

OPINION

THE BEHREND BEACON

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Inspiration over qualification in 2008?

By Rachel Reeves
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A *USA Today* poll says that although more Democrats think that Senator Hillary Clinton can get more done than Senator Barack Obama, and would make a more strong and decisive leader, 63 percent see Obama having the best chance of winning the primaries.

Most also see Hillary Clinton handling environmental issues, terrorism, the economy and health care better than Obama would as president. Even though these are some of the biggest issues in the year's race, they are clearly not the deciding factor for most voters.

So what does Obama have that Hillary does not? According to the polls, he is more honest and fair, he has a stronger vision for the country's future and he shares our values and understands us. More people believe that Obama has a genuine concern for our problems, would handle government corruption better than Clinton, and would find better ways of attaining sustainable energy.

America is in a war and is facing a recession as well as a healthcare and social security crisis. So why are voters turning to a young idealist instead of a

more experienced leader?

It could be that after eight years with George W. Bush, America is looking for the complete opposite. Obama is that opposite. He has no military background, he does not represent the establishment and he is the calm reason to Bush's bulldog tenacity. Obama is the teacher, always soft-spoken and composed, even stoic. Since so much of the American population is unhappy with the Bush administration, wouldn't it make sense that they would now go for

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something completely different?

Or maybe it is the difference in personality. Hillary Clinton seems to come off as naturally abrasive - she is always a little strained, a little louder and stronger than everyone else in the room. Her past hints at an ambition that may be a bit stronger than is wise. Obama decidedly has more charisma - he is easier to listen to, and he seems comfortable in

every situation. There is nothing threatening or uneasy in his manner.

And logic does dictate that, with so many impending crises, America chooses the strongest leader with the strongest game plan. But that is not what the atmosphere reflects. Instead of dealing with immediate issues, citizens are being pulled into a more long-term vision. We are following inspiration instead of a step-by-step plan, and even with so many problems looming in the future the word "hope" is flying around more than ever.

So is charisma an empty personality trait, or is it product of sincere conviction? Is a voter's intuition irrelevant, or does the subconscious really know more than we give it credit for? Do passion and ideals really count for anything in American politics, or is it always a façade? Are we really looking long-term, or are we just ignoring the issues at hand?

At least this much can be said now - America is willing to take the chance. We seem to be willing to take a risk in risky times, and see what will happen. And it really looks like we will find out either way. Whether it ends in unexpected surprise or disaster, this election is going to shake up American politics as we know it.

Don't worry about the developmental chart

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Freshman year experience. Sophomore slump. Senioritis. Quarter life crisis.

These are developmental challenges I either have faced or will face between the ages of 18 and 26. Probably you too, if you're reading this. A record number of 20-somethings are graduating college and returning home to live. Some really do only stay for the few months it takes to find a job, others stay for years more.

Psychologists all over the country are completing studies, asking questions and drafting up charts to explain why these years are so hard on us. They are discovering extra high levels of anxiety and depression in college, alcohol dependence and unsatisfying relationships. So people begin creating lists: how to adjust to college smoothly, how to select your major smoothly, how to graduate and get off to an easy start. There are charts plotting out every challenge I will have to face in the next handful of years, so that whenever I hit a rough patch I can check up on my development and be reassured that I am right on track.

I remember learning about the sophomore slump in one of my classes. It was horrifying; I had survived the first semester and it wasn't just smooth sailing for the next three years? The list clipped into my binder outlined all of the intimacy crises I had to look forward to, all of the identity issues I haven't sorted out yet. I frantically flipped around until I found the solutions page - the bulleted plan to make these impending disasters a little easier to manage.

But then, after I left the room and the panic had subsided, this idea occurred to me: maybe it's just hard.

But then, after I left the room and the panic had subsided, this idea occurred to me: maybe it's just hard. It could be that simple. When you come into college, most of us are straight out of high school. What happens in four years that can transition someone from a kid in the backseat to a grownup ready for the 9-5 a white picket fence and taxes?

I can tell you this - it isn't going to be smooth. There isn't a map or a list to follow to make it easier. You can give me whatever list you think will help, but a plan of action doesn't count. I have to learn for myself, I have to change. And no two people grow up the same way.

