

# No Winner in the Debate – But Maybe a Loser

☒ I have this funny feeling that just about nobody will remember very much about what they heard during the vice presidential debate, but they'll remember what they saw.

First, on substance, there was no clear winner (though Vice President Biden's assertion that the Obama administration wasn't told about requests for more security in Libya before the attacks that left four Americans dead, strains belief).

So if you liked Biden going in, you probably thought he won. If you liked Ryan, you figured he came out ahead. But this was one of those times when style, I think, will trump substance. So even if there wasn't a winner, there may have been a loser.

Joe Biden was OK when he was talking – but not when he was listening. That's when he came off as condescending. Paul Ryan was trying to make a point and the split screen TV shot showed Biden laughing – not because anything was funny; it was Biden's way of mocking Ryan, his way of saying Ryan didn't know what he was talking about. At one point last night I tweeted that if Biden laughs one more time I'm going to jump through the TV set and slap him.

There were also the frequent Biden interruptions. He came off as smug, maybe even as a bully, the older guy beating up on the new kid on the block.

Political junkies may like that kind of stuff – if it's your guy doing the smirking and bullying – but independents, I suspect, don't like it. They see it as rude. The morning after the debate I heard someone say that even if you don't like President Obama you better hope he stays healthy because you wouldn't want somebody like Joe Biden in charge.

In terms of poll numbers, the debate might not mean much. We'll see about that. But in terms of optics – an important element in our political culture and in life in general – Joe Biden didn't come off very well.

He reminded me of Al Gore during his debate with George Bush. Remember when W would say something Gore didn't like – and Gore would roll his eyes and sigh. He did it over and over again. I can't remember a single piece of substance from that debate all these years later – and I suspect I couldn't remember a single piece of substance the next morning, either. But I remember Al Gore sighing all these years later.

And I'll remember Joe Biden laughing, not like a friendly, nice guy but like a condescending, snarky politician. I bet I'm not alone.