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Film rallies young voters

Eagleton Institute of Politics screens documentary by 18 year-old director

By: Brian Dwane / Contributing Writer

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As part of a major campaign to galvanize young voters to get to the polls, David Burstein, the 18-year-old director and producer of "18 in '08," screened his documentary and held a post-screening discussion with students, professors and alumni at the Eagleton Institute of Politics on Douglass campus Monday night.

The nonpartisan film focuses on the role of today's youth in politics and features interviews with politicians, commentators, political strategists and students. In addition, Burstein's documentary aims to motivate students to vote in the 2008 election because what happens in Washington today will affect them for years to come.

The film is a call to action for young voters to take their future into their own hands by participating with and engaging in democracy. This begins by registering, getting informed and voting, Burstein said.

"The idea for the documentary came about in 2004 when I was following the presidential election. I thought about what I could do to increase the youth voter turnout. I thought it would be great to work on a film to speak on their level," Burstein said. "We tried to speak to our peers, legitimize their frustration and concerns about the political process and say, 'Dude, I totally get it.'"

"David created a nonpartisan documentary that acts as a catalyst to get youth involved across the country," said Elizabeth Matto, a staff member at Eagleton. "David is linking a voter mobilization effort with the film. He has screened his film at about 20 campuses across the country so far."

"I thought it was fabulous. It was nonpartisan and thought provoking. I feel that the best message is to deliver by a young person," Matto said. "The same holds true for voter-mobilization. In the film, a peer shows students why voting matters and how they can get involved."

Burstein, who will be turning 19 next week, said he wanted to analyze the issue of voting from a youth perspective.

"In 2008, about 29 million will be able to vote between the ages of 18 and 24," he said.

Burstein said issues such as Medicare and social security get a lot of attention on Capitol Hill because senior citizens are a reliable voting block. Issues such as tuition rarely get brought up because young people are not a reliable voting block.

"If we start voting more, candidates will start to pay more attention to us," Burstein said. "Young people need to answer the call if they want a candidate to reach out to them."

Politicians are beginning to show attempts to reach out to the youth by their use of "new media," or mediums like MySpace, Facebook and YouTube, he said.

Student groups at the University are answering the call, including the League of Women Voters, New Jersey Public Interest and Research Group Student Chapters, RU Voting and RU Youth Political Participation Program.

"I think the film is great. It couples what we're trying to do by creating youth voting as a social movement," said Shannon Lange, a full-time campus organizer for NJPIRG.

The NJPIRG student chapter at the University is holding an upcoming registration blitz, Lange said. The goal of the blitz is to register 2,200 voters.

The blitz consists of NJPIRG volunteers going around campus with clipboards and voter registration forms registering students to vote.

The organization is also holding events with music and games Tuesday outside of the Douglass Campus Center.

The Youth Participation Program at the Eagleton Institute aims to get students more involved in politics by educating about politics through holding forums, disseminating information and holding events, Matto said.

"The film definitely had a lot of good points about getting students to vote and to care about politics," said Jill Gomez, a Rutgers College junior. "I feel that students have so many other things going on that they sometimes get disillusioned about voting, but every vote counts."

"I hope it will spur people to start thinking about politics more often," Matto said.

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