

Politician encourages youth participation

By Bridgette Bjorlo / Contributing Writer | Posted: Wednesday, March 6, 2013 12:00 am

Former Pennsylvania Rep. Joe Sestak, D-17, is putting a lot of faith in the youth to right the wrongs of the country.

Sestak encouraged students to actively participate in politics and perhaps even run for office someday.

Sestak, who spoke at the Arthur J. Holland Program on Ethics in Government hosted by the Eagleton Institute of Politics yesterday, said he continues to believe the youth will restore America's broken trust in its government by prioritizing accountability and transparency in the political realm.

Around 200 people listened to Sestak speak about ethics in politics as a part of the Eagleton Institute of Politics' "Leadership for a Better America" lecture yesterday on Douglass campus.

The greatest flaw in the U.S. government remains a lack of accountability and credibility, he said. Sestak believes that accountability should be measured by one's deeds, not by one's intentions.

"Don't hold me accountable for what I do, but for what I don't do," he said. "Accountability is what gives you the trust to lead."

Sestak said too often, American leaders fail to act on and acknowledge pressing issues in our society.

He referred to a farmer that he spoke with during the recession. The farmer replied that the economic climate only contributed to his already unfortunate circumstance. Sestak said this reflected an absence of leadership on Capitol Hill.

Sestak served as an admiral in the U.S. Navy for 31 years and rose to the rank of three-star Admiral, said John Weingart, director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics.

Under the Clinton administration, Sestak was the director for Defense on the National Security Council, he said. Coupled with his naval career, Sestak pursued a future in politics. He won a seat in Pennsylvania's 7th congressional district in 2006 and 2008.

Sestak currently teaches courses involving ethics and leadership in politics and government at the Carnegie Mellon University, Weingart said.

"It is important that people trust their government," Weingart said. "As much as possible, politicians should be doing their best to do what is best for their country, or district, and not compromise their goals for their own self-interests."

In the military, Sestak said accountability is transparent.

"We depend as much on the mechanic who built the plane as the pilot flying it into combat," he said.

The whole country could learn from the military's emphasis on community and less focus on individuality, he said.

Despite his concerns with the present state of the nation, Sestak said he remains optimistic for the future and a lot of his confidence rests in the promise of the youth.

"I'm a big believer in the youth of America," Sestak said. "I've lived and worked with them. I went to war with them, and I learned leadership through them."

The event was a part of the Arthur J. Holland Program on Ethics in Government, which began in 1989 and acts as a tribute to Arthur J. Holland, a distinguished University alumnus and former mayor of Trenton.

Holland advocated for transparency in government, requiring that under his administration, the public and the press had access to City Hall meetings, Weingart said.

In past years, the Institute has selected people like John Dean, White House Council under the Nixon administration, and former Congressman David Skagg, D-Colo., to serve as guest speakers.

Emmi Morse, a School of Arts and Sciences senior, said she enjoyed his speech.

“Joe Sestak touched on a lot of issues that are very relevant for students and it was very inspirational for this generation,” Morse said.

Part of the Institute’s mission is to demystify politics in government and to promote student participation in the political sphere, Weingart said.

“Coming to any of the Eagleton events and meeting these people in person, make possible a different kind of learning that you can’t get online,” he said.