Two sides square off over Coke

SHAKING IT UP: Richardson urges students to vote Yes, but Ogomski and No-side volunteer Angelica Quejada say "nay."

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Along with the executive positions, students will be voting on a plebiscite on the campaign fee the University and Students’ Union’s exclusive contract with Coca-Cola. Brook Richardson, a third-year political science student, is the campaign manager for the Yes side, while fifth-year political science major, Denise Ogomski, heads up the No campaign.

1. What benefit would the student body see by voting for your side?

Brook Richardson: If we win Yes, this fee will go to Mac’s and buy you your own drink or go to a water fountain, but really, I don’t know if that’s good enough. We’re not saying “Ban Coca-Cola,” but we’re saying provide choice to people. Coke’s still going to be on campus, but we think there are better alternatives, and we think there are a lot of intelligent people on campus who think this is a better way to provide this choice to people on campus.

The ethical purchasing policy that the Students’ Union has is something that benefits everybody and they’re obviously not following it. So they’re not following it and they’re also obligated to stop the contract with a company like Coke, because it doesn’t meet even the least ethical standards.

2. Given the campus response to the Coke debate, it seems to be a controversial issue among students. Why do you think there are such strong feelings on both sides of the Coca-Cola issue?

Richardson: I think that the thing that causes the problem on both sides is that there are a lot of myths about the deal, and that people are basically buying into this because of the media.

Because even if Coca-Cola does have questionable ethics, and I think this is the strongest that the No-side has been able to put out there, that they are questionable—the option of getting an average of $554,000 a year directly into scholarships and bursaries and student services. So I think the benefit is very clear. Especially when affordability of education is such an issue.

Denise Ogomski: First of all, you get choice at the University. The Yes side says “we can go to Mac’s” and “buy your own drink or go to a water fountain,” but really, I don’t know if that’s good enough. We’re not saying “Ban Coca-Cola,” but we’re saying provide choice to people. Coke’s still going to be on campus, but we think there are better alternatives, and we think there are a lot of intelligent people on campus who think this is a better way to provide this choice to people on campus.

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3. Given the fines that have been levied for the No-side (amounting to $1,000), some have expressed concern that it may have affected the validity of this vote. Is your response to that?

Richardson: I don’t think that that’s going to affect the validity of the vote. When it comes down to it, there are so many different ways of getting the message out there; different students from different clubs are doing it. I don’t think that the No-side having a very substantially decreased campaign budget is really going to affect their ability to get their message out there if they choose to really push it. It’s good that we have two sides in this referendum. I mean, if you look at the O-Press, there’s only one side. I think that’s a problem when these things occur, because you don’t have anyone running for office, you just have people picking a side. Money is only one of the issues, because I don’t even think the whole campaign budget has been cut. There are so many other things that people are doing. Classroom speaking, telling their kids on campus, producing very cheap materials, which are easily done by anyone.

4. What do you think is the future machinery agreements on Canadian campuses?

Richardson: First of all, who do you want to be business partners with, and that’s probably what’s on the mind of a lot of universities and colleges across the country. If this was a decision on if we were choosing whether we want Coke on campus or not, I think that this whole plebiscite would be playing out very differently, because I think that’s a different issue entirely. That’s not the choice here. I think the other choice that has to be made here by college and university is that, because government funding seems to be going down and down every year, there’s the need to explore alternative funding methods and alternative ways of actually getting results for students. Because, I think it’s okay to pick up the same one for years, but if you’re not accomplishing anything for students, that’s a problem.

Ogomski: I can’t predict the future, but I think that people are smart. People in interviews are smart. They’re going to realize that this isn’t a good idea. I don’t know what they’re going to choose as an alternative, but I think that they are going to realize that these exclusivity contracts aren’t right, and they are going to find their own alternatives by finding out what they need, what works best for them. Not what works here for a large company like Coke, that violates human rights and environmental standards. So, I think there is going to be a reaction to these, because it’s already started; it’s happened in the United States already, so I think Canadian campuses are going to follow suit.

5. You have five minutes to write a hall talk explaining why students should vote for your side.

Richardson: Do the program.

Ogomski: Stick to the issue.

The following positions are available:

- Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics
  - 2 SU Seats
  - 2 GFC Seats
- Arts
  - 8 SU Seats
  - 8 GFC Seats
- Business
  - 3 SU Seats
  - 3 GFC Seats
- Education
  - 4 SU Seats
  - 4 GFC Seats
- Engineering
  - 5 SU Seats
  - 4 GFC Seats
- Law
  - 1 SU Seat
  - 1 GFC Seat
- Medicine and Dentistry
  - 1 SU Seat
  - 2 GFC Seats
- Native Studies
  - 1 SU Seat
  - 1 GFC Seat
- Nursing
  - 2 SU Seats
  - 2 GFC Seats
- Physical Education and Recreation
  - 1 SU Seat
  - 1 GFC Seat
- Pharmacy
  - 1 SU Seat
  - 1 GFC Seat
- Faculte St. Jean
  - 1 SU Seat
  - 1 GFC Seat
- Science
  - 9 SU Seats
  - 8 GFC Seats

To download a Nomination Package or find out more about these positions, please visit the Elections Website or the Chief Returning Officer (Room 3 - 92K SUB).

THE NOMINATION DEADLINE IS TUESDAY, MARCH 13 @ 17:00