

THE VANDERBILT POLITICAL REVIEW



Will Work
For Experience
And Change



Will Experience
Change For
Work

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FROM THE EDITOR

THE USA: THE WORLD'S BIGGEST LOSER?

Jadzia Butler, Founder & President, The Vanderbilt Political Review

This summer, the Beijing Olympics came with a lot of lessons. Throughout its course, we discovered that pollution has effectively ruined China's air quality to the extent that some athletes would refuse to compete for fear of irreparable damage to their lungs. We learned that China was willing to go through great lengths to display its newfound economic might, as demonstrated by their opening ceremony featuring 2,008 drummers, footprints in the sky, and a cute little girl lip-synching. We found that despite the protests from the rest of the world, China was bound and determined to make everything perfect, ignoring the costs that it brought upon its own citizens. However, what was perhaps the most apparent was something that was not learned, but rather, confirmed: the United States hates to lose.

This self-evident truth presented itself when the U.S. cried foul as their gymnastics team was severely trumped by that of the Chinese, which was made up of extraordinarily talented girls who may or may not have been sixteen years old, or even tall enough to see over the steering wheel of a typical automobile. It made Michael Phelps, who was definitely older than sixteen but also, perhaps, part dolphin, the obsession of every proud American who loves to not only win, but also to break every record that they come across. As the games came to a close and China stood proudly with more gold medals than anyone else, America's addiction to winning was further demonstrated by its alarm. Many interpreted the games as an overall sign that the U.S.'s time as the world's #1 superpower is coming to a close, leaving room for countries like China, India, and Brazil to surpass its once legendary power. After all, had not the same thing happened to Great Britain a century ago?

In his new book, *The Post-American World*, Fareed Zakaria audaciously both confirms and denies those fears with a theory that he refers to as "the rise of the rest." Indeed, the United States will no longer be the world's ultimate, supreme superpower in the decades to come. However, this does not mean that its power and wealth are necessarily declining, or even being surpassed by others. What it does mean is that "the rest" of the world is beginning to catch up by doing exactly what we've been

encouraging all this time: opening up, sharing ideas, and maximizing everyone's profits through specialization based on comparative advantage.

So what is America's deemed "specialization" if our manufacturing jobs continue to be shipped overseas, our energy comes primarily from foreign countries with "questionable" governments, and new trends in technology are beginning to come from places like Mumbai, Shanghai, and Seoul? Our specialization is both intangible and unstoppable: it is our ideas. According to Zakaria, higher education happens to be America's best industry. Thus, it is unsurprising that we attend a university that is ranked 42nd on the list of the top 500 universities all over the world. We live in a country where it is not only possible but encouraged to voice our opinions, learn as much as we can throughout our lives, and sharply protest any injustice that is brought to light. That is what makes America stand out, and its superior universities that foster the growth of ideas will be the reason why it cannot and will not falter under the staggering growth of the rest of the world.

My staff and I present to you this new publication both out of great pride and out of great concern. It is with great pride that we display the ideas that some of the world's best and brightest have come up with. The students, professors, and alumni you're surrounded by every day happen to be some of the smartest people you will ever know. Their ideas about global issues ought to be published, circulated, and discussed. Unfortunately, we are also concerned that there are some who would rather ignore the events taking place in our world as we speak, be it because they are too complicated, too depressing, or both. This is completely understandable. Everyone has too many of their own problems to begin to even comprehend those of the rest of the world. Thus, it is easier to focus on the "Vanderbubble" and believe that what's inside the bubble has nothing to do with what is on the outside. However, the easy way doesn't always lead us down the right path. Remember when it was easy for the rest of the world to ignore the massacre of millions of Jews, Poles, and Roma before the term "genocide" was even coined? Remember when it was easy to ignore the threats of terrorists from

countries with names we could barely pronounce at the time? Remember when it was easy to assume that warnings of America's weakening infrastructure, particularly in New Orleans, were merely exaggerations coming from hysterical politicians? If we continue to assume that the world's problems aren't related to our own and that someone *else* will surely come up with the solutions, America will, in fact, end up "losing."

