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Students get involved in state political organizations

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As the 2008 election approaches, our nation finds itself polarized. Debates within and between parties are charged with energy, and a deeply rooted tension is manifest between those who are satisfied with our current administration, and those who feel that the time has come for a new direction.

Jacob Roundtree '10 and Henry Beck '09 are two Colby students who are not "waiting on the world to change" but instead have already stepped boldly into the world of politics. Members of different parties, they share little ideologically, but both believe that through their involvement in politics can have a real impact on the world around them. Both answered questions for the Echo at the close of the summer as they prepared to begin the new school year.

Roundtree is an active member of the Colby Republicans and the Maine College Republicans. Although he joined both groups only last year at the activities fair, he has quickly advanced within the Maine College Republicans as Editor-in-Chief of their newspaper, the Pachyderm Press. Roundtree has been impressed by the Colby Republicans who are recognized as "one of the strongest grassroots organizations in the state." The 2006 election provided him with an opportunity to become "very active in the organization," handing out literature, or making phone calls three or four days a week.

Although Roundtree has long been interested in politics, he used to "want to shy away" from it as a career choice. He stated that as he has become more involved in College Republican organizations, he has been impressed by the way that his actions "can make a difference in people's lives." Whether or not he continues on to a career in politics, he said that he knows his current political involvement will help him in the future. Roundtree attributed much of his enjoyment of these organization to the way in which they have provided him with opportunities to meet and work with "successful people," as well as allowed him to see his passion for activism translated into real achievements.

For Beck, being a Democrat has long been important to him, his family and even his neighborhood. He is a member of the Colby Democrats, as well as President of the Maine College Democrats. Furthermore, he is a member of the Waterville City Council and he works with the Maine State Legislature. The broad "role of the Maine College Democrats is to build a Democratic community on college campuses," and also to engage college students in the political process, Beck explained. He went on to note that at the end of the day, however, the goal of both Colby Democrats and the Maine College Democrats is "to turn out student voters" and help win elections for Democratic candidates and issues. To this end, in 2006 they "effectively fought a Republican bill that would have stripped the [voting] rights of college students" across the State.

When asked about what issues they currently feel most strongly, both Roundtree and Beck spoke about the communities in which they grew up. Roundtree, a Libertarian who feels that, of the two major parties, the ideology of the Republican Party coincides most closely with his own, spoke passionately about education. He noted that he felt unprepared by his local junior high school, and he wants to "ensure that students in the future don't have to face the same problems."

Beck, a native of Waterville ME, has seen the real impact of the war in Iraq as he has watched many friends leave home to serve in the military, either through enlistment in one of the active armed forces or through call-ups of the National Guard. "Like a lot of young people I feel that it was a mistake to follow [President] George Bush" into Iraq, Beck said. He went on to state that he hopes that the country can find "a policy that is best for those people serving our country overseas today." Other issues Beck highlighted as important to him personally were affordable healthcare and the rights of patients, as well as issues important to working families, such as wage policies.

Looking forward to the coming election, both Roundtree and Beck said that they are excited about the prospect of student involvement in political dialogue. When asked if he had chosen a candidate to support in the 2008 Presidential election, Beck tactfully complimented the three Democratic frontrunners equally. The efforts of the Maine College Democrats, however, will be focused on an election closer to home as they work to support Tom Allen in his bid for a seat in the United States Senate. Roundtree stated that he was most excited about the possible candidacy of either Ron Paul or Newt Gingrich. Regardless of the difference in their political opinions, both Roundtree and Beck encourage Colby students to join them in stepping into an active involvement in the political process.

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