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# Tierney indulges creative urge in RAW Arts visit

By David Liscio / The Daily Item

LYNN - Charged by President Barack Obama to seek out opportunities for summer service in his congressional district, U.S. Rep. John F. Tierney visited RAW Art Works in Central Square Monday to hear how art has influenced the lives of hundreds of local youth.

Encircled by the students, Tierney fielded questions about gangs, violence, the country's future, the sagging economy and his personal background. The congressman also explained how federal funding works, particularly the dollars assigned to the National Endowment for the Arts - and how that money eventually trickles down to organizations like RAW.

The big question concerned how art has helped shaped the students' futures. "Art has helped me to communicate," said community college student Susana Paz. "I had trouble doing that, but RAW helped and that will be important in my future."

Yesenia DeLeon, a freshman at Bunker Hill Community College, said art has helped her focus. "It helped me connect to what I want to do with my life," she said. "I want to be a filmmaker."

Demetrio Carrion, a junior at Lynn English High School, said he and many members of his generation are willing to volunteer for community service but fear gang violence.

Tierney said the government has taken steps to bring the reality of urban violence under control by hiring more police, creating anti-gang units and after-school programs and funding organizations like RAW.

"Arguably this is an answer to gangs," the congressman said. "It gives you a place to go."

Tierney said the answer to reducing violence can't always be found among law enforcement. "We had to provide the resources to our schools. Summer jobs are critical," he said, adding that the Obama administration is no longer accepting a pat answer from banks that unless they are government subsidized they can't offer students loans. "Students loans are very profitable," he said. "There's no need to subsidize the banks for that. And there are now more Pell Grants."

According to Tierney, Pell Grants paid 75 percent of college education costs in the 1970s. During the ensuing two decades, that percentage dwindled while the cost of borrowing increased.

"We're reversing that trend," he said. "And we've lowered the interest rate."



Congressman John Tierney donned a paint-stained smock and joined Raw Arts students to work on a project Monday. Item Photo / Reba M. Saldanha

Tierney said academia has long had a stranglehold on costly textbook sales, but new legislation is loosening that grip. For example, textbooks can be purchased from online retailers rather than solely from the campus bookstore, and those textbooks accompanied by a compact disk can be sold unbundled.

Mary Flannery, founder of RAW, said the National Endowment for the Arts recently awarded RAW a \$50,000 grant to defray the cost of its staff. "With the grant, we don't have to lose good people," she said.

When the question-and-answer session ended, Tierney donned a smock and joined the students in making art. Although no Van Gogh, the congressman was able to express himself artistically.

"Art work is the connection," he said. "This is one of my wife Patrice's favorite programs. It works."

Tierney visited the Food Project in Beverly last week and has planned additional summer service participation in Lynn throughout the season.

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