, when the former vice president had told the man that he was “full of sh**,” and said that he would like to take him “outside.”

Despite CNN not thinking that confrontation worthy to ask about, it is a good bet that we will see the video of Biden and the autoworker — in which Biden vowed to get rid of AR-14s (by which he probably meant AR-15s) — if he becomes president. And, no doubt, President Trump will remind his rally crowds



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that Biden said he would make former Texas Congressman Beto O'Rourke his point man on gun control. The same O'Rourke who said, "Hell, yes, we're coming for your AR-15s."

Which means it is fair to conclude, that were he were to win in November, Biden would be coming for our guns, too.

Photo: AP Images

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