

## Get-out-the-vote rally aims at students, poor

By Dave Olson

The Forum - 10/08/2004

Matt Bakko, 19, has never voted in a presidential election. But he plans to cast a ballot Nov. 2 and the Minnesota State University Moorhead student wants all eligible voters in the country to join him, particularly other students. "There is a very large feeling of apathy (among young people), that they can't make a difference," Bakko said. He's been trying to change that perception by telling fellow students, "You can make a difference. You're such a huge vote, this year especially."



Bakko was among the organizers of a get-out-the-vote rally Thursday evening in Fargo and Moorhead that took aim at groups typically underrepresented at the polls -- people with low incomes, people of color and students. Dubbed the "Walk and Roll for Democracy," the event sponsored by area nonprofit organizations drew more than 60 people to a gathering outside Moorhead City Hall. They later moved via foot and hay wagon across the Red River to Fargo City Hall.



Speakers included elected officials and student leaders from area colleges.

Moorhead School Board member Sonia Hohnadel spoke of the barriers faced by her Latino parents, who could not vote unless they passed a literacy test, and of civil rights workers who died to change things. The sacrifice of others convinced her of the importance of voting and of taking an active role in public service.

Travis Maier, MSUM student body president, called on everyone in the crowd to make sure they and their friends make it to the polls. "Only a few votes made a difference in Florida during our last presidential election," Maier said.

"Do you realize that Minnesota, right here, is a swing state? We could be the Florida of this presidential election," Maier said.

"Heck yeah!" someone shouted from the crowd.

One member of the audience, Dana Boraas, said she decided to take in the rally as a follow-up to her efforts to register voters in the area. The recent Concordia College graduate said when she knocked on the doors of low-income homes, residents told her they didn't think they could change things by voting.

The story was different in middle- to upper-income neighborhoods. She said those residents told her they voted at every opportunity and felt it made a difference. "It was amazing to see the reaction change," she said.

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