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"Congress to Campus" Hosts Former U.S. Representatives

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"Congress to Campus" Hosts Former U.S. Representatives

On February 25-26, two former members of Congress – one Republican and one Democrat – spent two days on the Dominican campus, meeting with students to share insights and experiences with the goal of encouraging civic literacy and participation among youth.

Former representatives Frank Riggs (R-CA) and Brian Baird (D-WA) are spending February 25-26, at Dominican, talked with students, attended classes, and participated in community forums focused on engaging youth in civic life.

The duo visited Dominican as part of the national Congress to Campus program, created by the United States Association of Former Members of Congress and run in partnership with the Stennis Center for Public Service in order to encourage youth to consider careers in public service.

Riggs is currently seeking the Republican nomination for governor of Arizona. Baird is president of Antioch University Seattle.

With the recent drop in electoral participation by younger voters and Congress at its lowest ebb in public approval, now is a critical time to engage students and provide inspiration that will lead to greater democratic participation, said Alison Howard, assistant professor of political science and chair of [Dominican's Department of Political Science and International Studies](#).

“Given the trend in civic disengagement, and negative view of government and public servants, we must encourage young people to look at government and public service as something that is positive, productive, and necessary for a healthy democratic political system,” Howard said.

“Millennials need be exposed to opportunities to learn how they can become informed and involved with the issues that matter to them. Knowledge and information are two of the most important components for political participation and many young people have very low levels of political knowledge.”

Inspiring the younger generation to become passionate public servants is critically important due to the ‘greying’ of Congress, Howard added.

“With the average age of a member of Congress being around 60 years old, there is a growing need for a new group of people to be interested in public service and in representing their communities,” Howard said. “Our representative democracy needs a new generation of dedicated, talented, and hopeful individuals who will not replace, but will continue the good work of all of those who have dedicated much of their lives to improving the lives of others through public service.”

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Riggs represented California's First Congressional District from 1991-1993 and again from 1995-1999. While in Congress, he served on the House Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education, Training and Life-Long Learning and on the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee. He chaired the House Subcommittee on Early

Childhood, Youth and Families and was the primary sponsor of the 1998 Charter School Expansion Act that provided federal start-up funds to charter schools.

Baird represented Washington's Third Congressional District from 1999-2010. During his time in Congress, he was member of numerous committees, caucuses, and working groups with diverse focuses including science and technology, energy, mental health, foreign policy, and Congressional integrity.

As part of Dominican's Congress to Campus event, President Mary B. Marcy moderated an inter-generational panel discussion titled "Harnessing the Volunteer Spirit of the Millennial Generation" on Feb. 25 in Edgehill Mansion. The panel included Riggs, Baird, Dominican student leaders, as well Sue Beittel of the League of Women Voters in Marin; Dominican alumna Juleah Cordi '10, District Manager for Sutter County Resource Conservation District; and Isabelle Gardner, a Marin Catholic High School student who is co-chair of the Marin County Youth Commission.

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