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TWO SETTINGS OFFER MIX OF VIEWS ON DEBATE

Gathering applauds Obama's summation

By T.J. GREANEY of the Tribune's staff

Published Saturday, September 27, 2008

Fewer than 100 people gathered at Kayotea Tea Room & Bistro on Broadway for a debate watch party organized by the Barack Obama campaign.

Though relatively quiet for much of the 90 minutes, the gathering had moments of either laughter or applause. When Obama mocked John McCain for asserting he might not meet with the president of Spain, the crowd jeered. And when Obama ended his speech by speaking of restoring America's standing in the world, many rose to their feet and applauded.

That finale was particularly poignant for Rainer Glaser of Columbia, a German national and "a permanent alien."

"I'm an immigrant. I came to this country because it stood for something," Glaser said. "When he said in the '60s people looked up to America, that's me. I've lived 25 years in Germany and 25 years here, and I can't recognize this country anymore."



Julia Robinson photo

A gathering of people organized by supporters of Barack Obama views the televised debate between Obama and John McCain last night at a watch party at Kayotea Tea Room & Bistro, 912 E. Broadway.

Glaser said he can't vote for Obama but is canvassing door to door to sway others. "I hope to get 100 votes for him," he said.

David Breon, 29, is an Iraq war veteran who said he was seeing red when McCain told the audience he stands up for veterans. Breon, a student, wondered why McCain didn't stand up and vote for a Democratic GI Bill to help veterans pay for college. "He voted against that bill and didn't offer anything in its place," Breon said of the bill that McCain actually opposed but skipped voting on in May. "He just equivocates and misleads the public."

A seasoned observer of presidential debates, Herb Tillema, 66, is a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Missouri. He said the debate between the two candidates on whether Iraq or Afghanistan is the central front in the war on terror is a huge issue.

"I think that's what people have got to choose," Tillema said. "It's not so much about who won the debate, it's a choice for the American people."

Tillema said he is supporting Obama and the plan to pull troops out of Iraq and send two combat brigades to Afghanistan. "Toppling Iraq was not constructive for the so-called war on terror," he said. "In fact, it was undermining it."



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Among the many people wearing Obama shirts and buttons, Brian Newquist, 29, wore a gold Mizzou football shirt. He might have been the only McCain supporter in the room. Newquist said he was impressed with Obama but isn't changing his vote.

"I would say Obama probably looked stronger tonight, but at the same time, I don't think he looked strong enough to convince an undecided voter," he said.

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