



Indiana Senate debate: Young defends his record as McDermott goes on the offensive

Kaitlin Lange and Kayla Dwyer

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Republican Sen. Todd Young defended his six years in the Senate during a debate Sunday, attempting to fend off attacks from both Democrat Thomas McDermott Jr. and Libertarian James Sceniak, his two opponents on the ballot this November.

McDermott took every opportunity to criticize Young's record during the hour-long debate hosted by the Indiana Debate Commission at WFYI studios in Indianapolis, as Young attempted to both show his policy chops and push back on the attacks.

Here are some takeaways from the debate.

Young takes opportunities to attack Washington Democrats

Young spent much of his time on stage wrapping policy positions into critiques of the Democrat-controlled Congress and President Joe Biden's administration.

He blamed the nation's record inflation and gas prices on Democrats' spending, and in particular, the federal stimulus package passed shortly after Biden took office. He criticized the United States' withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. He criticized the Inflation Reduction Act, which he voted against, for increasing the Internal Revenue Service's budget and including billions for climate change proposals.

The Inflation Reduction Act, he said, did nothing to help inflation, and he said he's glad he opposed it.

"The economy was poised for takeoff when we emerged from the global pandemic," Young said in his opening remarks. "All of that was interrupted under Democratic control."

McDermott uses most of his time to attack Young

McDermott took almost every opportunity to criticize Young's time in office, sometimes at the expense of sharing his own policy suggestions.

On inflation, for example, McDermott argued Young was being hypocritical. Young routinely has blamed Democrats for contributing to inflation due to what he called their reckless spending. That's despite Young's own involvement in ushering the \$280 billion CHIPS and Science Act through Congress, a bill some Republicans saw as too pricy.

McDermott mentioned a brief anecdote of a child he met on the campaign trail who pays a high monthly cost for insulin, with the aim of pointing out Young's vote against capping the price of insulin. He insisted Young is beholden to pharmaceutical companies, while McDermott said he answers to Hoosiers. While reiterating his support for abortion rights previously codified by *Roe v. Wade*, he blamed Young for voting to confirm three Supreme Court justices who later helped overturn the precedent.

In one of the more heated moments of the night, he accused Young of having two faces: one that voted to confirm Biden as president, and the other who spoke to rioters on the Capitol steps on Jan. 6.

"I value your opinion. I actually share your concerns," Young said at the time in the viral video. "I share your conviction that President Trump should remain president."

It should be noted Young at the time was explaining why he felt compelled as a U.S. Senator to vote to certify election results in states that Biden had won, regardless of whom he preferred had won, saying he took an oath to defend the Constitution.

During Sunday's debate, Young called McDermott's attacks an "unfortunate presentation" and reiterated his support for the democratic process.

After the debate, McDermott acknowledged his hyperfocus on Young. He said he invited Young to nine debates across the state of Indiana, but instead only had tonight's hour to debate him.

"I get one hour with him, and I had to make the most of it," he said.

Young and McDermott played to their strengths

Throughout the debate, Young and McDermott both played to their strengths, and had clearly prepared for meeting.

McDermott, for example, is not afraid to make political enemies or to be seen as more emotional. He displayed that during the debate through his repeated attacks on Young, seemingly holding nothing back.

McDermott debased what he described as the lavish amount of high-dollar campaign contributions Young receives, including from pharmaceutical companies, which he believes corrupts Young's interests. Young has substantially outtraised McDermott.

"My bosses are the 6.6 million Hoosiers who live in this state," McDermott said.

Meanwhile, Young, often seen as an even-keel policy wonk, focused his answers on policy, typically only reverting to attacking McDermott when the Democratic candidate went on the

offensive, in a tone that sounded more like a disappointed parent rather than an equal on the debate stage.

"It's either because one of my opponents is misinformed or it's because they are intentionally distorting (my record to) Hoosiers," Young said at one point, after being criticized for McDermott for voting against capping the price of insulin. "Either way it doesn't seem to instill trust."

He also made it a point to emphasize his desire to work across the aisle on bipartisan issues, something else he has become known for despite his Republican bona fides.

Young gets attacked from both sides on spending

From the beginning of the debate, Young attempted to focus on how inflation and high gas prices were hurting Hoosiers, blaming the Biden administration for both.

"Hoosiers are hurting because of the out-of-control spending from the Biden-Harris administration, which has catalyzed inflation," Young said in his closing statement, repeating a common refrain from earlier in the night. "They want a fighter who has the courage to stand up to these profligate spending patterns."

But throughout the debate, Young found himself on the defensive on the issue as both Sceniak and McDermott in part blamed him for spending in Washington. Sceniak, in fact, often seemed more closely aligned with McDermott.

"He's the most liberal Republican I've ever met," McDermott said of Young

Young defended his spending during his time in office, saying most of it consisted of necessary early-pandemic relief for businesses, and the CHIPS Act, which he characterized as a bill that will make the country more productive and reduce supply-chain chokeholds. He differentiated this kind of spending from the American Rescue Plan, which he called wasteful.

Sceniak also pointed out that Young, while blaming Democrats for inflation, did not offer his own solutions.

"Unlike the incumbent, I don't just disagree with spending when it's the other side," Sceniak said. "We have to balance the budget, so we can get inflation rates down."

Sceniak is light on specifics

Sceniak was often overshadowed by the other two candidates on the stage, talking much slower, frequently using up less of his allotted time and often delving into less clear policy specifics. He focused his answers on the need for what he called real solutions for Hoosiers.

While he supports the Cato Institute's proposal for allowing individuals to privately invest part of their Social Security money and a repeal of the Jones Act to deregulate the shipping of cargo, his responses to other topical areas were surface level: The United States should come to the table and pursue diplomatic solutions to the war in Ukraine, the United States should seek to

understand better why Americans lack confidence in the electoral system, balance the federal budget and make the drug market more competitive.

Meanwhile, the major party candidates largely attacked each other, instead of the Libertarian candidate on the stage.

McDermott focuses on abortion

Just like he did in his first TV ad released last week, McDermott used the debate to focus on the topic of abortion. It's a common tactic Democrats are deploying around the country as they work to capitalize on anger, especially among women, about the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* this summer. In Indiana, the issue hits close to home: the Republican-dominated Indiana General Assembly passed a near-total abortion ban in a special session this summer.

In both McDermott's opener and closer, he focused on the issue of abortion, criticizing Young for confirming three Supreme Court nominees that went on to overturn the landmark court case. McDermott argued Young turned his back on Hoosier women.

"I promise Hoosier women, when I go to Washington D.C., I'm going to know why I got there. I got there because you voted for me," McDermott said in response to the final question of the night about candidates' priorities. "I will not rest until *Roe v. Wade* is codified and Hoosier women have the protections that they had a couple of months ago."

Young, on the other hand, argued that the recent Supreme Court decision on abortion was the best move for the country, because it allowed for people to weigh in on an important issue. Essentially, Young thinks the issue is best left up to the states.

He also said he isn't on board with South Carolina Republican Lindsey Graham's plan for a national 15-week abortion ban.

"The people of Indiana and 49 other states are in the process consistent with our values and ideas of trying to get this right," Young said. "I'll accept whatever the people of Indiana decide."

Meanwhile, Sceniak, said that "politicians should not act as physicians," but said that whatever law is passed, the focus should be on policies that will reduce abortions authentically, rather than a ban.

The election is Nov. 8.