

OPINION

National Insecurity: change we can hope for President's Corner

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The first time that I sat down to write my first article since early December, I struggled with how to sum up a political primary month unlike any other. Unfortunately, before I was able to finish the piece, the political landscape had drastically changed due to a crap-slinging fest (sometimes referred to as a debate) rivaled only by the worst of days at a zoo's ape habitat. Starting over, I wrote my second draft – and then Barack Obama won his land-slide victory in South Carolina which was promptly followed by Bill Clinton's all but racist remarks that implied Obama had only won the state because he is African-American.

On the Republican side, Rudy continued his "Custard's Last Stand" strategy in Florida while Mike Huckabee attempted to use a commercial air-liner to get physically closer to God, Mitt Romney personally paid off the national debt, and Ron Paul began manually prying bricks off the façade of the IRS building in Washington. Granted, some of these events may not have actually happened, but what shot do any of those guys have anymore anyway. John McCain, however, had started his steady climb to stardom which appeared to be successful, so I had to start over.

As I began writing draft three, John Edwards and Rudy Giuliani dropped out of the race. Now on draft four (or was it five?) I have

decided that no matter what I do it is literally impossible to have an up-to-date piece without inviting all of you to my apartment to watch me write it. Having said this, I am writing about Barack Obama and Ron Paul. If, when this hits the news stands, one of them has dropped out, consider the following a nostalgic trip down memory lane.

It is my opinion that when George W. Bush was first sworn in as President seven years ago, he had not laid out a particular agenda designed to make the American people as disapproving of their own government as they are today. Rather, I believe a series of clumsily executed initiatives, poorly thought-out plans, inadvertent megalomania, and his getting involved with the bad kids on the playground has worn away the public's patience and resulted in the apparent purging of everything resembling the Bush Administration the 2008 election has seen. This frustration probably manifested itself most vividly when, during a Democratic Presidential Debate the white, Christian, male, had to remind the audience that he was still standing there. Another facet of this unprecedented election that has grabbed the media's attention is us – college students, or voters in the 18 to 24 year old range.

In the process of this campaign, two contenders have emerged as the youth vote's anointed candidates. Barack Obama has risen to the top for college Democrats and Ron Paul is the choice of college Republicans. Both of these men are, for all historical purposes, long-shots;

however, both of these men have also built campaigns on ideas which stand in stark contrast to the current Bush Administration's standard dogma. Growing up under the Bush Administration has meant becoming accustomed to N.S.A. wiretapping, the Patriot Act, and members of your government being forced to leave office under suspicion of something far more sinister than you would like to know about. Because this is the first time many students currently in college will get to vote in a national election, we seem to have taken the opportunity to really push the parties back to their roots in protest of the out of control government the previous President had given us. For the Democrats this means forming an effective government that will help those who need it and do some genuine good for the world without the influence of big business and billions of dollars in lobbyist money. Across the aisle, the Republicans are looking for a more 'back to basics' approach. Shrink the government back to the Constitution and only allow what a literal reading permits. All else will be controlled by the people and the free market.

Each of these directions, while drastically different, are aiming to fix the same problems created during the Bush Administration. Both center their campaigns on solving the problem of U.S. involvement in Iraq, the failing foreign image the U.S. currently has, immigration - you name a Bush mess-up and they have a stance. A major issue for both campaigns,

especially Paul's, has been money's power in government. While Obama talks of campaign finance and ethics reform, Paul has put out the broad-ranging concept of simply eliminating most of the government and therefore any leeches that may or may not be hanging on. Looking at the way the Bush Administration has run the country, this is a logical course of action as any government that would allow Bush to happen has to have some major flaws. Under Paul, Dick Cheney's connections with Halliburton would be impossible, Iraq would have never even been considered, and the economy (according to Paul) would be in better shape than it has ever been in.

