

# The Recorder

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## Kaine, Stewart clash in heated debate

U.S. Senate candidates squared off Saturday at The Homestead

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*Media questioned Sen. Tim Kaine after the debate. (Recorder photos by Mike Bollinger)*



*Corey Stewart fielded questions from assembled media following the debate.*

HOT SPRINGS — “Spirited” was the word moderator Judy Woodruff, the anchor and executive producer of PBS NewsHour, used to describe Saturday’s debate between incumbent Democratic U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine and Republican challenger Corey Stewart.

The debate highlighted the candidates' differences on virtually every issue, and the rhetoric was hot and heavy. The Virginia Bar Association hosted the debate at The Homestead — the first of three debates scheduled between Kaine and Stewart.

In his opening statement, Stewart, chair of the board of supervisors in Prince William County, highlighted his accomplishments on that board, including a crackdown on illegal aliens and economic growth. “That is what we need in Washington, because we don’t have it right now,” he said.

Kaine said he was about Virginia, about working people and jobs, and working for all. “It shouldn’t matter what your religion is, who you love or where you live. Our President is being too divisive,” he said.



A large crowd attended Saturday’s U.S. Senate debate in the Grand Ballroom of The Homestead.

## **Economy**

In her first question to Kaine, Woodruff noted in 2016, Kaine said a Donald Trump presidency would be a disaster. Yet, she noted, 3 million jobs had been created, the unemployment rate was down to 4 percent, and corporate profits were up.

Kaine said the economy was strong before Trump took office. He said the U.S. should not engage in a “foolish trade war” that would work against American workers and farmers. He said while tariffs imposed by Trump would create about 30,000 jobs, they would cause the loss of about 430,000 jobs. “We need to stop this trade war that is hurting American farmers and workers. I do think the President is right to focus on China as an issue,” he said. Kaine also called Trump’s attacks on Canada and Europe “painful.”

Stewart cited the struggling economy in the Danville area as an example of how Kaine has failed Virginia. He said as the result of international trade agreements Kaine voted for, 5 million jobs

were lost. “Those jobs will not come back unless foreign markets are opened to U.S. goods,” he said.

Kaine responded that the country needs bipartisan tax reform. “The President’s tax reform resulted in deep, permanent cuts for corporations and tiny, expiring tax cuts for the people. The priorities were wrong,” he said.

### **Government spending**

In a question for Stewart, Woodruff noted the national debt could approach \$3 trillion in a decade. She asked what cuts he would make or what revenue he would raise to reduce the debt.

Stewart blamed Democrats for raising the deficit and said the average benefit to Virginia families was \$2,617 under the Trump tax cuts. He gave no specifics on how he would work to reduce the deficit.

Kaine called Trump’s tax bill “the biggest budget busting bill ever.” He said the debt could be brought under control by managing expenses, but offered no specifics on how this could be done. He also said Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security had to be protected.

Stewart said Social Security was a pension fund, not a welfare benefit. “We cannot cut those benefits. We need to reform Medicaid, but we don’t need cuts to Medicare and Social Security,” he said.

### **Health care**

Woodruff noted Kaine supported the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion in Virginia, and asked what he would do about prescription drug prices.

“We are very different on health care,” Kaine said. “I believe the federal government should negotiate on pricing. We should use free market tools to negotiate. We can try and get the best prices for drugs.”

Stewart said the government needs to stop protecting insurance companies and should hold drug companies accountable for their prices. He also said the quality of care was worse under the ACA.

Kaine said those with pre-existing conditions especially benefitted from the ACA, as did young people who can remain on their parents’ policies until age 26. He said the uninsured rate is the lowest it has been in 50 years.

Stewart said he supported the provision that allows people to remain on policies until age 26 and also supports coverage for those with pre-existing conditions. “The vast majority of people have seen prices skyrocket under the ACA. There is a difference between health insurance and access to health care,” Stewart said.

Between 20 and 30 million people would lose insurance if the ACA were repealed, Kaine countered. He also referenced Republican efforts to repeal it. “My opponent was rooting on the destruction of health care vital to Virginians,” Kaine said.

