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Bill Nye visits campus

By Ryan Kamphuis
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Every so often, the students of IIT get to rub shoulders with fame. Whether it be with bands like We the Kings and Reel Big Fish, astronomer Phil Plait, or comedians like Nice Peter and Dave Coulier, IIT students are able to meet famous people almost every semester. But this Friday at 7:00 p.m. in the Hermann Hall Auditorium, IIT students will get to meet a celebrity that almost every child of the 90s knows and adores: Bill Nye the Science Guy.

The well-known host of *Bill Nye the Science Guy* that aired on PBS between 1993 and 1998 now travels the globe, advocating for greater scientific literacy and talking about scientific issues such as climate change.

Nye was not always the science advocate that we all know. Nye grew up on the East coast where he attended Cornell University, graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering; this lead to him being hired by Boeing as an engineer. While there, Nye designed a hydraulic resonance tube that is still in use on the 747. While working at Boeing, Nye began to do stand-up comedy. He enjoyed this so much that he eventually left Boeing to pursue comedy full time. This lead to him becoming a writer and performer on the sketch comedy show *Almost Live*, Seattle's take on *Saturday Night Live*. While on *Almost Live*, Nye created the character of "Bill Nye the Science Guy." It quickly became one of the most popular segments on *Almost Live*.

Nye's success on *Almost Live* led to him creating the TV show he is most well-known for, *Bill Nye the Science Guy*. After the end of that show, Nye went on to create many other shows such as *The Eyes of Nye*, *The 100 Greatest Discoveries*, and *Stuff Happens*.

In preparation for Nye's upcoming

visit to IIT, TechNews had the opportunity to sit down with him and talk about science, his time on *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, and more.

TechNews: You've done a lot of different things in your life. What made you decide to become the Science Guy instead of staying at Boeing or doing stand-up comedy?

Bill Nye: I was working at another, very closely related company at that time in Redmond, Washington. And the people I worked for were very concerned about making a profit every calendar quarter. I thought that was not appropriate when you are working to create complex navigational systems for airplanes. So I made a conscious decision to focus on kids so that the future could be affected. I lived through the Ford Pinto and the Chevy Vega, perhaps the worst of our automotive engineering in many respects, and I was deeply troubled by that, so I set out to change the world!

TN: Many of today's college students first were exposed to Science through *Bill Nye the Science Guy* on PBS. Because of this, many students here at IIT mention you as one of their inspirations to go into science and engineering. Looking back, is this something you anticipated when you were starting out? And how does it feel to know that you helped push so many individuals towards the STEM fields?

Nye: I had a document I gave everyone who came to work on the show, and that says that the first objective of the show was to change the world. And I wasn't kidding, that's really what I hoped to do. And, frankly, I thought it would take many, many years. So we'll see! I say all the time, that I try to get it. I try to understand the effect of the Science Guy show. And I'm not sure I do. So many of you come up to me and thank me for all I do, and it's very gratifying. It feels very great, and I'm hopeful that it continues.

TN: How many bow ties do you own?

Nye: A couple hundred. I'm well into my fifties, and they don't wear out! Once you get

one, they don't fall apart. It's hard to wear out a bow tie. They accumulate, and people give them to you. And you do a job where they give you a custom one, and they all add up. And it's pretty cool! Of all the things to collect, it's a pretty benign collection – they don't take up much room. And now, as you realize, it's become a signature. I can't change it now!

TN: Lately, you have been speaking all over the country and on TV advocating for greater scientific understanding, education, and literacy. What do you think is one of the greatest things threatening this country regarding scientific literacy?

Nye: The systematic denial of climate change. Where very influential and powerful people have, successfully to a large extent, confused us by interchanging, or the modern word everyone likes, conflating, the idea of scientific uncertainty with the idea of skepticism or doubt. When you say "plus or minus three percent", that's not the same as "it doesn't exist" or "it's not a real phenomenon." This is a terrible thing not just for science or scientists or for the U.S., it's a terrible thing for the world. For me, the sooner we can squelch those voices or, better yet, turn them around -- there's no one more passionate about not smoking than someone who has just quit. It would be great if we could get the deniers to become passionate advocates for this. It's very troubling. And now we have Hurricane Sandy, and I hope it really awakens people. The economic impact of Sandy is enormous, let alone the human cost is so enormous. All caused by a hurricane that was, and continues to be, exacerbated by climate change.

TN: What's your favorite scientific principle to share with others?

Nye: Maybe it's that water takes up less room as a liquid than it does as a gas, if you have to pick one, but who doesn't love mass and acceleration? Who doesn't like the second law of thermodynamics? Who doesn't love relativity?

It's hard to pick just one!

TN: Do you have a laboratory in your house?

Nye: Well, I have a workshop and a kitchen, so I have two!

TN: What do you think the most important thing we can do to improve science education in the U.S.?

Nye: We need to get people interested and excited about algebra earlier in school and make sure that everyone gets it. It turns out algebra is this turning point. If you don't embrace algebra, then you have trouble thinking abstractly about all sorts of things. That's where I'd like to apply some pressure. People also need to take time to embrace vectors, and realize that when you change direction you are changing a vector. It's also very important that everyone learn and understand the fundamental theorem of calculus.