Moving to the opposite, but equal end of the spectrum is Obama, a candidate who introduced the word "change" into this election and represents the Democratic ideal better and more fully than any other. From the obvious and shallower characteristics of his person to his inspirational and motivational presentation of his plan for, to put it in the words of John Edwards, one America, Obama is reminiscent of the demigod JFK. Admittedly, his policies do not constitute the same kind of "revolution" Ron Paul can brag about, but a revolution isn't what is really needed. What the country needs is a leader who can set good policies, and more importantly strength the country by bringing it back together after two terms of being pried apart for someone else's political gain. Unfortunately for Ron Paul,

Barack Obama has one thing he can only dream of – voters. This, it seems, is mostly because of Ron Paul's unwillingness to play the game of politics. Whether he feels he is better than, or simply outside of the system which has been used to elect at least the most recent Presidents is almost inconsequential to the fact that because he refused to go along with at least a few of the rules of running for office the media has ignored him and only magnified his general lack of ability to communicate with voters. I think the only safe prediction one can make in this election is that Ron Paul will go down in flames; although stranger things (Huckabee) have happened. Obama, on the other hand, has succeeded in winning several primaries in his own right as well as the 18 to 24 year old vote in elections he did not come out on top of.

With the public backing a candidate who was picked by the lowest voting bracket, this election has proved to be a historic one in so many ways and I am personally excited to see others in my own generally apathetic age-group getting excited about the political process and the future of the country. Really, then, the message here is not to back one candidate or another (although, doesn't Obama sound like he would be a really good President), it is to say regardless of who you support the trends we have seen in this election are worth trying out for a little while and if we really want it we can have change.



By **SAHAR SAFAEI**
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Hello again! So, there have been a few changes to the student government. If you have not already noticed, there has been a change to the president and vice president positions. I am now the student government president and Martin Santalucia is now the student government vice president.

The student government is diligently working on a few things that have affected students directly: Common Hour, or should I say lack there of; textbooks (I don't think this issue will ever end); and voter registration bringing the chance for those of you who can vote to register and take an active interest in the United States government.

With Common Hour on the fritz this semester, we are seeing that those students who want to take an active interest in clubs around campus cannot because of the entire schedule clash.

The senate is writing up a resolution to recommend a change to the scheduling process. As of now we have over a hundred-some time slots which classes can be scheduled in, compared to the 16 time slots University Park has. Our campus is different from University Park as it is still adjusting to the new four-year undergraduate program.

With this adjustment, the campus also has to take into consideration the scheduling process, as many students have to take general education courses that are not major requirements. So, schools now need to take each other's class scheduling into consideration so that all students have an equal chance to take a certain course. Viva la revolution!

So how many people are tired of purchasing the new edition of a textbook every semester when the last one did the trick??

I know I am, and I know many of you are too, especially the books that cost like a million dollars.

Come on, we are college students. Does it not ring a bell that most college students have to work and have loans?

I do not think that we really need to pay \$500 per semester. So to help bring awareness to the fact that professors need to be a bit more considerate when selecting or updating a textbook, the senate is proposing a resolution that will hopefully help control the textbook issue.

As you all know the presidential elections are the big buzz this year! Penn State Harrisburg's student government held a voter registration drive a few weeks ago. It was a success!

But we are looking for more people to get involved, so we will be holding another all-day drive in the near future.

We hope that you all stay informed about the presidential candidates, as this may be one of the biggest and most important decisions of your life!!!

Unfortunately break is over. Back to school again. So many more classes and still I think that we should change the days so it consists of 25 hours instead of 24 hours.

I think it is possible, Albert Einstein said that time is relative. But until the day that we can manipulate time, let us figure out a way to make the most of day.

Balance subverts truth

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In the documentary "Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism," much praise is given by marketing directors to the Fox News network's advertising slogan, "Fair and Balanced." After all, who doesn't want a fair and balanced news source? It's important to hear both sides, no?

Anyone with eyes and ears can see that if it is one thing Fox News is not, it is neither "fair" nor "balanced." However, neither is the rest of the media. And what a horrible thing the media would be if that was its sole aim.

The problem with being fair and balanced is that those words are very subjective. Fair to whom? How do you measure fairness? And should one really be fair to a side that has less evidence?

