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'We are different from what we were yesterday'

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January 21, 2009

By **HANK BECKMAN** For The Sun

A different America: That was the feeling Tuesday in Meiley-Swallow Hall at North Central College.

Students -- and a few faculty members -- packed the 240-seat theater to hear a broadcast of Barack Obama taking the oath of office as the nation's 44th president.

"What it means to be an American changed today," history professor Ann Durkin Keating said. "We are different from what we were yesterday."

Keating was part of a faculty group, including colleagues Jennifer Jackson and Steve Caliendo, who joined NCC President Harold Wilde in a panel discussion following the swearing-in ceremony.

But the day belonged to Obama.

The new president used his inaugural speech to acknowledge the challenges facing America, noting the deep recession and two foreign wars the country is involved in. But he promised that "the challenges would be met," and honored the sacrifices of the nation's armed forces throughout history and called for the nation to set aside ideology and partisanship.

Obama called for an approach to problem-solving that asked not whether the government was too big or small, but if particular programs were working.

While he expressed no doubt that our enemies would be defeated, he also held out an olive branch to those who would take it, saying we would "extend out a hand if you will unclench your fist."

Many professors excused their students from class to attend the viewing of the speech, and the college set up several common areas on the campus where the speech was broadcast.

While the crowd in Meiley-Swallow had supporters of both political parties, there was a definite Democratic flavor in the air.

The first cheers could be heard as Bill and Hillary Clinton appeared on the giant television screen and continued for several other Democratic notables, such as incoming Vice President Joe Biden. Obama's first appearance electrified the room and the applause for his taking the oath of office and beginning his speech got even louder.

A few people sat on their hands for the new president's speech, but the room erupted in applause on 10 occasions, especially when he said, "We are ready to lead once more."

By contrast, no cheers greeted outgoing President Bush or any other Republican. There was a smattering of laughter at the way conservative Pastor Rick Warren pronounced the name of Obama's daughter, Sasha.

After the inaugural address, the panel gave its assessment of the speech.

Wilde, himself a former Democratic speechwriter, gave the new chief executive a thumbs-up.

Saying a good inaugural had to set a tone, Wilde said Obama's theme was "asking us to step up to the plate."

Caliendo, who teaches political science, said there were a small number of people who were appalled at the election, some who were frustrated at the focus on Obama's race and the largest group, who were "moved."

Two students majoring in history sat together and gave their impression of the inaugural speech.

"It's a big day," said senior Luke Kerber, who acknowledged supporting John McCain in the election. "I'm a history major who is seeing history in the making."

His friend, senior Dina Tufo, enthusiastically supported Obama and echoed Kerber's sentiments. "It's a momentous moment for the college and the community to come together and see history being made," she said.

Greg Jackson, president of the Black Student Association, thought Obama's speech sounded just right.

"He addressed all the issues as far as diversity and what we are trying to accomplish," Jackson said.

Erica McCauley is a sophomore majoring in global studies and French who was overcome with emotion.

"It's very hard to contain myself and stop from crying," she said.

The panel passed the microphone around to let all the attendees have a chance to speak to the audience.

"It's a great day to be American," one male student said. Another, a black female, spoke emotionally of speaking to her grandmother the night before. "It's not about politics, but about how far we've come."