Like it or not, we live in a country that survives almost solely on its innovative ideas. It's what the U.S. is known for. It's what Americans do for a living. It's what we, as students at one of the top universities in the world, are

preparing to do. It's what the world relies on us for, and it's what makes our current situation "the rise of the rest" rather than "the fall of the giant." If we don't embrace this homegrown talent of ours, what else does the U.S. have left to be the best at? Take this publication and read the ideas that your friends, your professors, and alumni have come up with. And then come up with some new ideas of your own, and take those ideas into consideration when you help choose our next President on November 4th. It just might be one of the most patriotic things any American can do.

A SENATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

US Senator Lamar Alexander, Vanderbilt Class of 1962

VPR: In your opinion, which issues pertaining to this election are affecting our state of Tennessee the most?

Senator Alexander: The same issues that are affecting our whole country. Number one this week is the stability of our financial institutions and the effect it's having on ability of Tennesseans to get mortgage loans, car loans, keep their savings accounts, and make retirements secure; as well as the ability to get student loans. Second is energy independence. How do we over the next five years deal with climate change and create clean energy independence? We need to invest in energy we already know how to use like nuclear power and offshore drilling and we need to discover new ways to produce cleaner energy, such as making solar power more competitive and discovering more advanced biofuels. And third would be providing an opportunity for every American citizen and every American family to have a health insurance policy that travels with them from job to job and from place to place.

VPR: You mentioned the financial crisis and energy independence—do you favor one candidate on these issues? Do you find one candidate to be more knowledgeable and better equipped to deal with these issues?

Senator Alexander: I support Senator McCain. Now, I respect Senator Obama, and I think he has a remarkable background, but I think Senator McCain has the edge on executive leadership, experience, and maturity. And these are the characteristics you need to deal with all these issues. Whether it's a question of Russia invading Georgia or taking on the entrenched interest in Washington, to bringing spending under control or taking on various

national interest groups to deal with energy, I think senator McCain has the advantage.

VPR: Senator McCain recently selected Governor Palin as his vice-presidential running mate—what do you think of this choice? Do you think it was a move to energize the republican base or do you think her celebrity will detract from Senator McCain's central role as the president?

Senator Alexander: Well, Senator Obama's celebrity seems to have helped his [campaign], and Governor Palin's celebrity seems to have helped hers. She attracted 60,000 people to see her the other day in Florida. What I think is unusual is that she is the only governor of the four of them. She is the only executive on the ticket, the rest are senators. Now, we usually don't elect senators president because the job of senator is voting and reacting, but the job of governor is making executive decisions. So I think it's helpful for Senator McCain who has some executive experience from the navy to add a governor to his ticket. It's also helpful that she is a woman. One of the most important changes in American society in the last 35 years has been giving women the option to work outside the home. It has created all sorts of questions about family, children, equal pay and the social fabric of our country. It has as many emotional aspects as race and Governor Palin's addition to the ticket brings energy, a governor from an energy producing state, but it also brings a woman who has real life experiences that are different from others on the ticket. I was at the farmers market the other week in Nashville, and a man walked up to me and I asked him what he thought about Governor Palin, and he looked at me and said she is the only one with any experi-

ence. What he meant by that was he doesn't count being in Washington for a long time the kind of experience he wants in a president or vice-president.

VPR: In a similar vein, as I'm sure you know, the youth voter turnout has steadily increased since 2000, peaking in 2004 with a 30% increase in turnout. As young people become a more consistent and coherent voting bloc, how do you plan to incorporate young people and out problems into your politics?

Senator Alexander: well I think young Americans really have the same issues that older Americans have, they just have more stake in these issues because they're going to be here longer. Of the issues I mentioned, energy is important to me and my aides, but even more important to my children and grandchildren. Having adequate healthcare is important, and to me it's more important to me that there are young working families that can't afford

it today. And getting spending under control during the next 10-15 years is important, but it's even more important to my children and grandchildren because if we don't control spending they are going to be paying the bill. So what I need to do, I take, is involve young Tennesseans in my campaign, which I have. My campaign staff is a young staff, and my son, who is 29, has taken leave from his legal work and he is a volunteer and surrogate for me, traveling across the state. He makes sure I explain the issues in terms young Americans relate to and that they have an opportunity to participate fully in the campaign.

VPR: In your opinion, as a former secretary of education and university president, do you feel our education system needs to be reformed? If so, what specifically, and which candidate to you think as a better plan to reform it?

