

Opinion: Candidates fail to address Western issues in debate

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

Though President Barack Obama and presidential candidate Mitt Romney got down deep in the weeds on taxes and health care in last week's debate, some viewers – especially in the West – may have been left with the impression that they skipped over more than they addressed.

The only presidential debate solely focused on domestic policy featured no discussion of immigration or the courts and only passing mention of the housing crisis. Sure, they frequently mentioned education (usually preceded by the lead-in “I care about” or “I want to invest in”) but offered few details of anything resembling a plan.

In one sense, that shouldn't matter too much, as the debates are really the election's final home stretch, when the candidates are simply trying to drive home the messages they've spent the better part of the last year framing.

But as we've seen in the last week, sometimes the candidates can clarify or change their positions, even close to the election. And in swing states such as Nevada, new revelations on subjects that hit close to home could potentially sway undecided voters in decisive ways.

For instance, on immigration: Nevada's electorate is 14 percent Latino. While Latino voters don't rank immigration as a top issue, according to polls, they tend to consider a candidate's stance on the issues as a potential dealbreaker.

Forty-eight hours before the debate, Romney revealed to the

Denver Post that he would honor Obama's pledge to undocumented youths if elected president. This summer, Obama instituted two-year deferments of deportation proceedings and authorized work permits for young people who entered the U.S. before age 16 and enrolled in college or the military.

But that topic didn't come up in Wednesday night's debate.

In the same interview with the Denver Post, Romney also said that he was considering capping itemized income tax deductions at \$17,000, a threshold that could adversely affect certain middle class families accustomed to being exempted from taxes on employer-provided health care and their mortgage interest.

During the debate, Romney started tossing around different numbers – \$25,000 and \$50,000 – much higher caps that would likely only adversely affect the wealthy. But neither he nor Obama were pressed to clarify their positions on health care or mortgage interest deductions, so we still don't know exactly where they stand on this issue – and probably won't until one or the other is elected.

Yet that's the kind of stuff that could affect Nevadans' bottom line, whether they're filling out their tax returns, or just hoping to restore the value of their home– and for the undecided voter not being swayed by the war of words over "Obamacare," "Big Oil" or the 47 percent of Americans Romney recently suggested are self-pitying government freeloaders. Oh wait: That 47 percent thing is another late-breaking twist they forgot to mention at the debate (and the Democrats are frustrated with Obama for the omission).

It is hard to address everyone's niche issue in the 90 minutes allowed each time these candidates face off. But there's a reason the debates started in the West: Because with Colorado and Nevada among the small handful of swing states at the center of this contest, the West is likely where the elections are going to end.

For that reason alone, the candidates might be well served by discussing some of these other domestic issues that directly affect Nevada in the next debate.

That faceoff is Oct. 16 and focuses on domestic and foreign policy. Let's see – that means they still have 45 minutes to do it.