

New Tech student describes the downstairs scene at Bill Clinton's visit

By SAM BARTOS
Special to the Register

I'm standing outside the Napa Valley Opera House, a place renowned for showcasing stars of world music and dance performers you may have heard of while listening to "Fresh Air" on NPR.

Today, however, excitement is in the air. A crowd has gathered, and there is an anticipation you could catch on the tip of your tongue. Bill Clinton, the former president, is coming to speak to our humble town on this day.

I am among a few hundred hopefuls lined up around the block and half way up the First Street Bridge to be among the select few that can fit into the Opera House theater.

We've been here since 1 p.m., schmoozing mostly. Today, my classmates and I make small talk outside this theater with an intonation of excitement in our talk that only the impending visit from a politician can bring. Bill Clinton is here, speaking more warmly of his wife than you'd expect of any man who has been married for as long as he has been married.

The line starts moving forwards in heaves, but stops when we are right in front of the door.

My classmates and I wait while there is a long pause. Then the seating continues.

But we get seated downstairs, where the message will be relayed from ... upstairs ... where the speech is being given. Some 400-plus early birds will get to see Bill Clinton's tangible person.

A gentleman in his late 30s, wearing a a green cardigan, says "This is bullcrap," as he is sardined in with the rest of the (relatively) latecomers.

I think to myself: I doubt that this is what the architects of the Napa Valley Opera House intended when they conceived of the schematics for this downstairs, wine-bar portion of the

building.

The speakers begin to relay an applause noise. Naturally, everyone around us in the downstairs area applauded, only later realizing it was a false alarm.

That set up an awkward silence in the downstairs area for a minute or a minute-and-a half.

When the applause was projected a second time, we realized that this was no false alarm. This was the real deal.

Bill Clinton walked out on stage, pumping his fists in the air. He flexed his face violently so that he was not just smiling, but the entire crowd could see his teeth. This of course, is speculation, being that we could not see Bill Clinton. "Hello" the speakers blasted, as a sound engineer ran to correct the misjudgment in sound levels. "Hello."

Bill Clinton was not afraid to touch the issues. However, the man also has a high degree of subtlety, so he stated his introduction and made it clear why he was in our "small, beautiful town."

Cell phones were raised from the bottom up, not in the way that people hold up lighters during a power ballad they enjoy, but to record the words relayed by President Clinton, so they can revisit them someday.

President Clinton continued and addressed the problems with America's need for oil, making some notable arguments. The No Child Left Behind Act was addressed, as he seamlessly connected the problem with Sen. Hillary Clinton's proposed solution.

After about 25 minutes I thought to myself "I get the idea," and exited prematurely.

A few of my peers told me they got to see President Clinton after the speech, and a few even got to lay a hand on him. Although I regret missing such an opportunity, I enjoyed my afternoon with President Clinton's disembodied voice.

(Bartos, 17, is a student at New Technology High School in Napa.)

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