

Dems, GOP View Debate Together

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Columbia's College Democrats and Republicans both convened in the Kraft Center last night to watch the third presidential candidate debate between Texas Governor George W. Bush and Vice President Al Gore.

For Columbia's politically active, the event kicked off with pizza and sodas, and then settled into silent lounging on sofas, chairs, and carpeting for an attentive watching of the debate on the big screen TV. The debate itself opened on a mournful note, as the two candidates gave their respects to Governor of Missouri Mel Carnahan, who was killed in a plane crash Monday night.

In light of this tragedy, there was a moment of silence observed, and both candidates in their opening remarks offered their condolences to the Governor's family. "This debate in a way is a living tribute to Mel Carnahan," Gore said in his opening remarks.

Members of the audience at the debate, which was in a town hall format, then posed their respective questions to the candidates. The two candidates addressed issues from health reform and education budgeting to gun control and affirmative action.

In Kraft, the bipartisan function responded with gusto to the rhetoric and animosity of the debaters. Overwhelmingly Democratic, the room surged with laughter and clapping at much of Bush's commentary. A Democratic student threw a yellow squish ball at one point at the TV screen, when she could no longer restrain herself.

"My level for tolerance with G.W. Bush is very low, very weak," said Jessie Daniels, CC '02, ball-throwing culprit.

The candidates each received two minutes to respond to a specific question, although both soon realized that two minutes was not usually sufficient. For the most part, Gore filled and sometimes exceeded his two-minute time blocks. Bush also filled his blocks, but his answers were short in several responses, and he filled some of the one and a half hours with dead air.

One of those dead spaces came during Bush's response to a question about affirmative action. His response and Gore's counter-response produced more excitement and energy in the crowd than the entire debate did.

Bush said he was against quotas, but did not address the definition of affirmative action and defined his policy as "affirmative access." Gore demanded that Bush clarify his policy on affirmative action, and Bush responded by stating that he gave an adequate and sufficient definition to the woman who had posed the question. Again Gore rebutted--conduct not allowed under the rules of this debate--and asked whether his definition of affirmative action coincided with the Supreme Court's definition. Bush appealed to moderator Jim Lehrer to move on to the next question.

The banter left the Democrats rejoicing and the small crowd of Republicans subdued.

One lone clapper supported Bush through thick and thin. "I support Bush because Gore thinks we are a bunch of idiots, who can't think for themselves," said Justin Homkow, CC '02.

Another Bush supporter was critical of Gore's mode of argument. "Gore was very hostile; it is worrisome that a presidential candidate can be so hostile," said Sandra Capel, SEAS '01 and president of the College Republicans. Jennifer Horton, SEAS '02, agreed. "He should not have used that ad-hominem approach."

The majority of this Kraft convention was composed of Democrats, who appeared at times confused by their Republican counterparts. "It was a win for Gore," said Ishwara Glassman, CC '02 and president of the College Democrats. "Gore demonstrated his leadership skills and knowledge of matters. Bush failed to demonstrate even a knowledge of his own platform--it seems that Gore knows Bush's platform better than Bush."

Other Democrats were similarly phased. "I never thought the Republicans could top Dan Quayle but now I see that they have found a public servant who is a complete idiot, who embarrassed himself and the entire Republican Party," said Ben Bolger, Graduate Student in the Architecture Department.

One supporter of Ralph Nader, the presidential candidate for the Green Party, was upset by the whole debate. Jonathan Manes, CC '03, said, "Both argue the same things, in slightly different ways. Gore may be more intelligent, but Bush is friendlier. But they were not having a debate about the issues, they were rather acting and impressing, seeing who could get more votes."

Sponsored by Hillel, the event was meant to draw different campus groups to Kraft. "We want people to come and see the building, and for all different groups

to feel comfortable using it," said Ariel Simon, GS student, vice president of initiatives and community strategies for Hillel.