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Tonight's debate: The advance transcript

By [Matt Miller](#),

Thanks to The Post's breakthrough in time travel technology – kind of like what they had in “The Terminator,” but for columnists – I've been to tonight's [debate](#) already and am pleased to share a condensed transcript:

Jim Lehrer: Welcome, gentlemen. President Obama, we'll begin with you. Unemployment has been over 8 percent for 43 months, and most people think the country is on the wrong track. With recovery so slow, why do you deserve a second term?

BO: Well, as you know, Jim, we inherited the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. And then Mitt Romney said he thinks 47 percent of the American people are slackers who just mooch off the rest of us. That's an insult to millions of veterans, seniors and other hard-working Americans who actually pay higher tax rates than Mitt Romney does on the millions he still earns from outsourcing American jobs to China.

JL: Governor Romney, how would you respond?

MR: Jim, in Barack Obama's economy there are 23 million Americans who want full-time work who can't find it. And to my friends in the liberal media who say my numbers don't add up, let me be clear: That's 13 million people who don't have jobs, and 10 million who want to work full time but can only find part-time jobs in this disastrous Obama economy. I think we can all agree that 13 plus 10 equals 23.

JL: Mr. President, your rebuttal?

BO: The plain fact is that far more Americans have been insulted by my opponent than are having trouble finding work. The 47 percent he says are shiftless losers means 47 percent out of 310 million of us. That's about 145 million good-for-nothing, low-life Americans. And 145 million divided by 23 million is more than 6. So when you look at the bigger picture, six Americans have been insulted by Mitt Romney for every American who can't find as much work as they might want. That's not ideology, Jim — it's math.

MR: Can I make a quick point?

JL: Briefly, please.

MR: Just briefly, each of the 23 million Americans suffering in this jobless Obama economy has at least two parents, 2.1 children on average, and at least four friends, including their spouse. You can't view the 23 million in isolation. And when you multiply those 23 million hopeless Americans by at least eight others who feel their pain, you end up with a lot more Americans than I've insulted. And I'm using very conservative estimates.

BO: Jim? Just, in fairness, to respond?

JL: Yes?

BO: Forty-seven percent.

JL: Let's move on to health care. Mr. Romney, you've said you'd repeal Obamacare as your first act. Yet in recent days you've said the fact that you passed universal health care in Massachusetts with a plan a lot like President Obama's shows you have empathy for average Americans and know how to address their problems. Isn't this a contradiction?

MR: Not at all, Jim. The common principle that reconciles these views is my desire to be elected president. I blast Obamacare because it gets me the votes of many on the far right who hate what the president did. And I tout my own record enacting a similar program because it shows a different group of voters how I can get big things done in a bipartisan way.

JL: But . . . but which approach do you really believe in?

MR: I'm sorry, I'm not sure I understand the question.

JL: President Obama, in a few short years you've added \$5 trillion to the national debt — that's more debt added faster than any president in history. Critics say you've offered no real plan to end this tide of red ink. How do you reply?

BO: Jim, let's get one thing clear. We inherited the worst economy since the Great Depression, and Mitt Romney, when he ran Bain, was a pioneer in outsourcing jobs to China. Now he wants to double down on the same trickle-down that got us into this mess in the first place. I think the American people want to move forward.

JL: But what about the debt?

BO: Forty-seven percent. Also [raises small white board and a marker] — let me put it this way — [draws the number with a little percentage sign] — there — 47%! Did you see how Netanyahu got on every front page with that little bomb drawing as a prop? [winks]

JL: . Governor, when you named Paul Ryan to the ticket, did you intend to put controversial changes to Medicare front and center in this campaign?

MR: It's a great question, Jim. And let me level with the American people. That was not my intent. Turns out we thought that one through a little less than the Clint Eastwood cameo.

JL: Your Medicare plan has helped push your unfavorable ratings to record highs. Why don't Americans seem to like you?

MR: The presidency isn't a popularity contest, Jim. But Ann can tell you I'm a bit of a cut-up.

JL: Your reaction, Mr. President.

BO: You're likable enough, Mitt. And I, for one, am really glad you're in this race.

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