



Let's Talk, Intelligently!

A new forum offers Americans the chance for spirited, rational, and polite debates.

By Judith Miller

ROBERT ROSENKRANZ WAS WORRIED ABOUT America. Why was the nation's civil discourse becoming so uncivil, the conservative, New York insurance executive and philanthropist wondered. Why were American politics becoming so bitter and partisan?

Was there a way to persuade Americans not just to talk to one another, but also to listen? And possibly even change their minds?

The questions Rosenkranz asked his wife and friends six years ago have given birth to an unusual brainchild — a series of Oxford-style debates imported from Great Britain called "Intelligence Squared U.S."

Initially launched with a series of eight debates at the Asia Society, whose auditorium seats under 300, IQ2US now stages 10 debates per season (soon to be 12) and routinely sells out New York University's Skirball Center, which seats 800.

IQ2US has also begun taking its intellectual show on the road. Last June, IQ2US staged its first debate in Washington, D.C. to a sell-out crowd, as four of the nation's top cyberexperts debated the motion:

"The Cyber War Threat Has Been Grossly Exaggerated." (The team rejecting the motion carried the day.) On Oct. 12, IQ2US is partnering with Chicago Ideas Week for a debate on an unusual theme: "Too Many Kids Go to College." Dana Wolfe, an ABC veteran who has produced the initiative since its inception, says that a college campus tour is also being planned.

"There seems to be a healthy appetite for what we're offering," says Rosenkranz, whose foundation picks up much of the cost — about two-thirds — of the series, since ticket sales cover only 15 percent of the total cost.

The wide-ranging debates, superbly orchestrated by John Donvan of ABC News' *Nightline*, have focused on

NONPARTISAN DEBATE
Rosenkranz, inset,
started IQ2US debates
(Skirball Center
pictured).



controversies in domestic and foreign policy, and searing social and cultural topics.

Some of the liveliest evenings have explored propositions such as "Global Warming Is Not a Crisis," in which mega-author Michael Crichton managed to convince a majority in the audience that his skepticism about the motion was justified; "The U.S. Should Step Back from Its Special Relationship with Israel"; and "Good Riddance to the Main Stream Media," in which a majority agreed that disposing of the leading newspapers and broadcast networks would be unwise.

What pleases Rosenkranz the most is the extent to which audiences appear to change their minds in response to the debates. "I always vote neutral going in," he says. "I vote for the team that does the best job defending or attacking the motion."

That is the point of IQ2US, after all. □

A NATIONAL HUNGER FOR NONPARTISAN DISCUSSION

► NOW ENTERING ITS fifth year with 50 debates under its belt, Intelligence Squared U.S., or IQ2US, is attracting a national audience among Americans hungry for lively, provocative, but nonpartisan debate about some of the most pressing

issues of the day.

Since the first debate in September 2006, the number of National Public Radio stations carrying the debates has grown from 40 to 250; Bloomberg and BBC TV now broadcast the evening sessions to growing audiences. □



Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter **Judith Miller**, formerly of *The New York Times*, is currently an adjunct fellow at the Manhattan Institute and an expert on national security issues.