

THE DAILY TARGUM

Alumnus sees GOP lean in governor race

Deirdre S. Hopton

Staff Writer

Published: Monday, March 9, 2009

Updated: Monday, March 9, 2009

University alumnus Mike DuHaime brought truth to the clichéd headline “local boy makes good,” as he took a break from his role on the GOP front lines last night in order to visit the Eagleton Institute of Politics and encourage political discourses.

Since his undergraduate days at the University, DuHaime became one of the youngest people ever to manage a presidential campaign, serving as the deputy campaign manager and political director for Sen. John McCain and Gov. Sarah Palin in the 2008 election.

“It was not easy being a Republican at Rutgers 15 years ago, and I’m sure that hasn’t changed much today,” DuHaime said. “I think where we turn around as a party is really going to be at the state level.”

Despite the alleged Democratic leanings of University students, DuHaime is confident that New Jersey is ripe to be swung back into Republican support.

“In New Jersey if you have a generic Republican and a generic Democrat, the Democrat is going to win ... I think Chris [Christie] is someone who can [change] that.”

He said the race for the state governor’s seat is one of great potential.

“I’m a Chris Christie supporter, there’s no doubt about that, but I do think we have a great opportunity this year. The reason being we have a governor who is damaged, clearly ... but also when we have a candidate in New Jersey, they have to be able to go over the divide,” he said.

DuHaime told the Eagleton audience the Republican Party needs to shift gears and get into the present times.

“I think we need to be a bit broader as a Party,” DuHaime said. “If we don’t adapt with the times, we will be unsuccessful.”

He said Republicans must bring younger, fresher faces and perspectives into the Party.

“[The main focus of my talk is] about the challenges facing the Republican Party after last year, and going into this year, and also some of the opportunities. I’m sure there’s going to be a lot of questions and answers. I’ve done this a few times, and that part is always kind of fun,” DuHaime said before his speech.

Eagleton Institute Director Ruth Mandel said she welcomed this type of discussion at the University.

“In my role as director of the Eagleton Institute, I’m really a cheerleader for participation and for a



Mike Shanahan / Staff Photographer

Michael DuHaime, political director for the 2008 McCain campaign, speaks at the Eagleton Institute of Politics yesterday about the Republican Party’s potential to win the governor’s race.

bipartisan system. I think it is good for our democracy to have a pretty healthy bipartisan system ... in my public role, I'm just a partisan bipartisan," she said.

School of Environmental and Biological Sciences first-year student Devin Goldman said he came to the event to verse himself about the New Jersey governor race.

"I'm an independent. I'm just very interested to see what's involved in running a political campaign in today's environment ... I just want to gain a better perspective of the campaign process," he said.

DuHaime was born and bred to enjoy political discussion and debate.

"Some of the most interesting political discussions I've ever had were around the kitchen table, and I'm sure that's often the case," DuHaime said. "My family is sort of all over the map, politically, so it got really interesting at times."

DuHaime, who also served as the executive director for the Rudy Giuliani Presidential Committee and the political director of the Republican National Committee, said he encouraged others to participate in political debate as he has.

DuHaime's early exposure to political diversity helped to prepare him for life as a Republican in a Democrat world.

"I majored in political science and journalism at Rutgers," DuHaime said. "I graduated in 1995, I was a Livingston student. I did my time on College Avenue, I got my B.A. at Rutgers, played hockey, met my wife at Rutgers ... I had a great time here."