

## Valley Policymakers Encourage Students To Vote

By ERIN FLYNN

*Daily News-Record*

**BRIDGEWATER** — Politics are often marked by cynicism, but two Valley policymakers encouraged Bridgewater College students to make their voices heard come November.

Del. Steve Landes, R-Weyers Cave, and Harrisonburg Mayor Chris Jones, a Democrat, spoke to 175 people gathered at the school's Cole Hall for a convocation.

Because Virginia is a battleground state, Landes said, it's especially important for residents to vote.

And it's a responsibility that dates back to America's foundation, he added.

"The power of our government is derived from the people by voting for representatives at national, state and local levels," he said.

This year, New York billionaire and GOP nominee Donald Trump is running against Democrat and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Down-ballot races include U.S. Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Roanoke, facing off against Democrat Kai Degner, a Harrisonburg city councilman.

Jones followed Landes by asking audience members to close their eyes and envision one thing they want to change about the world. The idea audience members imagined, he said, reflects their political views.

Voting, Jones added, can help make the idea a reality.

"You can change the world with your particular view, your particular voice, if you vote," he said.

Jones also advised audience members to continue to pursue their views even if others tell them "no."

He illustrated his point by recalling his desire to have Martin Luther King Jr. Day off while he was a student at James Madison University.

After meeting with members of the student government and university leadership, he was told the campus can't shut down for the day. When he was told a few months later that JMU was shutting down for the inauguration of former President Linwood Rose in September 1999, he and a group of students decided to coordinate a protest.

"So we marched nonstop until the end of the inauguration," Jones said.

Months later, the University Council, which included faculty, administration and student representatives, recommended and Rose endorsed a plan to cancel classes for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

BC Sophomore Jacob Neff, 19, of Richmond and junior Naseer Demoss, 20, of Westmont, Ill., co-hosted Wednesday's event.

Neff said it doesn't matter what one's political views are, as long as they vote.

"I want our students to understand that now, more than ever, it's important to be involved in politics and voice our opinions," he said. "I want our Bridgewater students to know that their voice and their vote matters more than it ever has before."

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**Del. Steve Landes (left), R-Weyers Cave, and Harrisonburg Mayor Chris Jones wait to speak to students at Bridgewater College on Wednesday during the Your View! Your Voice! Your Vote! convocation event.**

Holly Marcus / Special to the DN-R