

Reactions to Ford visit enthusiastic, disappointed

By Joe Starita

Reaction among NU officials to former President Gerald Ford's visit to the NU campuses last week ranged from "very enthusiastic" to "very disappointed."

Ford's visit to the Lincoln and Omaha campuses as a visiting distinguished professor of political science was arranged and financed by the NU Foundation, according to Foundation President Harry Haynie.

Ford's fee was \$15,000, he said. Haynie said, "We were very pleased and feel he added a great deal to the Foundation."

In the classrooms at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Ford was stimulating when relating firsthand experience but "sophomoric" as a political philosopher, Kent Kirwan, chairman of the Dept. of Political Science said.

"If they expected a distinguished scholar in political science, they should have gotten one," Kirwan said. "Ford is not a great philosopher."

"His excellence showed in practical ways. In discussing how Congress helps shape foreign policy, in talking about the Nixon pardon and the state of the Republican Party."

Organizational problems

On the UNL campus, organizational problems and role-playing were blamed for creating a disappointing visit from a man who occupied the nation's highest elective office.

John Comer, associate professor of political science, said "I was very disappointed and think that the graduate students and faculty expected more than his mere physical presence on campus. We didn't get it."

"We wanted Ford to tell us something we can't read in the newspapers."

Instead, Comer said, the former President provided predictable answers with "no inside information on the

inner workings of power."

Political Science Prof. John Peters echoed Comer's criticisms, citing bad planning and a lack of power to change format as reasons why Ford's visit provided "nothing we didn't already know."

Responding to criticism that Ford's campus appearance provided students and faculty members with little insight into the office of the President, Haynie said he believes "the classroom is not the place for major political addresses."

Ford as professor

Comer said Ford wanted to play the role of professor and part of the responsibility for digging out his political side rested with the students and faculty.

When dealing with politicians, Peters said, it's important to have a well-planned format that allows follow-up questions to dig out "the scoop," and to get at informative answers.

"We didn't get that," Peters said, "and that's either because we didn't ask the right questions, or because Ford didn't have anything to say."

Students received praise for their preparation and con-

frontations with Ford.

Students were well prepared, asked tough questions and created a sophisticated exchange, Kirwan said.

"We got a very enthusiastic response from the students," Kirwan said. "They were impressed that he didn't dodge any hard questions, was very candid and down to earth."

Successful day

"All in all, I thought the day was quite successful. I didn't expect a philosophical king and we didn't get one. We got our money's worth because we got what we expected."

Peters said it's an honor to have a former President on campus but added that changes will be made to make Ford's visit to NU this spring more productive.

"The burden is on the students and faculty to get the answers from him. We want more of a response than, 'We saw the president. He came to our class.'"

"I guess you could say I was glad he came, was sorry we didn't utilize him as well as we could have but that we'll improve for the spring."

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