

## Governors clue in aspiring office seekers

November 16, 2011 4:30 AM Mary Ann Travis  
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At a session on state and local politics during the Bipartisan Policy Center's political summit, a half-dozen hands shot up when former Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen asked how many students were interested in running for political office someday.



Tulane students hear from experienced politicians about the satisfactions of running for political office. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The theme of the [summit](#), held on the Tulane campus Nov. 15-16, was how to take the poison out of partisanship.

Students from the classes of assistant professors of political science Celeste Lay and Brian Brox heard practical advice about getting elected from Bredesen and other former governors, Jim Douglas of Vermont and Brad Henry of Oklahoma.

Bredesen said that early in his life he became convinced that serving in elected office was an honorable thing to do. But, he admitted, "My generation messed it up. I hope this generation does not."

Henry said that campaigning is a fabulous, up-and-down emotional experience, where friends are made. The winner in a political campaign usually “boils down to who the people like,” he said.



Tulane professor and political strategist James Carville opens the political summit by discussing the importance of leadership.

“Go door to door. Shake hands,” Henry said. “It’s all about people liking you.”

Douglas said that the key to winning an election is persuading people that you can represent them. “Work works,” said Douglas. “Work up until the end.”

Douglas noted that most people who run for public office lose. But that fact should not deter prospective candidates. Take losing in stride, Douglas said. “Go on to fight another day.”

The honorary co-chairs of the summit, political strategists and commentators Mary Matalin and James Carville, a Tulane professor of practice of political science, spoke at the summit’s opening session along with Tulane President Scott Cowen and New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu.

Carville reiterated a commonly voiced theme of the summit: political leadership can improve people’s lives. “We tend to underestimate how fast things can turn around,” he said, “and how much leadership matters.”