

Candidates square off in first debate

University students witness candidates' contrasting policies, discuss implications on upcoming debate.

By Anna Lee
Old Gold and Black Reporter

In their first debate as presidential candidates Gov. George W. Bush, a Republican, and Vice President Al Gore highlighted their sharp division on policy issues. Meanwhile the campus experienced a preview of what it will see and hear when the candidates meet in Wait Chapel on Oct 11.

Along with the rest of the national television audience, students gathered Oct. 3 in the Annenberg Forum to watch the debate saw a spirited exchange between two candidates who differ on their plans to reform Medicare and social security and their views on tax cuts, abortion, and energy policy.

The debate was held in the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Mass. on the campus of the University of Massachusetts. Although both candidates professed that education and campaign finance reform were two of their major concerns, the majority of their time and energy was spent in heated discussion of monetary issues.

Gore continually insisted that Bush's plan for tax cuts and social security reform would benefit "the wealthiest one percent." Bush however repeatedly called Gore's facts and figures "fuzzy numbers."

Their conversations about social security were also marked by key distinctive phrases. Gore said, "I will put Medicare and Social Security in a lock box and protect them." In contrast Bush's plan for social security allows people the option of privately investing some of

their social security funds. Bush insisted that his plan would ensure that "a promise made (would) be a promise kept."

Each candidate accused the other of having an insufficient plan to reform Medicare, particularly the issue of prescription drugs for seniors.

Gore said, "Ninety-five percent of all seniors would get no help whatsoever under my opponent's plan for the first four or five years."

Bush combated this when he said, "I guess my answer to that is the man is running on 'MediScare.' It's not what I think and it's not my intentions and not my plan." He added, "I want all seniors to have prescription drugs in Medicare."

Students watching the debate expressed that the policy wrangling in the debate was not a significant aid in deciding their vote. Senior Tish Harrison said, "In the end it's who you trust more and that's really hard to figure out from a debate." Senior Scott Mann added, "I don't think my opinion about who I am going to vote for changed."

The first debate focused the campus community on the presidential debate to be held here on Oct 11. Students viewing the debate indicated that watching it made them reflect on the differences between two debates.

Senior Wes Lotz asked rhetorically, "Is moderator Jim Lehrer likely to cover the same issues more in-depth or is he likely to explore other issues in the Wake Forest Debate?"

Others thought that the new talk show format to be used at the debate held on this campus will affect the exchange of ideas. Speaking about the upcoming debate junior James Curley said, "I think they're going to get stuck on little things."

The Boston debate did show the candidates' unwillingness to limit their discussions on a single issue. Despite a strict



Photo courtesy of Reuters NewServices

Al Gore (left) and George Bush exchange a handshake after sparring for 90 minutes with differing positions on Medicare, Social Security, tax breaks and the budget surplus.

format that limited the time for each candidate's remarks on questions, their first exchange about their Medicare proposals well exceeded the time limits to which they had both agreed.

The debating styles of the two candidates also interested those students who watched the debate. Bush's aggressive style drew different responses from student viewers.

"If Bush keeps harping on the attack issue its going to hurt him in the long run," junior Brendan O'Toole said.

Conversely, senior Scott Mann expressed his pleasure with Bush's style. "I do think that Bush stepped it up a few notches as far as being aggressive and I was impressed by that," he said.

Harrison failed to be impressed by either candidate. "Both of them came

across as very childish," she said.

Several members of the local media attended the viewing of the debate and interviewed students. In many ways this was a preview of the larger media invasion that will begin in the days leading up to the debate.

The Oct. 3 debate also revealed an example of the protests surrounding a debate that could be experienced on this campus.

Supporters of Green Party candidate Ralph Nader and other third party supporters protested outside the Kennedy Library. More than half a dozen people were arrested. Nader, who was given a ticket to an alternate viewing of the debate, was asked to leave the grounds and threatened with arrest if he did not comply.

Schedule of Events

Thursday, Oct. 5

9 p.m.

The Vice Presidential Debate between Dick Cheney and Joe Lieberman will begin at 9 p.m. EST and will last for 90 minutes. The debate will air live from Centre College in Danville, Ky. on major networks. Bernard Shaw will be the moderator for the event.

Friday, Oct. 6

11 a.m., 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Pugh Auditorium
"Conference on Debatable Issues in the Presidential Campaign"

This is the final day of a series of events scheduled by the politics department. All of the sessions are moderated by a member of the faculty from the politics department. Each session will address a different issue of importance to presidential campaigns.

Sunday, Oct. 8

7 p.m. Annenburg Forum, Carswell Hall

The university debate team will stage a mock debate with members of the team taking the candidates' stands on various campaign issues. The event will be attended by nationally prominent journalists from *Time* magazine and other publications.

Monday, Oct. 9

6-8 p.m. Worrell 1312

"Presidential Election Symposium"

Jack Ford, a co-anchor of ABC's "20/20," will be the moderator of this event which is being hosted by the Wake Forest School of Law. Four nationally recognized experts on Constitutional law will discuss issues important to the presidential campaign.

Tuesday, Oct. 10

7 p.m. Annenburg Forum

Five authors of books on presidential debates will preview the debate and discuss the history of presidential debates.

Wednesday, Oct. 11

5:30 p.m. Lawrence Joel Veteran's Memorial Coliseum
Rock the Vote concert

Doors open at 5:30 p.m. for the concert featuring Hootie and the Blowfish, Rah Digga and Daniel Cage. Music will begin at 7 p.m. until midnight with a break from 9-10:30 p.m. to watch the debate live from Wait Chapel.

9-10:30 p.m. Wait Chapel
Presidential Debate

Vice President Al Gore and Governor George W. Bush will participate in a "talk show" format debate, the second of three presidential debates. The debate will be moderated by Jim Lehrer.

9-10:30 p.m. Mag Quad

The Presidential Debate will be shown on a large screen to members of the campus community. Students, faculty and staff need to bring their university ID. Alumni, parents emeriti faculty and other guests need to preregister at the Alumni and Friends Web site and bring a photo ID to the event. Viewers are asked to bring blankets to the event, as lawn chairs will not be permitted.