

Candidates field queries in freestyle debate

RICHMOND, Va. — President Bush, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot fielded questions from uncommitted voters Thursday in a civilized, issue-rich debate that ranged from taxes to crime and character. Clinton said he wanted the wealthy to pay their "fair share" in higher taxes, while the president said he was opposed to any tax hikes.

After a brief clash in which Bush renewed his attack on Clinton's anti-war activities in the Vietnam era, the three men were brought up short by a questioner's demand that they "focus on the issues and the programs."

They swiftly took his advice, and proceeded to dissect their disagreements over education, health care, the deficit, trade policy and urban woes.

There were few surprises and surely no knockout punches, and little to

Issues the focus for unprecedented format

suggest that the session would boost Bush in his effort to overtake Clinton by Nov. 3.

The 90-minute debate at the University of Richmond was held under unprecedented ground rules in which the candidates sat on stools instead of standing behind podiums and were free to walk about while taking questions from a 209-member audience of area voters.

Bush used his closing statement to make a swipe at Clinton's proposed tax hike, and to ask the voters to decide who has the "perseverance, the character, the integrity, the maturity" to handle a crisis in the Oval Office.

Perot stuck to his outsider's appeal, saying that if the American people want to solve their problems "and not talk about it, I'm the one

person they ought to consider."

Clinton closed by speaking to the voters in the audience rather than looking into the camera. He criticized the Republicans' "trickle down economics" one final time, then said, "We've got to grow the economy by putting people first, real people like you."

The three men then shook hands and moved into the audience to greet those who had been their questioners.

Early on, the candidates were asked to give their remedies for the huge federal deficit, and Perot said scathingly that neither Republicans nor Democrats were willing to take blame for the nation's huge debt.

"Somewhere out there is an extraterrestrial who's doing this to us," he said.

The tax and deficit discussion be-

gan when one questioner asked whether the three men would agree to not seek re-election if they could not wipe out the deficit in four years.

Clinton replied, "no, and I'll tell you why," explaining that eliminating the deficit would require tax increase and cuts in benefit programs so large that it could "make the economy worse." Instead, he said he would "bring it down by 50 percent and grow the economy." He said he would ask the "wealthy and foreign corporations to pay their fair share."

Bush did not address the question of not seeking re-election. But he swiftly questioned Clinton's proposals.

"I don't see how you can grow the deficit down by raising taxes," he said. He said Clinton wants a \$150 billion tax hike and \$220 billion in

more federal spending. Perot dived into the re-election question by saying he planned to be a one-term president who wouldn't spend one minute of one day worrying about a campaign. He said he wouldn't take any pay for the job.

Bush endorsed term limits that would restrict members of Congress to 12 years in office. Clinton said that would hurt small states and would increase the power of unelected congressional staff members.

Clinton said he supported the so-called Brady bill that called for a waiting period for handgun purchasers and also backed an anti-crime bill that was killed by Republican-led filibuster.

Bush countered that the crime bill backed by Clinton wasn't tough enough. He said he wanted tougher provisions to cut down on court appeals and to strengthen the hand of police officers.

Strange markings may point to U.S. POWs

WASHINGTON — The letters "USA" and "K" etched into a Laotian rice paddy only four years ago could be distress signals from American prisoners of war, according to Senate testimony Thursday.

A top U.S. intelligence official told a Senate committee that the symbols have not been linked to any unaccounted-for POW. But lawmakers who visited the scene and other officials involved in the POW search process said the letters were almost certainly man-made and meant to be seen from the air.

As in past hearings of the Senate Select Committee on POW-MIA Affairs, the testimony sparked dis-

agreement among panel members and between senators and witnesses over the possibility that American POWs may still be alive in Southeast Asia.

"This may be the only evidence that we find that points to specific men," said Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa.

Duane Andrews, the assistant defense secretary for communications and intelligence, testified that the Defense Intelligence Agency, using highly sophisticated and classified photographic techniques, had analyzed several aerial images purporting to show letters, numbers and symbols. DIA rejected most as shadows cast by trees or overly optimistic interpre-

tations of markings on buildings.

In two instances, DIA has concluded that symbols were manmade but has reached no conclusion on what they mean, Andrews said.

