

Five Things Romney Needs To Do In the Debates



With the first presidential debate set for Wednesday night, there's been a lot of discussion in the media over what Mitt Romney needs to say to achieve some much needed momentum this close to the election.

By now, his debate strategy and most of his talking points have surely been finalized and rehearsed extensively. Still, I don't think it hurts to offer a little last-minute advice to the man the Republican party and much of the country are counting on to drive home his case for why the nation desperately needs a change in leadership.

We'll start with the cosmetics. From an attitude standpoint, Romney has to end the *Mr. Nice Guy* routine. The Romney campaign has invested a lot of time in building Mitt's *likeability* factor, which is understandable in the sense that his opponent has maintained a lot of support based solely on his personality. The reality, though, is that Romney just can't compete with Obama on that front. He should stop trying. Our country is headed off a fiscal cliff, and he needs to start acting like it. He should be civil, but direct, firm, and show some conviction, ala Newt Gingrich.

As for the substance of the debate, it's important that he do the following:

Tie the Poor Economy to Obama

There's been an assumption all along, both from the Romney campaign and the Republican party, that four straight years of a disastrous economy would force voters to draw the logical conclusion that our president's economic policies have been a

resounding failure. I certainly shared that assumption myself. We were all wrong. The consensus of the electorate seems to be that the economy is indeed in rough shape (though most people have no idea *how* rough), but they're not quite convinced that it has something to do with President Obama. As utterly ridiculous as that sounds, it appears to be the case. Romney has to break that false perception apart.

He needs to aggressively explain that the economy is not stagnant *despite* President Obama. It's stagnant *because* of President Obama. He needs to remind the electorate that Obama was elected in 2008 to FIX THE ECONOMY, not to act as a spectator, hold their hands, and promise them that *everything's going to be okay... someday*. He needs to explain that several presidents have inherited tough economies. Obama wasn't the first, by any stretch of the imagination. Obama is, however, presiding over the worst economic recovery since World War 2. Romney then needs to explain why that is.

He should point out that Obama's economic policies have discouraged economic growth rather than promoted it. There is a plethora of examples he can use: Over-regulations on the energy industries and the absence of an overall energy policy (including Obama's refusal to approve the Keystone Pipeline), the constant threat of tax increases on businesses, the burden of Obamacare on business growth and hiring, the devaluation of the U.S. dollar and how it has driven up the price of products (including gasoline), etc.

Romney's overall message has to be that the country's only chance of digging our way back to prosperity are for businesses to thrive, and that Obama has done nothing but place burdens on businesses in this country.

Set the Tax Record Straight

For weeks, the Obama campaign has been running an enormous advertising campaign in swing states and across the internet,

insisting that Mitt Romney plans on raising people's taxes. It's an outright lie. Yet, a lot of people have seen the ads and probably believe them. That's a bad thing for Romney.

The information the ads use was based on a thoroughly debunked study that made several false assumptions to draw a speculated conclusion. Romney has pledged all along not to raise anyone's taxes. The Obama camp, of course, is well aware that they're lying. The president himself even admitted in a recent *60 Minutes* interview that his campaign has been dishonest, and rationalized that dishonesty by saying, "You know, that happens in politics." Unsurprisingly, *CBS News* didn't find that admission newsworthy enough to include in the final cut of the interview that made it on to national television... but media bias is a topic for another column.

Romney needs to not only call out President Obama for outright lying about the tax charge, but broadcast to the world (as Paul Ryan has been doing in recent interviews) that there is only one presidential candidate who has vowed to raise taxes, and that is President Obama. He needs to affirm directly that no one's taxes will go up under a Romney administration.

In contrast, Romney needs to highlight the dozen or so Obamacare taxes that are being placed directly on the backs of the middle class. He needs to explain how raising taxes on *wealthy people* hurts the rest of us because it raises the cost of consumer products and services.

He needs to explain that there are no upsides to raising *anyone's* taxes. Lower taxes for wealthy people don't mean higher taxes on people who aren't wealthy. That's a myth. However, higher taxes on wealthy people do mean higher costs of services and products to consumers. That should be his rationale for lowering *everyone's* taxes, via his tax reform plan.

