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IWU German Exchange Student Discusses the U.S. Election on Berlin Radio

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IWU German Exchange Student Discusses the U.S. Election on Berlin Radio

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—While many Americans are immersing themselves in political commentary and campaign news in the final countdown before the presidential election, so are the citizens of other nations throughout the world. More than ever, the 2004 election will determine the course of international affairs, and people near and far are tuning in to the American political process. Helping Europeans to be informed is Sebastian Schoebel, an Illinois Wesleyan exchange student from Berlin who has a time slot on Berlin Radio 91.4 to discuss American political culture and the upcoming election.

The commercial station invited Schoebel, who interned there a year ago, to provide transatlantic commentary when it learned he was to study abroad in America. Berlin Radio, which has an audience of 117,000 listeners per hour, considers Schoebel's input especially valuable to the German public. Since there are already professional political commentators who report on the election, Schoebel devotes his time to explaining the complex issues in simple terms. "Most Americans know what a swing state is. Most Germans do not. This is the type of detail I explain," said Schoebel.

Secondly, Schoebel, who is experiencing America firsthand by living and studying in the Midwest, is more of an authority on current American culture than Germans across the Atlantic who have to rely on the news media to get their information. "If you only rely on the big city you get a wrong picture of the U.S.," he said. "Most of the nation is not urban. Most of the votes come from the rural backyard, and this is the region and culture Europeans don't really understand."

Schoebel also points out the differences between how a campaign is run in America and how one is run in Germany. "There's not as much advertising in political campaigns in Germany. The election process is much less flashy with much less excitement. We don't have bumper stickers," said Schoebel.

Schoebel has also addressed what many Germans view as the emotionalism of Americans. From a German perspective, he claims, Americans should learn to look at facts and issues instead of passing judgment based on emotion. "It isn't easy to persuade a German by a button or a box of mints," he said. "The agenda is what's important. Germans are more inclined to stay in a detached frame of mind about elections."