“Sen. Kaine thinks all solutions come from Washington. Medicaid doesn’t work. We doubled the number of people on Medicaid but there was no increase in the number of physicians. Medicaid needs to be brought back to the states,” Stewart responded.

### **Supreme Court**

Stewart was asked what litmus tests he would like to see for a Supreme Court nominee. Woodruff noted he supported Trump’s nomination of Brett Kavanaugh for the current vacancy and has said he would like to see *Roe v. Wade* overturned.

“Judge Kavanaugh is imminently qualified. You can bet your bottom dollar Sen. Kaine will vote against him. Why? Because he’s against anything President Trump does,” Stewart said.

The only qualification he wants in a justice, Stewart said, is to be able to interpret the Constitution as written and amended.

Kaine replied he has voted for many of Trump’s nominees, and said Stewart is “100 percent for President Trump.” He was scheduling a meeting with Kavanaugh and noted Republicans refused to do the same when President Obama nominated Merrick Garland in 2016.

### **Russia investigation**

Kaine was asked if he believed there had been collusion with Russia during the 2016 election, including with the Trump campaign. Kaine said he did not want to judge the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller before it had been completed. “We have to protect it,” he said. “There have already been 30 indictments and five guilty pleas. Trump’s campaign manager (Paul Manafort) is sitting in a Virginia jail. This investigation is about hearing the whole story so we can protect our election system.”

Stewart said the Russians had been spying for years, and there was finally a president who would stand up to Russia. Following that statement, the Kaine supporters in the room burst into laughter.

Stewart also said Kaine wanted to damage the U.S. relationship with Russia. “It’s important to work with Russia,” Stewart said.

In the course of the discussion of the investigation, Kaine again claimed Stewart was “100 percent Trump” while Stewart said Kaine “takes his orders from Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi.”

## **Values and beliefs**

Woodruff noted Stewart had received endorsements from people associated with white supremacy and anti-Semitism, and asked about a possible pattern of association with “people who promote hate.”

“There is not a racist bone in my body,” Stewart said. “I’ve disavowed them, every single one of them. You in the media have failed to report when he (Kaine) has been associated with someone who is bigoted.”

Kaine said Stewart knew who Jason Kessler (noted white supremacist) was and knew who Roy Moore (candidate for U.S. Senate from Alabama who is an accused pedophile) was. “He knew who these people were and he knew what they stand for,” Kaine said.

Stewart cited Kaine’s support of Leslie Cockburn, who wrote a book 27 years ago critical of the U.S.-Israel relationship. He claimed the book showed Cockburn is an anti-Semite and that Kaine has never been criticized for supporting her in her bid for Congress this year.

Kaine said the author’s disagreement with foreign policy regarding Israel did not make Cockburn an anti-Semite.

Stewart noted the allegations against Moore were more than 40 years old. “I think that’s wrong,” Stewart said.

## **Immigration**

Questioning Kaine about immigration policy, Woodruff said Kaine had been critical of the President’s policies and that Stewart has said he is in favor of open borders.

“I believe our nation is great because of immigration. A functioning immigration system is necessary, and I support immigration reforms,” Kaine said. “I have voted for border security over and over again.”

Stewart claimed Kaine voted against a bill that would create a 355-ship Navy because he wanted amnesty for illegal immigrants. He also claimed Kaine wants to eliminate Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Kaine responded by claiming Trump wants to eliminate family immigration and is slowing down the visa process. He said Trump’s policies will make it hard for students and tourists to enter the country.

In addition, Stewart said Kaine attended a rally to support abolishing ICE. Kaine said the rally was not for abolishing ICE, but was against “taking kids out of their mothers’ arms.”

## **Energy**

The price of gasoline has been rising steadily this year, Woodruff said, and she asked Stewart what the Trump administration and Congress should do about it. He said the Keystone Pipeline project should be restarted, and that oil and natural gas exploration in the U.S. should move forward.

Kaine said he had joined with both Democrats and Republicans to end the moratorium on crude petroleum exports, and that he does not support offshore drilling along the Virginia coast. “I strongly support the production of no or low-carbon energy. The President made a huge mistake by pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord,” Kaine said.

