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## College of Southern Nevada hosts debate forum

### Students listen to candidates, firm up election decisions

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It is the cynic who sees no point in presidential debates, these pseudo standoffs in which the candidates attack one another.

It is the cynic who watches the politicking, or chooses not to watch, with the belief that none of it will make a difference in the end.

Contrast the cynic with the people who crowded into a college auditorium Wednesday night, who filled overflow rooms and spilled into hallways, who offered earnest opinions and listened to reasoned analysis about what it all means.

Contrast the cynic with the college student, wide-eyed and eager.

"I'm really interested in their ideas," said Tereza Valdez, 18, a student at the College of Southern Nevada.

Valdez was one of what school officials said was 368 people, mostly students, who came to CSN's West Charleston campus Wednesday night to watch the final presidential debate before the Nov. 4 election.

The event was organized by CSN's communications department, and featured post-debate analysis by professors and others.

Valdez said she feels a tremendous responsibility to educate herself before voting for the first time. It is a responsibility she takes on with pride.

"It's one of the things you need to do," she said after the debate was over. "You have to do it."

She said she came into the debate favoring Barack Obama. She left more certain of her support for him.

James McCoy, chairman of CSN's communications department, said they have surveyed students and found that while many know who they will vote for, most do not know why.

"We thought, 'Oh my God. We've got to put something together,'" he said.

McCoy hoped Wednesday night's forum would change that.

Joining professors and a student in deconstructing the debate was Clark County Commissioner Rory Reid, a Democrat representing the Obama campaign. McCoy said organizers asked Republican candidate John McCain's campaign for a representative, but the campaign declined.

Members of the audience in CSN's auditorium listened mostly in silence to a CNN broadcast of the debate, displayed on a large screen. They applauded politely afterward.

Student Christian Magtanong, 18, said he hadn't followed the campaign much before Wednesday. He didn't watch the two previous debates, but caught a few clips on YouTube.

He said this final debate, coming 20 days before the election, "confirmed my decision on who I really wanted."

He said he will vote for Obama, but not because he really likes the Democrat. He just can't stand the Republican.

"I don't like McCain," he said.

Student Matt Watkins doesn't really like McCain either, but he's going to vote for him anyway. Watkins, 33, is afraid of what would happen if Democrats ran things.

They would raise taxes, expand the government, start all kinds of new programs that will grow and grow and not actually do anything good, he said. So he will vote Republican, despite his blah feeling about McCain.

Student Connor Casey, 25, is also a McCain voter. And he also isn't happy about it.

He was a Marine, serving from 2001 to 2005. He spent half of 2003 in Iraq. He likes McCain's military background, his sense of duty and honor, but not much else.

But he worries that Obama's superior public speaking skills, his youthful vigor, his good looks and his "used car salesman" slickness will win people over.

"Basically," Casey said, "it's the lesser of two evils."

That is not what Valdez, the 18-year-old with a sense of responsibility, believes.

She said she likes Obama's ideas. She is excited by him. She came away from Wednesday's debate more certain that she likes his stances on education and on immigration, two issues important to her.

She will feel proud, she said, to cast her first ever vote for him.

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