**Personal attacks mark second governor debate between Matt Bevin, Andy Beshear**

[**Phillip M. Bailey**](http://www.courier-journal.com/staff/37241/phillip-m-bailey/)**, Louisville Courier Journal**Published 10:09 p.m. ET Oct. 15, 2019 | **Updated 5:21 p.m. ET Oct. 16, 2019**

LEXINGTON — Republican incumbent Matt Bevin and Democratic challenger Andy Beshear had their ugliest public exchange of the race yet at the second gubernatorial debate of the fall campaign Tuesday.

Throughout the discussion, hosted before a raucous crowd of supporters on the University of Kentucky campus, the two rivals called each other liars and regularly interrupted each other as they were peppered with policy questions.

When moderators asked about ways they would encourage students to pursue a career in public education, including the state's colleges and universities, the conversation took a turn into the gutter.

"You love public education so much that your kids go to private school," Bevin said. "Is that right?"

"You're attacking my kids now," Beshear said.

"No, I'm not," Bevin said. "I'm just saying, you're a fraud."

The high stakes debate touched on health care, pension reform, medical marijuana and supporting out-of-work coal miners. But it underscored how Kentucky's race for governor this year is defined by Bevin and Beshear's enmity as much as their deep differences on tackling the state's woes.

**More:**[Kentucky governor election guide: Where Andy Beshear and Matt Bevin stand on key issues](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/elections/kentucky/2019/10/10/pension-abortion-retirement-system-bevin-beshear-governor-race-2019/1806720001/)

Here's a look at each candidate's performance Tuesday evening:

Bevin was aggressive, nimble

Bevin isn't bothered at all by being called a bully by Democrats, and he was the clear aggressor during the hourlong debate. He was able to predict Beshear's canned stump speech remarks and used his responses to his advantage.

When Beshear told the familiar story of how his father, former Gov. Steve Beshear, and grandfather grew up impoverished in Western Kentucky, as a way to highlight education funding, the governor mocked him.

"If you have to brag about how poor your father and grandfather were, that's a bit of a stretch," Bevin said.

Beshear didn't shy away when challenged, however. He said he didn't come from money, "and I'm fighting for people who don't come from money."

Beshear touted a plan to give public educators a $2,000 across-the-board pay raise, but throughout the discussion Bevin was able to derail his opponent's talking points. The governor derided the attorney general's call to raise revenue through expanded gaming and medical marijuana.

"You're promising pay raises, you're promising increased funding — this is called 'Andy candy' and you're going to hear a lot of it over the last hour," Bevin said.

Asked about the state's role in abortion, Beshear appeared to have an advantage when saying how Bevin is an "extremist" who supports a total ban even in cases of rape or incest.

**Earlier:**[Trump endorses Bevin on Twitter: He's 'done a wonderful job for the people of Kentucky'](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/2019/10/15/trump-gives-gov-matt-bevin-shout-out-twitter-election-looms/3986635002/)

"I work every day with victims of human trafficking, people who have been harmed multiple times a day for years before we rescued them," Beshear said. "I believe those people deserve options. This governor would leave them none."

Bevin was prepared, however, for that attack line and shot back to roaring approval from the audience that he will always protect the unborn.

"You know who else needs options? Those who can't speak for themselves," he said.

Beshear: Your house or White House?

The big picture difference that Beshear tried to drive home is that the race for governor should be more about Kentucky's kitchen-table issues than the national political stage.

If the election is a referendum on President Donald Trump, the thinking is Bevin holds the advantage, and the governor's reelection team knows as much. The Bevin campaign is regularly injecting Trump and a possible impeachment into the race.

Bevin said during Tuesday's debate that the state's concerns come first but that national issues play a role. "It's a combination of both; you will see this race be a proxy in many respects," he said.

The governor pointed to how the Democratic presidential debate was airing after the gubernatorial one, and that Beshear was going to be voting for one of those candidates.

But Beshear made clear that his candidacy hinges on how Kentuckians need to address health care, education and jobs, and that he has the agenda to tackle those needs.

**Background:**[Airplane use, Purdue Pharma highlight first debate between Gov. Matt Bevin, Andy Beshear](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/elections/kentucky/2019/10/03/kentucky-governors-race-matt-bevin-andy-beshear-clash-debate/3830709002/)

"This race isn't about the White House," Beshear said. "It's about what's going on in your house."

Beshear finished stronger than he began by pointing to Bevin's calls for a work requirement on Medicaid expansion recipients; the failure to enforce state law to protect unpaid coal miners at the Blackjewel work site; and how the pension reform bill was knocked down on procedural grounds by the state Supreme Court.

"With a record like that, I would want to be talking about the national race, too," Beshear said.

*Reach Phillip M. Bailey at pbailey@courier-journal.com or 502-582-4475.*