Stewart did not specifically address what should be done about gasoline prices.

## **Coal**

Kaine was asked if it was better to prop up an industry in decline or to retool it and retrain workers. “We need to do a little bit of both,” Kaine said. “Research is needed on the federal level to make coal plants cleaner. We are mining as much coal as we were 50 years ago, but we are doing it with one-tenth of the people because of automation.”

Stewart said Kaine sided with Democrats and imposed unnecessary regulations on the coal industry. He blamed that action for the large number of miners who are out of work in Southwest Virginia. Kaine cited the new Virginia City coal plant on the border of Russell and Wise counties. “You see that Corey clearly hasn’t gotten around very much,” Kaine said.

In his response, Stewart talked about how Danville is boarded up and has a large drug problem and people leaving the city due to the loss of jobs, mainly from textiles.

## **Tariffs**

In a question for Stewart, Woodruff asked him what he would do specifically about Virginia farmers, particularly soybean farmers, affected by tariffs being imposed on China in retaliation for tariffs imposed on Chinese goods by this country.

“You gotta get tough, folks,” Stewart said. “We need to level the playing field, and that goes for agricultural products as well.”

“You have to be tough on trade, but you don’t have to be foolish,” Kaine responded. “It’s important to go after China for stealing our intellectual property, but what the President is doing with tariffs is hurting workers and farmers. The President is waging a trade war against America.”

Stewart claimed Kaine was in favor of unfair trade agreements that have hurt the U.S. and wants to do nothing to change those.

## **Vladimir Putin**

Woodruff asked Kaine if he believed Russian President Vladimir Putin was a sometimes ally or an enemy of the U.S. and was the European Union an ally or a foe.

“They’re an adversary,” Kaine said of Russia. “That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be dealing with them, but no one should mistake them for a friend.”

Kaine said Europe was an ally, and noted the only time Article 5 of the NATO agreement (mutual defense) has been used was after the 9-11 attacks on the United States. “European nations came to our aid,” he said.

Stewart said Russia is not the major threat to the U.S. but that China is instead. “If the Europeans are supposedly our allies, they need to start acting like it,” he said.

## **Questions from each other**

Each candidate was allowed to ask the other one question. Stewart asked Kaine whether he had changed his positions on late-term abortions and the Trans-Pacific Partnership since he ran for vice president. He alleged when Kaine joined the Clinton campaign, he was ordered to change those positions.

“No” Kaine replied. “Make it nasty, make it personal, and make it up.”

Continuing, Stewart said Kaine opposed restrictions on abortions up to the moment of birth. Kaine said he supports “reasonable rules on abortion.”

“I live by my church’s teachings, but I don’t think my job is to pass laws criminalizing women for their reproductive choices,” Kaine said.

In his question for Stewart, Kaine asked why Stewart skipped a Dec. 17, 2017 Prince William County Board of Supervisors meeting to campaign for Moore in Alabama. “Moore had been outed for his long history with teenage girls,” Kaine said. “Why was it important for you to skip your job and go campaign for him?”

“Why did you skip your entire four years as Governor of Virginia?” Stewart replied.

“I knew you couldn’t look this audience in the face and talk about Roy Moore,” Kaine said.

## **Closing remarks**

“He’s too weak, too liberal, and has gotten nothing done,” Stewart said of Kaine. “We need a U.S. Senator who will stand with President Trump. We need our economic growth to continue.”

“I think the choice is pretty clear. Do you want a Senator who is about Virginia, or a Senator who is all about Trump first?” Kaine said.

### **Woodruff's take**

The veteran journalist who moderated the debate has moderated several Virginia Bar Association debates, and said she continues to do so because the process is important. "When the VBA asks me to do it, I have a hard time saying no. I try to focus on topics that will be on the minds of voters," she said.

She also said she enjoys visiting the Hot Springs area. "I love coming to Hot Springs and The Homestead. The people are so welcoming and the area is so beautiful," Woodruff said.

"I think the debate was serious and they both presented their positions on the issues," she concluded.

The election will be held Nov. 6.