Senator Alexander: Well, in higher education, what

Interview Continued on Page 15

A POLITICS OF EXCLUSIVITY

Kevin Duong, Junior, College of Arts & Science

There is a familiar scenario among voters in the United States that generally follows the following logic: I'm voting for (insert candidate name here) because he or she is the lesser of two evils. This logic normally predicates an earlier thought: I would rather vote for (another candidate), but he or she is unviable. If you've ever been attracted to a candidate from the Green Party, the Libertarian Party, or any other less prominent third party in the United States, then this logic probably is all too familiar. Given the political situation within the States, we resort to strategically deploying our voting capacities for a candidate that is both viable and, to a tolerable extent, represents our actual interests and values. Thus, we are voting for the lesser of two evils and use our vote not to voice our true political opinions in the public sphere, but to achieve a particular strategy of democratic compromise successfully. I would like to suggest that this popular line of thinking is a dangerous move; it undermines the legitimacy of our democracy while representing one of the methods that the political status-quo sustains structural

forms of marginalization which plague our political process today.

When we confront the question, or problem, of democratic legitimacy, there are a number of perspectives that we can adopt in order to address it. One of these perspectives takes the structure of the democratic process as its point of departure. This approach assumes that if the process of democratic decision-making is sound, then regardless of the outcome of the voting, the decision is legitimate. There are, of course, other approaches to ascertaining the legitimacy of a democratic outcome. Some may posit that the content of the outcome affects the legitimacy, for if the outcome is unjust, then regardless of how perfect the process may have been which led to the decision, the outcome is illegitimate. I would rather not adhere strictly to either of these positions, for it seems clear to me that both are important questions which cannot be aggressively held apart and explored individually in order to answer the behemoth question of democratic legitimacy. Both unjust and discriminatory processes of democratic decision-making as well as unjust and marginalizing outcomes put the legitimacy of our political system into question. If we are

"I consider a legitimate democratic system, among many things, a system that has the mechanisms to uncover and give voice to individuals who have been previously silenced or pushed to the fringes of political society."

concerned at all with questions of justice, then we must persistently ask ourselves whether, in what contexts, and from whose perspective, is our political system legitimate? I consider a legitimate democratic system, among many things, a system that has the mechanisms to uncover and give voice to individuals who have been previously silenced or pushed to the fringes of political society.

It is from this philosophical perspective that I find our common practices of strategic voting problematic. Our vote is one of the primary ways in which we voice our opinion in the public sphere, hoping to have our opinion heard, taken seriously, and enacted as policy. Our political voice is, for practical reasons, given efficacy through a system of representative politics, where politicians on our behalf advocate for our values and interests. The reality of our political system, with only two effective parties, reduces the infinitely complex and nuanced opinions of all of the nation's constituents into two polarized doctrines: Democrat or Republican. This is, at least, the case in a presidential election. We choose to vote for one of these two, perhaps despite our affinities with a third party like the Green Party, because if we do not vote wisely, we will have wasted our vote.

What, conceptually, are we doing when we strategically vote? I think it plausible that what we are doing is violating the legitimacy of our democratic politics on both grounds of illegitimate process and illegitimate outcome. By strategically voting for a viable candidate, instead of voting for a candidate who more accurately represents our individual interests, we efface our belief that democracy is a legitimate political process because each person's voice can be heard equally. By strategically voting, we are not having our voice heard, we are having a doctrine,

which was promulgated by those with power, and with which we partially agree, to be heard. The platform of the Republican Party, should their candidate win, hardly represents the interests of a majority of Americans. Such an event merely suggests that a majority of Americans have subscribed to the doctrine of a few politically powerful who have the avenues to reify their political beliefs into a salient electoral platform. The exact same can be said of the Democratic Party. I can think of few other voting customs that do such violence to our idea of proper democratic process. There is, additionally, the issue of marginalization. So long as the platforms of the two dominant parties remains written by a select group of powerful individuals, the voices of the marginalized also remain silent because of our practices of strategic voting. By voting for the lesser of two evils, we sustain a power structure that will enable those who are dominant to continue writing the platforms, setting the agendas, and consequently setting the terms of political debate. Strategic voting maintains a logic of exclusivity which suffocates the space in which those who are silenced can speak up, for if they cannot even vote for their own interests, but instead must subscribe to a platform in which they had no part in constructing, then the structure of social stratification remains uncontested.

Our pragmatic impulse to vote strategically is a habit masking an invisible power assertion that continues the privileging of certain voices while ensuring that others remain unviable. I cannot predict whether this political dilemma will be rectified anytime soon. However, we can begin to think through this problem by asking ourselves what is truly going on, conceptually, the next time we choose to vote for the lesser of two evils.

