

THE DAILY TARGUM

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Panelists encourage students to vote in state election

By Aleks Tzatzev / Associate News Editor | Posted: Friday, November 4, 2011 12:00 am

Pizza and politics brought together University students and a panel of political experts last night for a discussion on why voting matters.

The event, held at the Eagleton Institute of Politics on Douglass campus and the first in a series of forums on student voting, hosted a panel of three non-partisan persons. It allowed students to express their opinions on the upcoming N.J. legislature election on Nov. 8.

“You shouldn’t care at all if you are happy with the way things are,” said Pete McDonough, vice president for Public Affairs at the University. “If you are happy with state funding for higher education ... then you shouldn’t vote. But if you aren’t and you want them to pay attention to you, then you have to vote.”

McDonough, alongside Rick Thigpen, vice president of State Government Affairs at PSEG and Amy Denholtz, senior research analyst at the N.J. Office of Legislative Services, argued that participation in politics is essential to any change made in young people’s lives.

Politicians pay attention to those who participate and the most consistent voters so far have been older generations, McDonough said.

“Given the choice of funding higher [education] and funding programs that people my age think about, it’s going to us, because you folks have demonstrated that you are really loud but you don’t vote,” he said.

Thigpen said politics decide students’ tuition, and if students do not participate in elections, they should not be surprised at some of the results.

“Participation is what is required. If you don’t participate, don’t be unhappy with the results,” he said. “If you don’t participate, I’m not sure if you can complain about anything.”

About 30 students took part in the event, and some expressed concerns over the lack of information provided to young voters.

“No one can say you are not allowed to vote because you didn’t read about the candidates enough,” Denholtz said. “It’s a representative democracy for a reason.”

McDonough said some elections, especially less popular ones such as for the state legislature, were close enough that the youth vote carries importance.

“Local elections are often decided by a half-dozen votes,” he said. “We’ve had gubernatorial races decided by 1,700 votes.”

Eva Grote, a School of Arts and Sciences junior, said young people do not think about what politics can

do for them.

“We are so consumed in our cultural efficacy,” she said. “We subscribe to mainstream media, but we don’t realize that the decisions made right now in government are going to affect us 10, 15 years from now.”

She said not enough young people realize this, and not enough people know how to vote.

“One of the things that obstruct someone’s privilege to utilize their vote is just registering,” she said.

“Perhaps in this new age of technology, we can better assess new ways for voter registration.”

The “Pizza and Politics” series began last night but will continue with more events on participation in politics, said Elizabeth Matto, director of Eagleton’s Youth Political Participation Program.

“The purpose of this is to help Rutgers students understand the role that politics plays in their lives as young people,” she said.

In her experience, she said young people wait until graduation or after to fully participate in politics.

The mantra at Eagleton is “politics matter,” she said.

“Politics matters to everyone,” Matto said.