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## Politics can't get between two UIS roommates

By **BERNARD SCHOENBURG** ([bernard.schoenburg@sj-r.com](mailto:bernard.schoenburg@sj-r.com))

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Maybe those folks in Washington, D.C., could learn something from Matt Van Vossen and Ryan Melchin.

Van Vossen, 20, president of College Democrats at the University of Illinois Springfield, and Melchin, 21, chairman of the College Republicans on campus, are juniors who have been friends since freshman year, and they live in the same on-campus four-person townhouse this year.

"We mostly get along," Van Vossen said. While they've done some arguing in their time in school together, he added, "We know where we stand by now on most issues."

So when a new political topic arises, "We might, like, have a five-minute conversation about it. But we're not going to try and totally change the other person's mind, 'cause we'd just waste our time."

"At the end of the day," said Melchin, "we don't really spend a whole lot of time arguing the issues. I've tried to convert Matt in the past, 'cause he tends to be more of a conservative Democrat. But he doesn't have fond views of the Bush administration, so (it's) kind of hard to convert him."

### Pragmatic decision

There was a pragmatic side to Melchin's and Van Vossen's decision to have the same address for a year.

"We both knew we were going to be president and chairman of opposite political organizations, and we wanted to possibly do some combined events and work together this year to try to make both organizations the best they could be," Van Vossen said, adding that there's a lot of "bureaucratic stuff" to do to clear events for campus.

One successful joint project was a "watch party" for Democratic President Barack Obama's State of the Union address this year. It was held in a campus building, and about 30 students showed up, divided pretty evenly between the parties. But no fisticuffs broke out.

"We had popcorn there, and a big-screen TV," Van Vossen said. "And there was some media there that night, too, so no one really wanted to get into a fight."

Political signs mark some of the doors and common areas of the four-bedroom townhouse. Republicans are represented with a "Drill Baby, Drill!" banner (complete with elephant logos on each side), and an "Illinois is next" sign with pictures of three states with recent GOP electoral wins — New Jersey, Massachusetts and Virginia.

Van Vossen says he's got an old sign up with the names of Obama and U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

The "drill" message encourages more oil production in the United States, something Obama spoke against during the 2008 campaign, but recently proposed for certain offshore areas.

Van Vossen said he doesn't fault the president for that.

"It's common sense to use our own natural resources in the short term," he said. But he also says it is U.S. oil is not sustainable for long-term energy self-reliance, and he credits Obama with also talking about other energy sources.

### Active at home too

Both students have worked in politics back home and continue to be registered to vote there — Van Vossen in Oak Lawn and Melchin in Hoffman Estates.

Melchin, a precinct captain back home, will be a paid intern this summer on the campaign of a GOP candidate he's already helping, Ryan Higgins in the Chicago suburban 56th Illinois House District. He has also campaigned for U.S. Rep. Peter Roskam, R-Wheaton.

Van Vossen hopes to get an internship for school credit with U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski, D-Chicago, for whom he's campaigned before.

Though both are juniors, their campus party positions and living arrangements are coming to an end. Van Vossen is also UIS president of student government and hopes to do that time-consuming job for another year. Melchin is a student senator and running for vice president for next school year.

Melchin said he's going to move back in with some former roommates, and Van Vossen will be living with some other college Democrats.

But no regrets are apparent about this year.

In Washington, Melcher said, "they spent an entire year arguing, back and forth," about health care. "I think if they were more civil, they could have probably found a more bipartisan agreement."

Not unexpectedly, Melcher assigns more blame to Democrats "for cutting Republicans out of the process."

### Classmates

Melchin and Van Vossen also share a class — a seminar on political campaigns — taught by visiting Professor Ron Michaelson, the former executive director of the State Board of Elections.

Michaelson said both students were in an earlier class he taught on campaign finance reform, then asked to be admitted to the campaign class, which is designed for graduate students.

"Since it's a practical politics seminar and both of these young men are very involved in practical politics, I gave them permission," Michaelson said.

"They're holding their own with the graduate students," he said. "They're just a lot of fun to have in class, particularly a class like this.

"They talk a lot," he added. "When they disagree, it's always good-spirited. I really honestly think they are good friends. There's nothing phony about it. But they're both highly partisan."

"I've often said in class," Michaelson said, "if members of the legislature or members in Congress of opposite parties got along as well as you two do, we'd be accomplishing so much more in the legislative arena — both in Springfield and in Washington."

Bernard Schoenburg can be reached at 788-1540.

#### **UIS student party leaders**

College Republicans

Ryan Melchin, 21, chairman

Home town: Hoffman Estates

Year and major: junior in political science

Experience: Campaigned for U.S. Rep. Peter Roskam, R-Wheaton; is a precinct captain in home district. Working for Illinois House GOP candidate Ryan Higgins of Schaumburg. Student government senator

College Democrats

Matt Van Vossen, 20, president

Home town: Oak Lawn

Year and major: junior in political science

Experience: Campaigned for local candidates back home, including U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski, D-Chicago. Student government president at University of Illinois Springfield

#### **The Republican**

Ryan Melchin said he's a Republican because "I believe in limited government. I think taxes should be as low as possible, and I believe in a strong national defense. I think the Republican Party best embodies those beliefs."

#### **The Democrat**

Matt Van Vossen said he's a Democrat because he didn't like the administration of George W. Bush and "what they did to this country."

"I guess you could say I'm an Obama Democrat because he's the first president I voted for."

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