This is when we figure out what we love to do the most. We have to decide how important money is, we have to figure out how to vote and how to remember people's birthdays on our own. We have to keep track of when to wash our sheets and towels ourselves, we have to learn how to feed ourselves. We have to deal with being really sick, but having to take care of ourselves. We have to figure out how to get along with the human race on our own.

If putting names to your challenges and plotting out the trends makes you feel better, then that's fine. But don't expect to find a way to make growing up easy. Don't try to find yourself on the chart - there is no "YOU ARE HERE" marker in real life. Life doesn't go smoothly, it's messy and bumpy and that's all there is to it. Maybe it's a little scary, admitting that it's just plain hard. But then maybe it's a little easier to deal with, too.

Submission Guidelines:

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries should be limited to 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run the submission.

The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Please include your major, faculty, or administration position and semester standing. Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Thursday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue.

The Behrend Beacon reserves the right to edit any submissions prior to publication.

Please keep complaints as specific as possible.

Email submissions to rcr5057@psu.edu or drop them off at the Beacon office.

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Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Beacon Thumbs Up

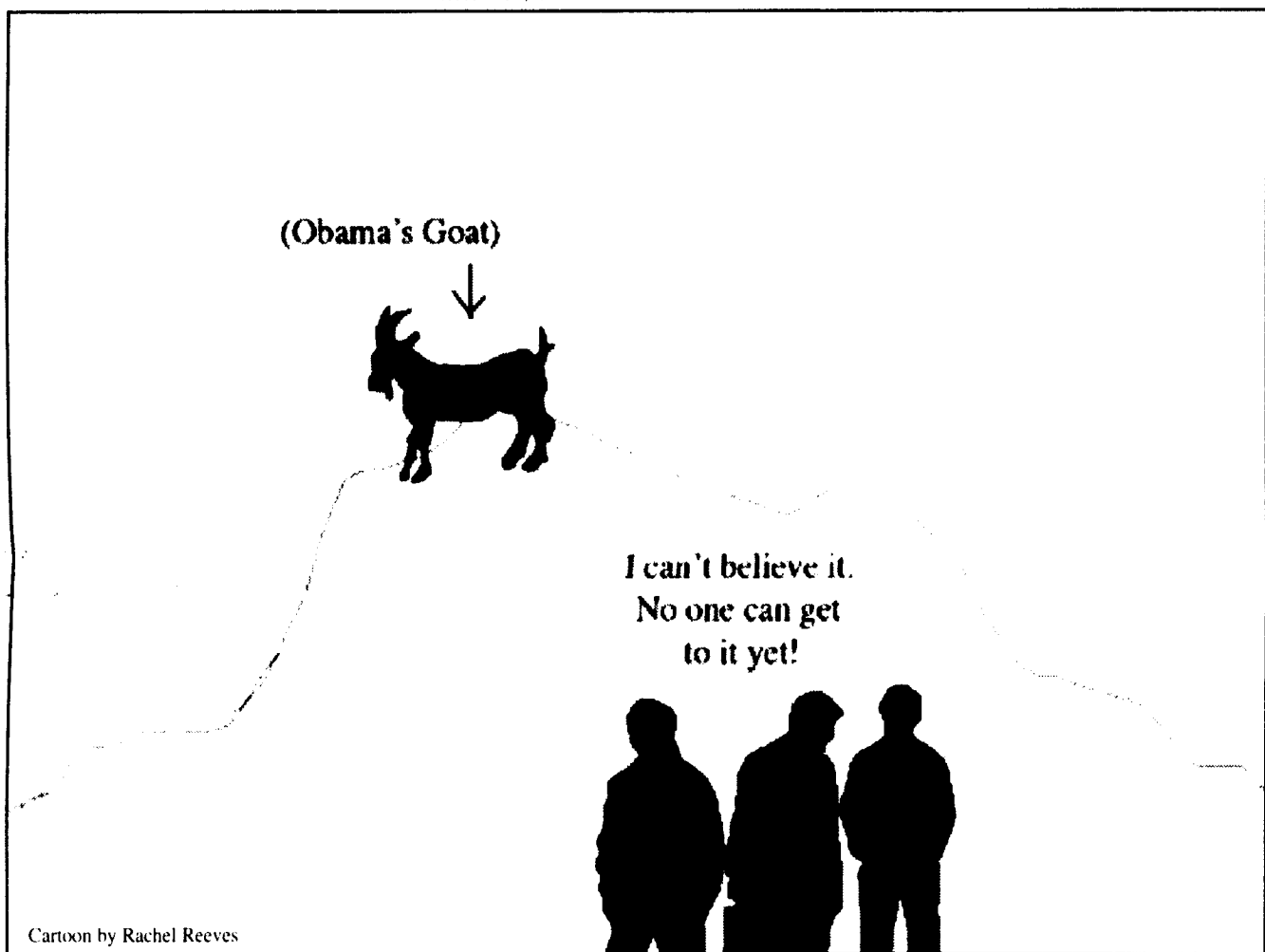


- Privacy
- Photogenic coworkers
- Third Eye Blind
- Spring break planning

Beacon Thumbs Down



- The Bluetooth finger
- Midterms
- Scratchy beards
- "Printer is out of paper"



The question about getting help for AIDS

By Chris Brown
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Congress began debate on the reauthorization of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) this past week. Under normal circumstances this would be a quick bipartisan passage, but it looks headed for partisan gridlock. The original PEPFAR bill was a prime example of religion dictating government policy and Democrats are determined to correct its mistakes. Unable to change these provisions in 2003 and reluctant to filibuster an AIDS relief bill, the Democrats deferred to the party in power. Now, Republicans are unwilling to return the favor.

When the United States distributes aid, it outsources the actual distribution of medical supplies and services to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The 2003 PEPFAR authorization bill allowed faith-based organizations to receive funding for the first time ever, even if they refused to administer programs because of their beliefs. To their credit, many faith based organizations work hard, but faith does not substitute for substance and science when it comes to saving lives.

The Bush Administration, concerned more with a group's ideology than policy, began funding more than a few suspect faith-based organizations. For instance, Martin Ssempe of Uganda's Global Alliance for Prevention receives

