

## Critically Thinking Students “Respectfully” Challenge a US Presidential Candidate

OpEd Tim Murphey and Chris  
Stillwell

On June 20<sup>th</sup> Mike Huckabee, a recent candidate for the Republican US 2008 election (and possibly in line for a vice presidential slot with McCain as we write), came to KUIS to give a 50-minute presentation and address some important issues. At the end of his smoothly delivered and often convincing talk, there was time for six or seven questions from university students.

Three questions in particular were provocative and showed that KUIS students, while still respectful, are not just passively accepting of any argument from above. They asked directly about the areas in which Mr. Huckabee seemed most incongruent on his web page and in his speech: US gun control, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the Kyoto Protocol, and same sex marriages.

While we find that Mr. Huckabee had some excellent ideas about the importance of creativity in education and prevention in health care, he seemed to lack a vision concerning gun control and crime prevention. Though he persuasively showed in health issues that prevention of sickness through programs that reduce overeating, under-exercising, and smoking is much

wiser and more economically justified than treatment and cure, he applied a twisted variation on this sort of thinking to gun control, insisting that average citizens need guns to protect themselves from criminals. In his worldview, strong gun laws cause would-be muggers to have second thoughts before attacking anyone, because of the possibility that their victims might have guns of their own. (For a more

lucid and rational argument concerning gun control, see <http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~ZJ5J-GTTL/guns.htm>)

At the beginning of his speech, Mr. Huckabee claimed not to be interested in ‘horizontal’ politics of left-vs.-right, Democrat vs. Republican, liberal vs. conservative. However, when faced with a question about the US’s environmental record, he abandoned that stance in a hurry. At the students’ microphone, Shota Mito noted how the US is among the worst with regard to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and has also failed to sign the Kyoto Protocol, asking how the US might become a leader in helping to reduce global warming and environmental pollution. Here was an opportunity to speak up for all humanity, but Mr. Huckabee resorted to nitpicking over which country currently has the worst record for pollution, followed by a gratuitous shot at Al Gore in reference to alleged increases in his home electric bill. This did not seem to reflect the ‘veritical’ politics of ‘lifting people up’ that Mr. Huckabee had previously extolled. Rather than taking a stand that could have inspired many in the audience, he insisted on the right of the US to do damn well what it pleases.

Finally, a young exchange student was brave enough to question Mr. Huckabee on his stand against same-sex marriage. Here Mr. Huckabee lost his footing on the proverbial slippery slope by putting his foot in his mouth with inappropriate examples and arguments, but he didn’t seem to mind - indeed, he seemed to take pleasure in baiting his questioner by revisiting his analogy of a man marrying his dog. Again, one wonders who exactly is being lifted up by this sort of politics.

While we found him personable and convincing to a great degree, we regret this power is being put to use in support of poorly thought out consequences with a conventional discourse which seems to be his party’s rather than his own. We fear in

some regards he has become an avatar of his own politics and rhetoric.

We dare say that we were very proud of KUIS students for addressing important issues and respectfully challenging a one-time US presidential candidate. Such critical thinking and activism may well become a trait of KUIS students, and through them the world a better place.