“Row the Vote” registers students for Michigan Presidential Primary

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It started out as a casual conversation among friends and then became a project that can help impact both the nomination and the election of presidential candidates.

“I was with a group of 10 friends sitting around and discussing the presidential elections,” said Adam Roth. “We came up with the idea of registering students as a way of getting them to participate. Competition is usually a motivator, so we decided to challenge our great rival, Central Michigan University, in a contest to see who could register the most students.”

Since “Row the Boat” is the Broncos’ cheer, the political activists slightly changed it to “Row the Vote” to get WMU students interested.

“We registered 128 students in a week,” said Roth, who was very delighted with the result at WMU. CMU reported registering 30 students.

“Row the Vote” even registered future WMU students who were taking part in Admissions tours.

“When students come out to vote, good things can happen,” said Roth. “Their say will be very important in this election, but they can’t get their voices heard unless they vote.”

The students also got the attention of local news station WWMT on Feb. 5.

The Western Student Association (WSA) met on Wednesday Feb. 3 to recommend that Western Michigan University to implement an institutionalized process or initiative for student voter registration.

This resolution was proposed by Chianti Lymon, political affairs chair, and Connor Smith, the WSA president.

Since there is currently no centralized voter registration system WMU’s campus, Lymon and Smith felt this creates an obstacle for the student body to vote.

"We wanted Western to be the landmark or footprint for this idea," Lymon said.

Also, under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, publicly supported institutions of higher education have an obligation to educate and provide resources for students as it relates to voter registration.

This resolution passed with a vote of 53-0-2.

Roth believes this year’s presidential elections are extremely important for college students. Concerns at the top of their list include tuition and paying back loans; health care after age 26 when they are no longer under their parents’ plans; finding jobs after graduation that pay well
enough to pay back their college loans; and climate change.

The biomedical major and Lee Honors College student from Kalamazoo got interested in politics through his girlfriend's brother, John Lawrence, who ran as a Green Party candidate for U.S. representative in Michigan’s 6th District in 2014. He started WMU with plans to go into medicine but at least for now he is more interested in politics. After graduation in April, Roth plans to work on Paul Clements campaign for U.S. representative against incumbent Rep. Fred Upton next fall. Clements is a political science professor making his second attempt to unseat Upton.

“Politics tries to improve the lives of people and it needs to attract those who want to improve others' lives,” said Roth. “So it’s important that we get as many people out to vote as possible. If we want change, we have to get those who haven’t participated before out to vote.”