



Students question candidates for mayor

January 17, 2011 (CHICAGO) (WLS) -- The major candidates in the race for mayor of Chicago squared off in their first face-to-face forum Monday. It was hosted by WTTW with questions from students.



It was the first time that Rahm Emanuel agreed to share the stage with his opponents, Carol Moseley Braun, Miguel del Valle and Gery Chico.

The students are part of the Mikva Challenge, a program meant to expose Chicago high school youth to the political process, and from

that perhaps help build the next generation of civic leaders. So to that end, the students questioned four of the top mayoral candidates.

Many of the high schoolers said they wanted specifics, but found that with four candidates, each eager to talk, many questions, and time constraints that are part of any forum, it was tough to zero in. What they did get was a snapshot.

"We should have merit pay so the best teachers are rewarded for doing well," said Emanuel during the forum.

"Add two hours to the day and add 24 days to the calendar," said Gery Chico.

"You need strong induction and mentoring programs. What that means is that they're in there with master teachers their first few years," Miguel del Valle said.

"If we put an educator at the head of the system and have that educator focus in and make students the priority," said Carol Moseley Braun.

On Tuesday, Bill Clinton campaigns for Emanuel which has already raised the ire of some African-American politicians. That issue was not important to most of the Mikva Challenge students who left the forum with questions and observations.

"They seem to have a lot to say up there. I just want them to get straight to the point," said student Joshua Escobar.

"This process really gave me an eye opener that they have to somewhat please the people. It's not just what they want to do. They have to answer these questions and live up to these questions as mayor as well," said student Kayla Sharp.

"They want to please everybody and get as many votes as they want. And I think it's a good cause. But I think they underestimate the effect students can have, especially in telling their parents," said student Carlos Ballesteros.

There were no major disagreements during the forum, but after the taping, Chico blasted Emanuel for not participating in debates since the campaign began last fall.

"I think it is a disservice to the citizens of Chicago to not have their candidates show up and relate to them," Chico said. "I think there's an arrogance to be honest. I think he must think he has this in the bag."

Earlier in the day, Emanuel did not participate in the Rainbow PUSH Martin Luther King Day forum on education. Emanuel says he left the PUSH event before the forum began to attend another event where he says his opponents didn't show up.

"I made the choice to keep my commitment to the kids, keep my commitment to that school on the West Side that I accepted a month ago, and I also made it to the breakfast," said Emanuel. "On a day that you talk about education and the importance it is to achieving Martin Luther King's dream, I didn't think anything was more important than to going to the school and being with those kids."

"I don't feel good about it, but those are his choices, his priorities," said Rev. Jesse Jackson, Operation PUSH.

"I think that was a disservice. I think there was a really robust discussion of education, which is one of the most important issues we have," said Gov. Pat Quinn.

"Last night, I attended a forum on the West Side, earlier in the day I was on the South Side. I have been to nine, ten different forums. Emanuel has not been to one," said Del Valle.

There will be three other televised debates.