Crucify Obamacare

Throughout the campaign, the Romney camp has pulled their punches when it comes to going after Obamacare. Sure, they've been talking about repealing and replacing it, but they've been timid when it comes to describing just how much of an impending disaster it is for our country, and how this election is the last remaining chance of stopping it. Romney needs to stop worrying about the superficial similarities between it and Romneycare, and explain once and for all what the law's survival means to Americans. It's already a winning issue for him, as most national polls show that Americans are still standing adamantly against it. He just needs to drive home the desperate need to kill it.

Romney needs to point out that essentially every promise made from the administration about Obamacare was a lie. The promised price-tag was a lie. The promise that it would bring down our national debt was a lie. The promise that our healthcare premiums would not go up was a lie. The promise that it would bring down the actual cost of healthcare was a lie. The promise that we'd get to keep our existing plans, if we chose to, was a lie.

He needs to point out the large jump in healthcare premiums as a result of Obamacare, the law's unfunded liabilities, the healthcare rationing decided upon by government boards, and the startling percentage of doctors who have vowed to leave the field because of the burdens placed on their practices by Obamacare.

He needs to pound home the fact that Obama took billions out of Medicare to help pay for Obamacare. The polls surged for Romney when Paul Ryan took on this battle a month or so ago. They need to return to it, and also explain that Medicare Advantage is going away under Obama, which a lot of Americans don't realize.

Paint a Picture of Obama's Second Term

It's not enough for Romney to point out how much of a disaster Barack Obama has been for our country. He needs to explain that *this* (October of 2012) is as good as it gets under Obama. There is no such thing as an *Obama Recovery*. It's a fiction. It's a fantasy. No matter how many times the president tries to push the square peg into the circle-shaped hole, it's not going to fit.

Romney needs to point out that economic growth is not getting better. It's only getting worse, and will continue to worsen. He needs to explain that the workforce is not growing. It's shrinking, and will continue to shrink. He needs to explain that with an administration that is hindering domestic oil production, the average price of gas over this past year will be the cheapest Americans will see under Obama. Gas prices will only get higher due to our dependency on foreign oil and the continued devaluation of the U.S. dollar.

Lastly, without mincing words, he should boldly state that under Obama, there WILL be another recession. This will undoubtedly get people's attention, and it's a reasonable conclusion to draw. The economic numbers point in that direction. The runaway government spending points in that direction. The national debt points in that direction. The president's inability to work with congress to solve dire problems points in that direction. Many people in the media will fly off the handle in reaction, but who cares? The national debate over the economy needs to get serious, and this will do that. It's not fear-mongering. It's a wake-up call.

Explain What a Romney Presidency Will Means to Individuals

Despite a national media that's out to get him, and a political opponent who has successfully created a negative caricature of him, it's ultimately Mitt Romney who is responsible for making his case (as hard as that might be in this political climate) to sell his presidency to the American

people. More specifically, he needs to sell his presidency to undecided voters who aren't all that informed. Like it or not, they'll be the ones deciding the outcome of this election.

Thus, Romney needs to do more than cite all of the economic numbers that point out Obama's sweeping failures. He needs to go beyond promises of tax cuts and lifting regulations. That kind of talk goes over well with business owners and others who understand economics, but it's lost on most voters. He needs to go beyond talking about China and the national debt because most people just don't understand why that stuff is important or how it effects them.

Undecided voters don't think *big picture*. They think about their own microcosms.

Romney needs to simplify his message to speak directly to middle and lower class families who aren't politically sophisticated, but struggle in this chronically weak economy every day. These are the people who aren't quite sure that either man can fix our problems. Romney must convince them that *he* can.

He should explain that his presidency won't be about forcing Americans to navigate through obstacles. It will be about lifting the burdens that are weighing them down: Lowering gas prices through expanded drilling and a stronger dollar, lowering unemployment and raising job security through pro-growth policies that incentivize companies to hire and invest, lowering the cost of healthcare by replacing Obamacare with *real* reforms that actually save patients money, etc.

He needs to apply conservative principles to family budget issues that people can identify with, because right now, those people aren't identifying with the *big picture* crisis our country is in.

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If Mitt Romney can begin to do many of these things during the first debate, and actually follow up with those themes along the campaign trail, there's no reason why he can't turn the momentum in his favor and win this race.