

**THE PRINCETON PACKET**

www.princetonpacket.com

10/24/2006

University panel predicts a volatile election

By: Jocelyn Hanamirian , Special Writer

Diverse group of experts examines midterm possibilities

While voter turnout is expected to be low, seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate are more volatile this year than in the past, experts convened at Princeton University concluded Wednesday.

The panel discussion on the midterm elections featured politics professors, a journalist and local political leaders.

T.R. Reid, the Rocky Mountain Bureau chief of The Washington Post, who has covered Congress, national politics and four political elections, identified this year's voting atmosphere as unique.

"It's been true on the congressional level for many years that the system was fixed," Mr. Reid said, citing how incumbent protection devices prevented congressional turnover. "This year, that's not true. This year, the angst in our country is so great that the incumbent protection devices aren't strong enough to hold the tide. There's a very good chance that either one or both houses will switch party control."

The New Jersey senatorial race between Republican state Sen. Thomas Kean Jr. and incumbent Democratic Sen. Robert Menendez is particularly close, said Mark Herr, chairman of the Republican Association of Princeton. Mr. Herr, who supports Sen. Kean, called the race a "once in a generation" opportunity, as New Jersey hasn't elected a Republican senator since 1972.

Panelists cited the importance of turning out on Election Day to the student audience. Politics professor Christopher Achen said that voter turnout in presidential elections is typically around 50 percent, with the percentage dropping to the 40s for midterm elections. This drop is partially caused by the low turnout of young people, he said.

He acknowledged that it is difficult to get people focused on a local race when there is sparse media coverage. New Jersey voters watch television stations based in Philadelphia or New York, and have been hearing about the New York gubernatorial race and the Pennsylvania senatorial race, as well as national issues and colorful scandals — but not local politics, he said.

"The New York Times, seminars in this room, and broad national problems make a very small impression in the mind of the average person," Professor Achen said. "Kitchen table issues tend to dominate."

Bill Spadea, a former Republican candidate for Congress now working in Sen. Kean's campaign, said candidates have moved away from "kitchen table issues" this election.

"This is one election in particular that the people are really paramount to the issues," Mr. Spadea said. "Both parties are in trouble and they're in trouble because they've strayed away from concrete solid issues that people can actually digest and get excited about."

Mr. Reid disagreed that the focus of the upcoming elections is more local or personal, citing big issues, such as immigration and the war in Iraq, as influencing public opinion.

"When people change their mind, everybody in this country tends to make up their mind in the same direction," Mr. Reid said. "If that happens here, against President Bush, Republicans and the war, then you really could have a big move."

©PACKETONLINE News Classifieds Entertainment Business - Princeton and Central New Jersey 2006