PURSUING THE UNDECIDED VOTER

Alex Marcotte, Junior, Peabody College

Once it became apparent that Barack Obama would clinch the Democratic Party nomination, he began the now familiar process of reaching out to undecided voters, a demographic that could turn out to be important in this close presidential election. Although he has frequently been thought of as a guarded liberal, he has recently become more vocal about the moderate aspects of his platform.

Is the transition from a liberal perspective to a more centrist perspective—a tactic used by both Kerry and

Gore—an attempt to woo the undecided voter? If so, it is important to critically examine why many voters are still undecided. People who hold strongly liberal or strongly conservative positions, by and large, are not undecided voters. It is, rather, the Americans who are less committed to a particular platform that comprise the pool of undecided voters. As Victor Navasky writes in *The Nation*, “[undecided voters] are undecided precisely because they are not Democrats or Republicans, and they don't care about left versus right.” Swing voters are generally more

concerned with the candidate's accountability and honesty than political platforms. This is not to say that undecided voters do not feel strongly about certain issues, it is simply to say that swing voters believe that there is more to a candidate than a political platform. These voters already identify Obama as the more liberal candidate and McCain as the more conservative nominee. What they may be unsure of, however, is which candidate they can trust. This is where media coverage becomes important. Through exposure to the candidates via sound clips on the news and televised debates, swing voters are able to decide which nominee they believe to be more trustworthy and competent.

Advocating more centrist positions than he did during the primary season might not be the best tactic for Obama to employ. In vocalizing his moderate beliefs, Obama risks not gaining the trust of the undecided voters. If what they are looking for is dependability rather than particular political stances, than the senator should not be making strides towards the middle as this act could compromise his trustworthiness. By moving to the center in an attempt to entice undecided voters, Obama actually loses some of

his authenticity. Losing this authenticity might result in the loss of supporters.

In addition to losing the trust of the undecided voters, what Obama also risks by gravitating towards the center during these final weeks of the presidential race is the loss of enthusiasm from his liberal base. When the senator voted in favor of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) re-authorization, which, among other measures, granted immunity to the telecommunications corporations that aided the Bush administration's illegal wiretapping of American citizens, he caused great upset among his more liberal supporters. There is very little chance that Obama's more liberal supporters will become so disillusioned with him that they will vote for his opponent. However, there is a chance that voter turn-out among his liberal base could be lower than expected.

Moberg, David. "Moving Obama Left." In These Times, September 2008, 20-23.

Navasky, Victor. "The Illusory Middle." The Nation, September 15, 2008, 7-8.

BOOZE, BLONDES, AND BOWLING ON THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Willie Geist, MSNBC's "Morning Joe" co-host, Vanderbilt Class of 1997

If it feels like the 2008 presidential campaign started a lifetime ago, that's because it did. John Edwards announced his candidacy in December of 2006, nearly two years before Election Day. At the time, Hillary Clinton seemed like a mortal lock for the Democratic nomination, Rudy Giuliani looked like a pretty good bet for the Republicans, and Edwards still enjoyed reading *The National Enquirer* in line at the grocery store. That was a long time ago.

The upside of the marathon campaign is that it has given all of us in cable news something to talk about for two years. Otherwise we'd be wall-to-wall car chases and waterskiing squirrels. I've been lucky to have a front row seat to the historic race on MSNBC's *"Morning Joe"*. Ev-

ery day on the show I get to absorb the wisdom of people like the late Tim Russert, Tom Brokaw, Andrea Mitchell, Chuck Todd, Mike Barnicle, and Pat Buchanan.

When Buchanan shocked the political world by winning the 1996 New Hampshire Republican primary, I was a 20-year-old political science major at Vanderbilt watching from my one-room solitary confinement cell in Towers. Today I consider "Pitchfork Pat" a friend. I especially love him when he's calling Europeans "fat and sassy" or characterizing Oregon voters as the kind of people who "ride 10-speed bikes". Riding a 10-speed bike is a bad thing, by the way. If you knew Pat, you'd love him too. Trust me.

