

Live-blogging the debate, sort of

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*I didn't post anything during the presidential debate last night, because I watched it without the benefit of an internet connection. Also because bona fide live-blogging can be seriously annoying to read. But if you want it in digest form, here's how I reacted in front of the TV.*

8:03—Obama wins coin toss, gets to be the first to mention his 20th wedding anniversary. Would have been sweet and humanizing coming from Romney.

8:05—Romney congratulates the Obamas and lands a cute joke about it.

8:13—Obama: We cut middle-class taxes by \$3,600. Of course, almost nobody knows this, because we're so good at [hiding our political light under a policy bushel](#).

8:17—Romney: Why won't my tax plan increase the deficit? Because I said so.

8:20—Which candidate makes more awkward and condescending faces when the other is speaking? We show them in split screen; you decide.

8:24—Romney: Actually I think I'll make the debate rules, Jim.

8:27—Lest there be any doubt about the Dems' embrace of the once-pejorative term "Obamacare," Obama interrupts Romney to say, "I like it."

8:28—Romney: To avoid borrowing money from China, I'm going to repeal the deficit-reducing health-care bill and kill the negligible PBS subsidy.

8:29—Not one but two instances of "What we've said is" from Obama means not one but two drinks, folks. You'd think [that excruciating bit on Jimmy Fallon's show](#) would have killed this particular Obama tic.

8:29—Again with the "Dwight Eisenhower." Obama's on a first-name basis with the guy but not a middle-initial one.

8:30—Obama: The other guy's for a pathological and premature obsession with the deficit that excludes the possibility of new revenues; I'm for a pathological and premature obsession with the deficit that *includes* the possibility of new revenues. America has a clear choice! Didn't you notice our color-coded ties?

8:31—Romney: I won't say whether I support Simpson-Bowles, but I do think the president should support Simpson-Bowles.

8:33—Romney: Even though both parties have pretty much abandoned the time-proven wisdom of Keynesian countercyclical spending, I'll just give a quick explanation and endorsement of it anyway, since we're talking at the moment only about the tax-cut kind of spending, which is *always* good.

8:36—Obama: Hey, here's a campaign-trail anecdote. It's from Nevada—just [happens to be where it happened](#).

8:40—What Obama's trying to say: The rise in the cost of health-care generally, not government-funded care in particular, is driving the deficit. What he's actually saying: Blah, blah, blah, I'm an exhausted policy wonk.

8:43—Romney: If you're over 60, stop listening. We all know you only care about yourself.

8:43—When Romney lands a hit Obama thinks is not-so-clean, Obama's facial expression is annoyed and condescending but also a little impressed.

8:47—Lehrer: Governor, do you support Medicare vouchers for the not-yet-old?  
Romney: Can we talk about the already-old instead?

8:48—Romney has learned to deliver his line about consumer choice crisply, persuasively, and without easy-to-distort cracks about how he likes to fire people.

8:50—Obama tries again to mention the cost of health care generally. Both Romney and Lehrer cut him off.

8:52—Obama's visible annoyance is approaching Al Gore's in 2000.

8:52—Lehrer: "Let's not." A bit too little too late with the tough-guy stuff, Jim.

8:53—Obama: "We said..." Half a drink.

8:58—Romney: Why did Obama go straight to health care when he took office instead of dealing with jobs? If only he had pushed through [some sort of economic stimulus](#) first.

8:58—Following Romney's clear list of what he doesn't like about Obamacare, Obama trails off and reverts to old boilerplate about the bill's consumer provisions. Why isn't he responding point-by-point? There are worse things than being on the defensive.

9:00—At the top of the hour, our top story: Distinguished newsman Jim Lehrer continues to get no respect.

9:03—Obama tries a joke about how silly it is to blame him for Republican obstruction and disengagement, but it's too subtle to register. Romney's just killing him on health-care reform.

9:04—Our policy-wonk-in-chief gives a good explanation of the importance of doctor incentives, using the Cleveland Clinic as his example.

9:07—Romney: But the Cleveland Clinic is private! He doesn't actually say that Obamacare's market-based reforms would somehow turn us into the UK, but if viewers infer that, he won't complain.

9:10—Another Obama would-be zinger goes awkwardly off the rails.

9:11—Romney implies that Obama is a my-way-or-the-highway kind of guy. This will be news to the liberals who almost stormed the White House during the debt-ceiling fight.

9:11—Romney: We could cap tax deductions. Let me just pull a possible number out of thin air, a totally arbitrary number that happens to be a bit higher than the other one I floated recently, when everyone responded that it was low enough to hurt a lot of middle-class families.

9:13—Obama: a government's first role is security. No, it's whatever the people say it is.

9:14—Obama busts out another "what we've said is"—while hyping school reform. Fellow public education supporters, that's two drinks: one for fun and one for sadness.

9:20—Lehrer: Governor, I'm interrupting Obama before he gets to the gist of his sentence to ask, do you agree with him? Romney: Yes. Yes I do.

9:21—Obama on who does and doesn't have the ability to borrow college money from parents. Driest populist dig ever.

9:23—Romney: The government should make business more effective and more efficient. He's right! Great examples I'd offer: Romneycare and Obamacare.

9:24—Lehrer: Now I'm going to talk for a minute about how we only have three minutes left.

9:25—Romney is again suggesting that Obama's short on bipartisan collaboration. I suppose a line that makes liberals want to throw things at both candidates can't be bad for Romney.

9:26—Obama gives us an incredibly awkward zinger followed by a "Look." Shot and a chaser.

9:27—Obama rambles. Here's the line he wants: "I tried for months to work with the Republicans. They weren't interested, and they said so."

9:28—Obama thinks this was a terrific debate! Even though he got creamed.

9:31—Romney: Obamacare means "a whole different way of life." I assume he supports whole different ways of life in Massachusetts, just not nationwide.

9:33—There are so many Romneys on stage with POTUS and FLOTUS, but nary an Obama daughter. Everybody's so smiley and linger-y! Maybe they'll stick around for a while and chat about a bipartisan strategy for making the next debate even less fun to watch.