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## Brother Rice alums, students debate state's future

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*The Detroit News*

Bloomfield Hills — Brother Rice High School students from past and present squared off Friday in a debate over Michigan's future.

Nearly 700 students filed into the school's orange-and-black bedecked gymnasium along with parents, alumni and their wives to watch "The Great Debate." Four students and four alumni — all lawyers — offered competing visions of "How to Save Michigan," debating taxes, health care, education and jobs.

"Dateline NBC" correspondent and alumnus Chris Hansen moderated the event, the first of its kind hosted by the all-male Catholic institution, which kicked off its 50th anniversary weekend celebration.

"We're trying to show the world all the things we're good at," said the school's president, John Birney.

Audience members voted with their cell phones to determine the winners. They chose the students' proposals for taxes and jobs. But the alumni topped their future colleagues on health care and education.

"Michigan's problems have become the entire country's," said senior Evan Hebert of Bloomfield Hills, who argued against increased taxes. "Students need to care about these issues, because a lot of people coming out of this school are going to be able to change things."

Louis Brown, a Maryland lobbyist who graduated in 1999, said it's important for high school students to see Michigan as a place they can return to after college. He said the state's assets include strong family values, a good quality of life and a tradition of hard work and innovation.

"People here approach their jobs and their families with a 'roll up my sleeves' mentality," said Brown, who won the education debate.

He said his time at Brother Rice contributed to his development in "mind, body and spirit."

Nearly all graduates of Brother Rice, which was established in 1960 by the Congregation of Christian Brothers of Ireland, earn post-secondary and graduate or professional degrees. Many have become business, political and community leaders, including John Rakolta Jr., chairman and CEO of the commercial construction company Walbridge; Gerald McGowan, former U.S. ambassador to Portugal, and local radio personality Ken Calvert.

Senior Michael Crowe of Bingham Farms didn't win the health care debate Friday, but he hushed the crowd when he opened his passionate speech by asking, "Are you aware that there are people who live 15 minutes away from where we are now with no health insurance?" He said health care in Michigan is a moral issue.

"We have a responsibility to the least of our brothers and to the least of our sisters," Crowe said.

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