In the frequently revised volume "Elements of Journalism," Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenthal hold that "journalism's first obligation is to the truth." And they aren't alone. Kovach and Rosenthal found that nearly eight out of 10 journalists consider the truth to be the most important aspect of their profession. However, in a media where being balanced is held above being accurate and factual, this obligation is subverted.

Well, but what truth? On many topics that are in the news today, "truth" is becoming a subjective concept. Be it global warming, the cause of the oncoming recession or why people like Mitt Romney, the jury is out for many Americans. Many of you probably "know" the answers to those puzzles, but you forget the words of Winston Churchill: "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on."

There seems to be a schism in what Americans want from their news corps. They are quick to blame journalists for not digging deeper and halting such practices as bombing the wrong country. This puts the media's job as "sense-maker," the defender of the truth in a world that is frequently trying to subvert it.

CNN has recently tried to market on this demand with their "Keeping Them Honest" campaign,

where authorities of all nature are investigated for fraud or trickery. In the same way, The O'Reilly Factor often touts that it is "looking out for you."

However, there is also the demand of the American people that journalists stick to just the facts.

Let's use another example to show how this might contradict the previous demand. If Dana Perino says that we are giving \$13 billion in aid to Saudi Arabia, then a journalist might write "the US is giving \$13 billion in aid to Saudi Arabia, White House spokesperson Dana Perino told a crowd of reporters Tuesday."

In that one sentence, we have a who, what, when and where. This kind of empty reporting lead us into war. But, if the journalist pursues the why, a much shadier area, he may be open to criticism for not accepting the facts.

Of course, it is possible to ask "why" and stick to the facts. Newsweek had a very interesting piece on global warming deniers and who funds them (energy companies, unsurprisingly). Any journalist can tell you what global warming deniers say, but it takes more work and effort to find out why they might say it. None of the things within the Newsweek article are lies. However, global warming deniers might call it "unfair" or "unbalanced." And citizens might believe this claim.

It is time to drop the holy cow of being balanced in the media. I want the truth and the best version of it. I don't just want to know that things happened, but why they happened. Don't just tell me that there's mercury in my salmon; tell me what the hell it's doing there!

These things will not be seen until critics of the media drop the "fairness" standard or, the less-likely occurrence, journalists get some guts. All it takes to lose a large portion of your readership is Bill O'Reilly or the nuts on The Huffington Post saying you lean too much in one direction or another. Many journalists make avoiding criticism their primary goal. This is safe journalism. I want journalists that get their hands filthy in criticism because, if both sides of an argument hate you, you're doing something right.

