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NEWS UW-MADISON CAMPUS

Falk speaks on green initiatives



TAYLOR FRECHETTE / THE BADGER HERALD
 Kathleen Falk served as the democratic contestant running against Gov. Scott Walker in the 2012 governor recall election, but ultimately lost

By Muge Niu
 THE BADGER HERALD

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Former Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk urged students to pursue meaningful change for the environment through their own areas of talent in a talk hosted by a Nelson Institute student organization Monday night.

Falk was the first woman elected to be the Dane County Executive and served for 14 years. She also ran as a candidate in the recall election against Gov. Scott Walker last year. She now teaches a class for the Nelson Institute titled "Making Change Happen: The Politics of Environmental Decision Making."

The Nelson Institute's student organization Learn, Express, and Act For the Earth hosted the event and discussion led by Falk.

Falk reflected on her career path and how she reached the current position.

"I loved it [being the County Executive]...I was able to do the two things I care the most about: lifting kids out of poverty and protecting our natural resources," Falk said. "But then one day, I decided it's time to do something else. So I left the County Executive and...here I am."

While serving as the chief elected official for Dane County, Falk pushed for initiatives to protect land and lakes and strategies to improve the lives of kids and families in poverty, according to Falk's website.

She said now she shares a passion about environmental protection in the classroom. Her students come from a variety of majors, including environmental studies, political science, biology and geography, according to the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences website.

Jared Sandlin, who is the founder of the student group and one of Falk's students, said he waited for months for the class to open and valued the opportunity to take a class with her.

"It's fantastic," Sandlin said. "This is her first time teaching in 23 years. Every day is inspirational. She's involved in so many environmental issues that I don't think there's anyone else in Wisconsin that could have a better personal experience to teach the course as she does."

Falk brings guest speakers from around the state to talk about politics and environmental decisions to the class every Thursday. Sandlin said she does this because of her connections with the state of Wisconsin and he always enjoys listening to the speakers.

Falk's students are working on developing plans and legislation for the Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission and will submit them by the end of the year. When addressing a group of students from various disciplines, Falk encouraged all of them to use their own niche to push for changes they want in the world.

"No one way is the wrong way, or the only way," she said. "We need all of you to do what you are interested in doing."

LEAFE's mission is to bring students from all disciplines to promote environmentally conscious actions on campus and solve environmental challenges, according to Jared Burris, another leader of the organization. He said they hold fundraisers, speaker events and regular weekly meetings.

As an example, he said members of LEAFE are planning on buying faucets that save water by about 35 percent to install on campus for "little things of change."

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