



A political odd couple: College Dems boss rooms with GOP chair

By Peter McGrain | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 5/17/2010 12:17 AM

Politics in this country have become increasingly polarized, but Ryan Melchin, 21, of Hoffman Estates, and Matt Van Vossen, 20, of Oak Lawn, prove there is still some room in this world for compromise and reasonable debate, all under one roof.

The two University of Illinois at Springfield political science juniors share a townhouse, even though Melchin is the chairman of the school's College Republicans and Van Vossen is the president of the College Democrats. Two other students live with them.

Despite their political differences, Melchin and Van Vossen became fast friends at their freshman orientation. They found common ground in their level of political activism, despite their opposite viewpoints.

"Since we both are so involved in campus political groups, we thought it would be really great if we lived together," Melchin said.

Melchin is a Republican precinct captain in Schaumburg and is currently working on Ryan Higgins' 56th District State Representative campaign. Van Vossen has campaigned for Congressman Dan Lipinski in Oak Lawn, and helped with Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

By now, there aren't many arguments or debates between the two.

"Occasionally we have a discussion, but we know where we stand by now," Melchin said.

The pair even agrees on a couple of issues: both believe in a strong presence in Afghanistan, for example.

"We've learned a lot from each other about our positions," Van Vossen said.

Van Vossen said his decision to become an active Democrat was influenced by the wrong direction he felt the Bush administration was taking the country. Melchin became a Republican because he "believes in limited government, low taxes, and a strong national defense."

Neither are quite sure of their post-college plans yet. Van Vossen is weighing his graduate school options, while Melchin is hoping he can start doing campaign work full-time for candidates. But for now, they are just enjoying their odd couple arrangement.