— On Jan. 22, 1988, an aerial image was taken of a rice paddy in northern Laos near the village of Sam Neua as part of a Defense Department POW mission. By the time the photo was analyzed the following December and follow-up missions flown, the letters had disappeared. But the photos showed a clearly delineated "USA" symbol carved out of the paddy in letters about 12 feet high and 6 feet wide. Below the "USA" letters was another marking that could be the letter "K," a letter used by Air

Force pilots to communicate with rescuers.

— In May and July of 1973, after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords between the United States and North Vietnam, unmanned air reconnaissance craft photographed what appeared to be the numbers "1973" followed by the letters "TH" or "TA." The symbols were etched in the ground or grass in central Laos.

"The 'USA' and possible 'K' remain unexplained, despite having tasked every means of information collection available through the intelligence community," Andrews said. He said the "1973" symbol "is unexplained and probably will remain so."

Russians give death sentence to murderer

ROSTOV-ON-DON, Russia—For Lydia Khobotova, the death sentence handed down to the world's bloodiest serial killer was not enough.

"Give him to us! Let us have him!" she screamed on Thursday as a judge sentenced Andrei Chikatilo for murdering 52 children and women in a series of cannibalistic sex crimes. Khobotova's 10-year-old son was one of the former schoolteacher's victims.

Chikatilo, a 56-year-old grandfather, was convicted Wednesday of killing and mutilating 52 boys, girls and women between 1978 and 1990. Some of the victims were dismembered while they were still alive. Court-appointed psychiatrists had certified Chikatilo as sane.

He kicked a wooden bench in his steel courtroom cage as the sentence was read in this southern Russian city.

"Con man! Swindler!" Chikatilo yelled at Judge Leonid Akubzhanov.

Russian authorities executed the wrong man before arresting Chikatilo in November 1990. They arrested Chikatilo once in 1984, but released him because of inconclusive blood and semen tests.

Under Russian law, the death sentence would be carried out by a single bullet to the back of the head. Both the sentence and the conviction can be appealed. The judge could have sentenced Chikatilo to life in prison.

Although most of the murders took place in and around Rostov, Chikatilo's killing stretched from St. Petersburg in the north to Tashkent in the east.

In some cases, the judge said, Chikatilo gouged out his victims' hearts and stomachs, cut off their fingers and noses, or ate their genitals and the tips of their tongues.

City residents were riveted to the proceedings. Hundreds pushed their way into the courtroom after midday recess to look at Chikatilo's cage.

Antarctic ozone levels lowest ever

WASHINGTON — The lowest level of ozone ever recorded over the South Pole has been detected by instruments carried aloft by balloon, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Thursday.

The agency said that the ozone concentration in a column of air above the pole was measured at 105 Dobson units on Monday.

Samuel Oltmans of NOAA's climate monitoring laboratory at Boulder, Colo., said the previous record low measurement was 120 Dobson units in 1987 and again in 1991.

A Dobson unit is a measure of ozone in a column of atmosphere from the ground up.

The finding continues a trend first detected in September when Oltmans reported that the South Pole ozone depletion started sooner and proceeded faster than any previous year.

Measurements taken by NASA satellite also detected what officials said was a South Pole ozone hole that was about 8.9 million square miles, larger than any previously measured ozone hole.

South Pole ozone levels go down each year and many scientists believe the natural chemical is being destroyed as the result of man-made chemicals, principally chlorofluorocarbons, that are released into the atmosphere.

In the upper atmosphere, ozone forms a protective barrier against the damaging ultraviolet rays of the sun. Without this protection, some scientists have predicted that an increase in UV radiation could lead to damage of some plants and animals. UV radiation is also thought to be a factor in causing human skin cancer.

Chlorofluorocarbons are used as refrigerants and in some industrial

processes, such as cleaning computer chips. Use of the chemical is being phased out in the United States and in many other countries because of its effects on the ozone layer.

NOAA scientists at the South Pole send up instrument-laden balloons every three days to take measurements of ozone in the air above Antarctica.

Oltmans said the balloon measurements on Monday showed there was no ozone between nine and 11 miles above the South Pole and a record level of depletion between seven and nine miles in altitude.

The record low depletion may be the result of a combination of both man-made chemicals and the chemicals remaining aloft from the eruption last year of volcanoes in the Philippines and in Chile, Oltmans said.

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FAX NUMBER 472-1761

The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by phoning 472-1763 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The public also has access to the Publications Board. For information, contact Tom Massey, 488-8761.

Subscription price is \$50 for one year. Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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