

Jill Biden draws crowd of 500 to Janet Wallace Second Lady's speech encourages student involvement

By ANNA PICKRELL
News Editor

Second Lady Jill Biden and Senator Amy Klobuchar spoke on campus last Friday to tout the youth vote and, for Dr. Biden, to reenergize the young people she knows best.

As a community college professor on the campaign trail, Biden threw no curveballs to the crowd of more than 500 students, staff and faculty: her speech, though brief, outlining the Obama administration's efforts on behalf of higher education and her own desire to see students thrive.

"It's students like you who make me so excited to be in the classroom," Biden said. "And I want you to know that every single day our administration is fighting and working for you ... I want you all to know that the President, the Vice President and the entire administration believe that if we're going to create an economy built to last, we've got to start by making sure that young people like you can get the skills and the knowledge you need to fulfill your potential."

Highlighting doubled Pell Grants and healthcare as examples of successful pro-student milestones in the Obama administration, the Second Lady asserted that she and the administration know what aid students need.

"The biggest issue [facing higher education], I think, is making college affordable for students, and I think that it's what our administration is doing," Biden said in an interview after her speech. "You know, they've doubled the Pell Grants, they've made student loans available and they've made the payback rate lower - they've made it able to be paid back by students no matter what jobs they have."

And if this mention of Washington didn't do it for the audience, Biden also brought her own history into play, mentioning that she, the Vice President, the President and

the First Lady all got through college on financial aid.

"When we look back, we all know that we're where we are today because of the opportunities that we had in our education," she said. "That's why Barack and Joe are working so hard to invest in education and make it easier for young people to afford college."

Getting out the vote

Though the majority of her Minnesota campaign stops were at community colleges, Biden came to Macalester to take advantage of the school's history of civic - and political - engagement. More than anything else, the Second Lady and Senator Klobuchar urged students to get active and get out the vote.

"I know that here at Macalester, you've got a tradition of activism," Biden said. "Every day, President Obama and my husband have got your back. Now, we've got to have theirs. That starts with getting registered, getting out the vote on November sixth and making sure that all of your friends do the same."

MacDems, the student organization hosting the event, is now taking steps to ensure that Biden's words will make the kind of lasting impact she asked for and lead to heightened student activism.

"A lot of people were really glad that the event happened, and I'm hoping that the big turnout will transpire into big turnout at phone banking and canvassing," said MacDems co-chair Rick Beckel '15. "That was the ultimate goal of the kickoff event."

But this doesn't happen just from one big campus event. MacDems is hosting phone banks and canvassing every week between now and election day, and co-chair Zack Avre '14 insists that students have to get on their own feet.

"Even though it was really nice to have Jill Biden and

Amy Klobuchar here, it's not up to them to get the students out," Avre said. "I think it's really up to our organization and organizations across campus who have an invested interest in this election to get their members out. We can't convince everyone to come to a phone bank or canvas; I think people have to get into it themselves."

Biden said she already sees this happening.

"I'm seeing a strong youth turnout," she said to reporters after the event. "This morning I was at a community college, and now Macalester and you saw the crowd here today; there were over 500 students. I think kids are getting energized. They're ready to get out the vote. I'm seeing a very strong student vote ... It's moving in a really positive, strong direction."

Concerning Macalester's involvement, turnout at the event was a good start to what MacDems hopes to see in the coming months. With only 36 hours between confirmation and the actual event, MacDems managed to get the word out in time to fill two levels of the new Janet Wallace music building.

"The campaign gave her to us, but we were responsible for getting the 500 people come," said MacDems co-chair Lucas Asher '15. "And we got lucky because we're 50 days away from an election, and when people hear the Second Lady is coming, it's a big thing."

"I think it was kind of assumed that people would show up. But we made a concerted effort with almost every person we saw to tell them that Jill Biden was coming, even before we officially knew," Avre added.

•apickrel@macalester.edu



Students Adrian Lein '13 and Tsesa Monaghan '13 show their support at the Mac Dems kick-off meeting. The event featured guest speakers Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden and Sen. Amy Klobuchar.



Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden articulates a point during her speech at the Mac Dems kick-off meeting. In her speech, Biden stressed the Obama administration's efforts in support of higher education.



Mac Dems co-chair Zack Avre '14 poses with Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden at the Mac Dems Kick-off event last Friday.



Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden speaks to a packed house in the Lowe Dayton Commons in the new Fine Arts Complex. Photos by Lora Hlavsa '13