

THE DAILY TARGUM

Republican Congressman praises Obama Administration

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Today marks President Barack Obama's 72nd day in office.

Congruently, the Eagleton Institute of Politics presented the 2009 Arthur J. Holland Program on Government and Ethics last night, featuring former U.S. Congressman James A. Leach.

The topic may have seemed like an odd choice to anyone not well versed in the career of James Leach, a Republican congressman who represented Iowa from 1976 to 2006. Congressman Leach was also the national leader of "Republicans for Obama," where he continued his advocacy for the president.

"What happened in this last campaign was that there were more than a few Republicans that identified with the issues that Sen. Obama was addressing," Leach said before taking the podium. "Most particularly, in my case, I was convinced that the foreign policy direction he was advancing was very important for the country, and that we were on the wrong track as an international actor."

Leach famously spoke out for Obama at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. His reasons for supporting Obama, as he said in his speech last night, include the president's foreign policy and lack of mudslinging in his campaign, as well as historical reasons.

"We were the first country ever founded with a philosophy both of revolution and of governance," Leach said. "Perhaps the most revolutionary document ever crafted was our revolutionary document, and in it we affirmed these rights which were defined as inalienable ... the government can only be legitimate if it's owned by and for the people ... the principal obligation of public officials is to protect the civil rights of all." Leach said he thinks Obama is doing all he can to uphold those rights, despite being left with the fallout of his predecessor's actions.

"As president, Obama has inherited a neo con-devised foreign policy, a negligent regulatory legacy and a treasury that failed to avert or stem a tidal wave," Leach said. "Seldom, with the exception of perhaps [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] or Lincoln, has a president been presented upon taking office with a portfolio of more daunting challenges."

Leach's non-partisan attitudes, in combination with the spring weather, brought dozens of people to the institute to hear his speech.

"I'm really interested in politics, in fact I'm a political science major, and this is just something I'm interested in," said attendee Aakruti Vakharia, a School of Arts and Sciences sophomore. "It's just a great opportunity to interact and network and also a great opportunity to come see a Republican's point of view on how President Obama is carrying on his presidency."

School of Arts and Sciences junior Matthew Collins agreed.

“How often do you get a chance to meet a congressman that’s been in the White House for 20 years? To be quite honest, I haven’t heard that much about him, but how often do you get this chance [to hear] his insight on the White House ... his views, [and] his oppositions?”

Leach, a Princeton graduate who is now a professor at his alma mater, said he was pleased to be at the University.

“The last time I was here, I was wrestling,” he said. “That was over 40 years ago.”

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