

# Gore, Bush talk taxes, finance in first debate

■ The two candidates met in the first of three debates that will shed light on their differing policy goals

By Sandra Sobieraj  
Associated Press Writer

BOSTON — Vice President Al Gore and Texas Gov. George W. Bush clashed over tax cuts, Medicare prescription drug benefits and campaign finance Tuesday night in their first debate of the fall, a pivot point in the closest White House contest in a generation.

Combative from the outset, Gore charged that his rival's tax plan would "spend more money on tax

cuts for the wealthiest 1 percent than all of the new spending he proposes for education, health care, prescription drugs and national defense all combined."

But Bush, standing a few feet away on a debate stage at the University of Massachusetts, said Gore's economic plan would offer tax cuts only to the middle class. "Everybody who pays taxes ought to get relief," he said. At the same time, he said, Gore's blueprint would produce "dramatically" bigger government with 200 "new or expanded programs" and 20,000 new bureaucrats.

"It empowers Washington," added the governor, who hastened to tell a national viewing audience he was from West Texas — not the

nation's capital. Over and over, he accused Gore of "fuzzy math."

Gore and Bush met for the first of three presidential debates over the next two weeks, each man seeking advantage in a race so close that poll after poll shows them within a point or two of one another. Their vice-presidential running mates, Democrat Joseph Lieberman and Republican Dick Cheney, debate Thursday in Kentucky.

Jim Lehrer of PBS was moderator, operating under strict rules negotiated in advance by the Gore and Bush camps. It was, he said at the outset, the first of three 90-minute debates between the two major party rivals — a format that excluded Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan, who are running as minor party candidates.

Outside the hall, dozens of protesters knocked over police barricades and blocked a road leading to the debate hall to protest the exclusion of Buchanan and Nader, who was turned away at the door.

Inside the hall, the audience heeded Lehrer's admonishment to

remain silent.

In a reprise of his acceptance speech at this summer's Democratic National Convention, Gore said it was important to stand up to special interests, pharmaceutical companies among them. "Big drug companies support Governor Bush's prescription drug proposal," he said. "They oppose mine."

Bush made a sour face when he heard that, and in his next breath offered a swift rebuttal.

"I've been standing up to big Hollywood and big trial lawyers," he shot back, mentioning two groups that have lavished campaign donations on Gore and Democrats.

Stepping onto the podium a few minutes before the debate began, the vice president blew a kiss in the direction of his wife, Tipper, a reminder of the embrace they shared on stage at the convention six weeks ago. Gore and Bush shook hands twice, once before debating and then afterwards.

Each man came equipped with a refrain.

## Debate Schedule

There will be two more presidential debates and one vice-presidential debate in the next two weeks.

### Presidential debate #2:

Wednesday, Oct. 11, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, S.C.

### Presidential debate #3:

Tuesday, Oct. 17, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.

### Vice-presidential debate:

Thursday, Oct. 5, Centre College, Danville, Ky.

SOURCE: www.cspan.org

For Bush, it was the accusation that Gore was practicing "fuzzy math" with his attacks, sometimes rendered as "fuzzy Washington math."

For Gore, it was a loud, audible sigh, meant to convey profound skepticism over Bush's claims about the economy, prescription drugs and other issues.



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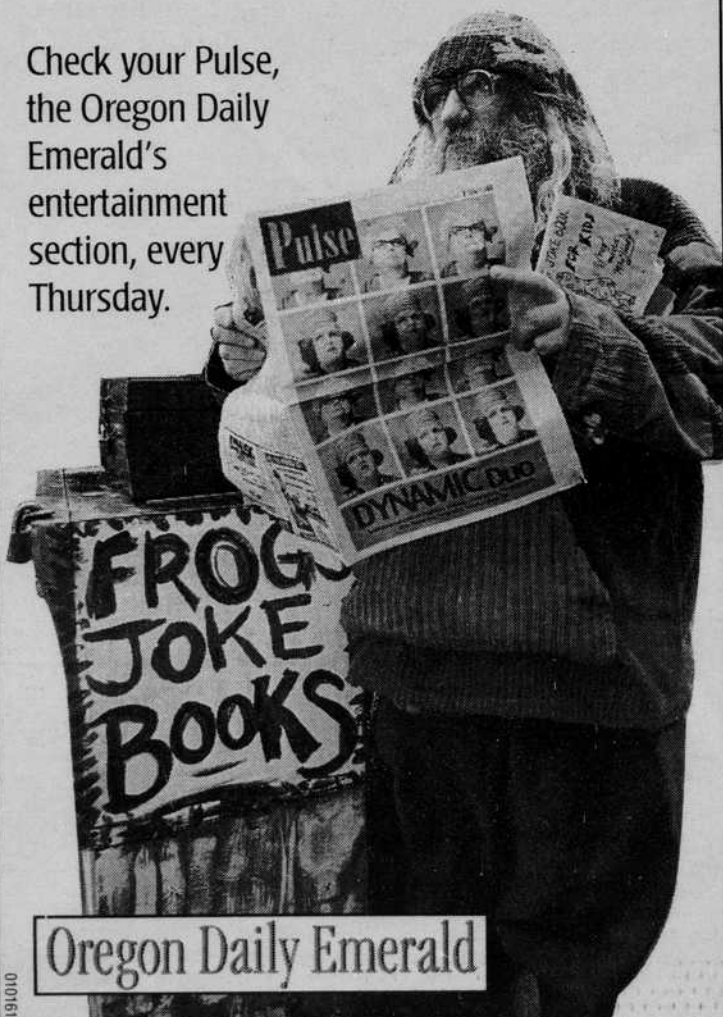
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