TN: What is one piece of advice you would give to the aspiring scientist or engineer?

Nye: Learn to write. Make sure you learn to write succinctly and clearly, and in an interesting way that people want to read. Learning to write is hard, it's work. But put in the hours. That's my advice. You will find that you end up doing so much writing, so much has to be communicated, so much has to be specified, so much has to be spelled out, that those who don't know learn to write well have a lot more trouble getting supporters. It's a lot harder to influence people if you don't write well.

Bill Nye is going to be speaking this Friday, November 9, in the Hermann Hall Auditorium. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. and he will be taking the stage at 7:00 p.m.

The event is open to all IIT, Vandercook, and Shimer students. It is important to note that a student ID is required to get in. Nye is a fascinating guy, and his presentation is sure to delight both those who grew up watching his show and those who have never heard of him.

Rock the Vote: Election Day today

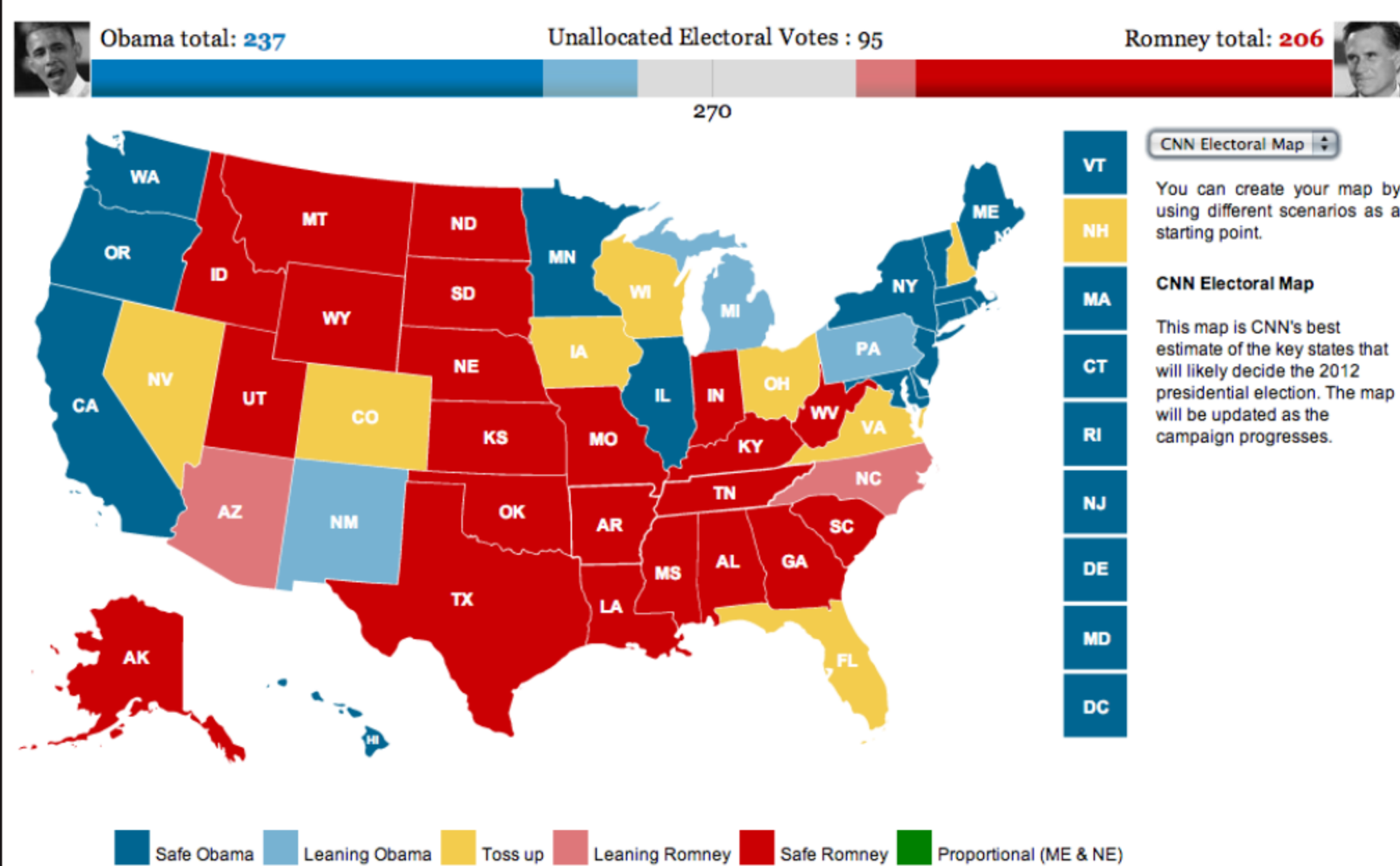
Predicted Polls

(via CNN.com at publication)

Barack Obama
237
electoral votes

Mitt Romney
206
electoral votes

Unalloted votes: 95
Needed for victory: 270



Polling Place

For students who are registered to vote in Chicago, using their IIT address your polling place is:

Lincoln Perry Senior Building,
Community Room
3245 S. Prairie Ave.
Chicago IL, 60613

Illinois does not offer on-site registration. You must be registered 27 days prior to an election.

(via Illinois State Board of Elections)

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