over \$40,000 a year in PEPFAR funding to support his Makerere Community Church. With the money Ssempe spreads homophobia, incites violence, and burns boxes of condoms in public. Later, organizations tried to align themselves with the religious thoughts of President Bush believing they would receive more aid. Beatrice Were, a noted figure in Uganda for helping combat AIDS, described this competition saying, "Our programs were affected, and the US funding actually divided us and led to us fighting each other, and undoing all the progress made."

The original bill also required a portion of funding to go to abstinence only education. NGOs had their hands tied. What option does abstinence leave for a woman whose husband is cheating on her and is probably infected with HIV if they can't get condoms? In Uganda, 56 percent of funding now goes to organizations that only promote abstinence. Today billboards, radio programs, government employees and booklets spread inaccurate information about condoms. Abstinence should be an integral part of any prevention regime, but never at the expense of other successful strategies.

The 2003 bill also required NGOs to make an anti-prostitution pledge. On paper, this seems hard to disagree with; no one wants to see women exploited. However, in practice it placed relief organizations in a precarious position. Many groups refused to sign the pledge, feeling it would undermine their effec-

tiveness. Studies show the best way to help these most vulnerable victims, women coerced into prostitution, is by gaining their trust. These women have few skills, can't convince customers to use protection, no means to protect themselves, and no authority to turn to. Successful programs in Papua New Guinea, Venezuela, Bangladesh, Brazil and India have all shut down or been forced to reduce their coverage since 2003 because of budget shortfalls caused by a refusal to sign the pledge.

The combination of AIDS and religiously driven government policy make for a lethal combination. Even with funding dedicated to distributing more than a billion condoms in Africa, PEPFAR's other provisions have created a massive condom shortage. When a faith-based clinic refuses to supply condoms, it refers people to another clinic that distributes them. Unfortunately, funding shortages, due to either increased competition from the faith-based organizations or refusal to sign the prostitution pledge, have forced many NGOs to close. Lacking transportation to a faraway clinic, people who want condoms must go without them.

When politicians create programs based more on how they want the world to be, than the world that actually exists, we are left with these policies. For a continent rife with civil, ethnic, and religious strife, the last thing the United States should do is export its own brand of religious fundamentalism.

**You have two weeks to think:
Send something in after break.
e-mail rcr5057@psu.edu**

I think the world needs...

To dress up a little bit more. Maybe looking our best will brighten our days until spring comes. Girls, those boots that you love haven't seen the light of day in ages. And guys, the simple truth is that everyone looks good in a blazer. Especially if it's pinstriped.