

Wilkes-Barre Times Leader **April 7, 2005**

Rendell discusses W-B's call center at Wilkes **By Kris Wernowsky**

WILKES-BARRE – Gov. Ed Rendell made the threat: “If no one asks any questions, I’ll have to give my slate speech.”

The governor made the trip to Wilkes University Wednesday by invitation of the College Democrats student group for a question-and-answer session with students who shared most of his ideological and political beliefs, and college faculty.

Questions ranged from the sale the downtown call center to Wilkes University, the possibility of the sale of Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency to **Sallie Mae** and how the Democrats can rejuvenate their base before the 2008 presidential election.

A college newspaper reporter asked what the governor thought of the possible sale of the South Main Street call center to the university.

Rendell said he would rather see a taxable business relocate to the building, but realistically it wouldn’t likely happen. Instead, he said a sale to the college would help alleviate some of the city’s financial burden.

The center was built by the city’s redevelopment authority in 1999 and costs more than \$700,000 each year in debt payments. The university said, if purchased, it would use the building as office or recreational space.

A professor asked Rendell whether he supports the possibility of **Sallie Mae**’s proposed \$1 billion takeover of Pennsylvania’s student-loan business.

Rendell said when a company lays the prospect of \$1 billion on the table it’s always wise to at least explore the option. He said he wouldn’t support the takeover if **Sallie Mae** increased interest rates on student loans, making the cost of higher education more expensive.

Another student hinted that he was disillusioned with the current state of the Democratic Party. He wondered what kind of shot in the arm it would take to lead the Democrats to control the executive and legislative branches in the future.

“We have to stop being afraid,” Rendell said. “There was no better example than the Terri Schiavo case.”

The governor argued the right-to-life battle over the Florida woman in a vegetative state was an issue best handled at the state level. He thought many Democrats looked soft on the issue when they allowed the Congress to undermine the ruling of the state court.

“These guys (Republicans) say they’re for less government,” the governor said. “We’ve got to get back to our roots, and if they want to call us liberals, then we ought to accept the label of liberal.”

Kris Wernowsky, a Times Leader staff writer, may be reached at 831-7329