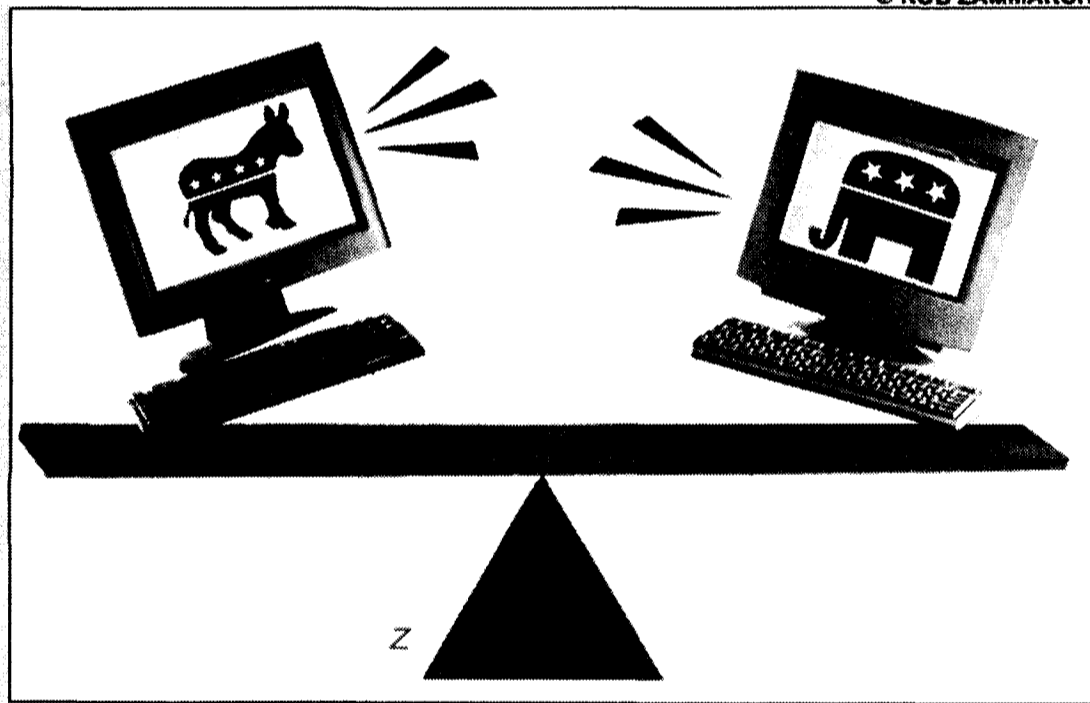


Photo courtesy of google.com

Get your money for nothing

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America is facing an enormous problem. The economy is in serious trouble and we are heading into a recession. This dark cloud has a silver lining: the government wants to give you money... for nothing. This might sound great, but it really isn't all it's cracked up to be.

The value of the dollar hit an all-time low in 2007 and consumer spending over the holiday season was weak in comparison to 2005 and 2006. As a response to the slumping economy, President Bush has proposed a "tax relief" plan in which an individual who earns less than \$75,000 a year will receive \$600 from the government. Married couples who fall within the combined income guidelines will receive \$1,200 and \$300 per child.

This sounds great unless you earn over \$75,000 a year, or if you earn under \$3,000, you only get \$300 back. The real question is whether or not this will stimulate our economy the way the administration would like it to.

The answer to that question, in my opinion, is that this just isn't the answer to our problems and it will be a very temporary solution if a solution at all. Of course I'm not

going to send my \$600 check back to the government, but I'm sick and tired of the government – no political party excluded – dodging the real issues.

Why is consumer spending low? Maybe the fact that very recently oil hit an all-time high of \$100 a barrel and each time we fill our tanks we sacrifice purchasing that new CD or DVD we've been wanting so badly.

It's no mystery that the increased price of gas affects the consumer's wallet in more than one way. Food doesn't magically appear on the shelves in the grocery stores. It has to be delivered by truck. The last time I checked, trucks are powered by gasoline or diesel. Put two and two together and you can see why your gallon of milk is over \$3. The price of groceries jumped 4.1 percent in 2007. Consumers have to ask themselves if they want to feed their families or purchase that nifty, new flat screen TV. You can't eat a TV although it might be funny to see it attempted.

Obviously, products other than groceries are delivered via truck and thus everything is more expensive. THIS is why our economy is in crisis, not because people aren't earning money. It seems we are all working to fill our tanks and not to fill our apartments and homes with nice furniture, clothing, CDs and

other luxuries. Forget about taking vacations or road trips unless you are willing to sell some plasma or a kidney for gas money.

I am saddened by the fact that when I started driving nearly 10 years ago, gas was under \$1. Now I get excited if it drops below \$3!

I didn't intend this to be a bitch-fest about the price of gas, but I think it's pretty clear that it's the reason our economy is in the crapper!

The solution to the problem can be found in searching for alternative fuel sources – something that doesn't seem to be a priority for the current administration. The president is not the only one to blame; we do have congressmen who could be putting more effort into the solution to our dependency on oil.

If we do receive tax relief from the government this year, it will put money in the pockets of millions of taxpayers, including myself. I'm not sure how I would spend the money. It would be nice to save some and maybe pay off a bill or two, neither of which will really increase my spending nor give the government their desired result. If the government really wants to increase the spending of this taxpayer, they can keep their \$600 and work on lowering the cost of filling my tank.