

'Fiscal cliff' discussions bring out political bipartisanship

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Tulane junior Ainsley Fagan, center, joined the Republican team for the "lightning round." (Photos by Sally Asher)

As the Bipartisan Policy Center closed out its annual political summit at Tulane on Thursday (Nov. 15), concern over the nation's looming budget crisis took center stage. In bipartisan form, politicians representing Democrats and Republicans agreed that the issue has to be solved, perhaps by reaching across the aisle.

In a "lightning round" session posing red and blue teams against each other, BPC's president, Jason Grumet, asked, "Will we tumble over the fiscal cliff?" The two normally contentious groups gave a resounding "no."

"The president is willing to compromise; we have to figure out a way to get around it," said the representative of the blue (Democrat) team, which was led by Tulane professor and national political analyst James Carville.

Across the stage, the red (Republican) team, headed by Carville's wife and conservative consultant Mary Matalin, agreed. Tulane junior Ainsley Fagan, who

joined Matalin's team, responded for her group, "Too much is at risk for both parties. We have to trust in bipartisanship."

Hundreds of New Orleanians with political fever filled two rooms in the Lavin-Bernick Center on the Tulane uptown campus for the fourth annual summit, ["Beyond the Ballot."](#)



Democratic team members Kiki McLean, left, and James Carville, right, cheer on an answer from Loyola student Dwayne Fontenette, center.

Journalists, political consultants and former officeholders brought in by the BPC expounded on the results of the election season.

Fiscal concerns also dominated an earlier session called "View from the Boardroom" that included Tom Fanning, CEO of Southern Co., and Bob Bennett, former Republican senator from Utah.

"The fiscal cliff exists because of an act of Congress, and it can be removed by an act of Congress," said Bennett, describing how Congress "kicked the can down the road" rather than make tough choices.

"We must raise the debt ceiling ? we've already run up the bills."

Fanning lamented the "volatility in the marketplace." The uncertainty also is causing business and industry to hold back on investing.

"It's time for fiscal policymakers to step up," Fanning said. "We need to get business off the sidelines and get them to commit."