

Representatives stump for presidential candidates

Sara Gretina / Associate News Editor

Published: Monday, October 27, 2008

Updated: Monday, October 27, 2008

With only a week left until the election, representatives for Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barack Obama visited the University last night to discuss key topics surrounding the presidential race.

President of Building the New Majority Bill Spadea represented the Republican point-of view and Edison Mayor Jun Choi the democratic. The event, structured as a formal debate with a question-and-answer period, was hosted by the University's Eagleton Institute of Politics.

"We want to encourage, especially students, to exercise their franchise, to exercise their right to vote in this democracy, and then to exercise it in a way that reflects a well-informed educated point-of-view," said Ruth Mandel, the director of the Institute.

The representatives spoke on behalf of the candidates as volunteers for their respective nominee. Co-sponsored by the Centurion, Empower Our Neighborhoods, New Jersey Public Interest and Research Group Student Chapters and more, the surrogates actively engaged in a series of questions including budget cuts, taxes and minimum wage, foreign policy, energy and health care.

As far as budget cuts — a topic that greatly affects the University as a public institution — Spadea focused on the idea that more spending does not guarantee quality and a reduced spending budget, whereas Choi emphasized intelligent spending in programs that will progressively improve the country, like infrastructure and new energy sources.

Spadea said McCain would agree with spending in new energy sources.

"We need a significant investment in alternative energy resources," Spadea said. "John McCain's plan, labeled the Lexington Project, is not only an investment in clean coal but an investment in 45 new nuclear plants across the country. That alone will create 700,000 new, energy related jobs across the country."

The country's growing unemployment and eminent economic failure were a popular topic at the debate. The candidates in discussion of American economic status continually returned to energy, taxes and health care.

Where Spadea argued that McCain's tax plan would help the small businesses to increase return revenue and continue to grow, Choi said Obama's plan will encourage overall economic health and only increase taxes for a small percentage of the population.

Regardless of their differing views, both representatives said they agreed the country was in need of change, especially in renewing their trust with the government.

"There is a crisis of confidence in our country," Choi said. "There is a fundamental level of distrust between the people and the elected representative. These polls are reflective of the real problem we [Americans] have; we have lost confidence in our government. We need a new type of leadership and fundamental change."

But on the process of that change, Spadea said the American public must learn to fix themselves rather than have their problems solved on a silver platter.

"It is like that old adage: If a man is starving, do you teach him to fish or do you give him the fish?" he said. "Obama wants to give you the fish ... [Republicans] want to teach you to fish. And there is the fundamental difference."

Although Mandel said the institute is constantly dedicated to promoting political awareness, during an election year, there are more intense efforts to engage students.

"I think we've seen a change during this election year," she said. "This generation of students is recognizing that ... all of these issues are affecting their lives."

Part of this change is shown in the statewide number of 6,000 students registered to vote through the grassroots organization, RU Voting, Mandel said.

RU Voting director Martha Guarnieri, a Rutgers College junior, said the organization began registering students at the beginning

of the semester and was able to register close to 4,000 students alone on the New Brunswick campus.

“We also help organize events like [tonight’s]. Both the speakers were able to talk directly to the students without blurring our vision [like the media tends to do],” she said. “In the past, the media hasn’t paid attention to students, because we weren’t voting. But today, they are talking to [students] because we are voting. [Students] are going to be make or break for a lot of elections, not just presidential but local elections too.”

Both representatives said they encouraged the student population to exercise their responsibility to vote.

“Certainly, democracy does not work unless we have forums like this that allow us to hash out the issues,” Choi said. “I hope that regardless of your position, you will stay engaged and do something about it. [Our government] does not work unless there is real action behind it.”