"Morning Joe" has given me the chance to in-

"Morning Joe" has given me the chance to interview all the candidates and I believe I have made my university, my family, and indeed my country proud in doing so."

interview all the candidates and I believe I have made my university, my family, and indeed my country proud in doing so. For example, I delivered the exciting news to John McCain that Heidi Montag of the reality show “The Hills” had just endorsed him. Senator McCain failed in his attempt to keep a straight face as he responded, “She’s a talented actress”. I confronted Barack Obama with an offer of a 3-on-3 basketball game between our “Morning Joe” team and the best three on his campaign. Senator Obama has ducked the offer time and time again. I got our favorite guest Governor Mike Huckabee to confess that he used to deep-fry squirrel in a popcorn popper for a cheap meal during his college days. I fear he may have lost the support of the coastal elites with that admission. Not a lot of squirrel eating on The Upper West Side of Manhattan, I’ve noticed. Or fried food for that matter.

But it hasn’t been all hard-hitting candidate interviews for me. I have also tackled the important contro-

versies that changed the complexion of the race. When Obama rolled an unconscionable 37 at a Pennsylvania bowling alley, I went on the attack. When Hillary threw back a shot of Crown Royal whiskey in Indiana, I asked why good old American whiskey wasn’t quite good enough for her. When Cindy McCain was caught red-handed stealing cookie recipes from The Food Network and passing them off as her own, I did not rest until the truth was revealed (I can’t remember what the truth was, but I know I did not rest until it was revealed). And when John McCain insulted Paris Hilton in an ad by lumping her in with Obama as a vapid celebrity, I called him out for blasphemy against a national treasure.

When you have two years of a campaign to cover, stories like these tend to slip through the cracks and make it into the conversation. As a purveyor of mindless trivia, I am eternally grateful for that. And the good news is that the 2012 race should be starting any day now.

THE MAGNITUDE OF HEROISM

Elizabeth G. Smith, Sophomore, College of Arts and Science

In case you haven’t heard, John McCain was a Vietnam prisoner of war and is commonly referred to as a maverick. While you were probably already aware of these associations, it is imperative to step back and consider their implications in the presidential race. McCain’s willingness and courage to go against his adversaries, whether they be the Viet Cong or interests within his own party, and fight for causes that he deems worthy of being ostracized for is a direct result of his life-altering experiences as a prisoner of war during the longest period of captivity in American history.

Many people know that McCain was a POW and suffered immense torture. Yet many do not know the facts behind his incarceration. On October 26, 1967, the Viet Cong gunned down McCain’s jet as it passed over Hanoi on a bombing mission. During his ejection, McCain collided with the plane, fracturing his left arm, his right arm in multiple places, and his right knee. Instead of immediate medical attention, McCain received additional fractures from the Vietnamese who salvaged him from the crash site. After four days of brutal interrogation and torture, McCain realized his broken limbs were causing his body to go into shock and that his death was near. He begged his guard for medical attention, to which his captor replied, “It’s too late.” McCain recalls that he went

unconscious, and then woke up to the voice of his captor saying, “Your father is a big admiral. Now we take you to the hospital”¹.

While McCain received medical attention, he also continuously received brutal torture for not revealing information. His captors constantly fed him pro-Viet Cong propaganda in an attempt to make him turn against the U.S. However, it only served to make McCain appreciate the freedom of speech provided and protected by America even more. As McCain said, “...it...exacerbated my yearning for a world in which all information was not... in disguise to advance someone’s military or political objectives”¹.

The Viet Cong placed McCain, who then weighed just over one hundred pounds, in solitary confinement in the spring of 1968, where he would remain for two years. McCain writes that he kept his sanity by focusing on the academic disciplines of writing books and plays in his mind. Antagonizing his tormentors also helped preserve McCain’s spirit. “Resisting, being uncooperative and a general pain in the ass, proved, as it had in the past, to be a morale booster for me”¹. Even in the face of torture, McCain refused to back down from his principles and showed no fear, even though he feared for his life.

After resisting early release numerous times during his

five-and-a-half year captivity because of his adherence to the U.S. military policy of releasing those first who were captured first, McCain tasted long-awaited and hard-earned freedom on March 15, 1973. Joe McCain, who calls his brother John “my hero of heroes,” recalls viewing his brother’s arrival in the Philippines from Hanoi with great emotion. “The door of the plane opened, and I thought I saw John...But it was somebody else coming out. Then, it was John. His legs were stiff. He was thin, and gaunt. He had white hair. He had his hands on the railing. He had to hop down . . . this stairway”². Although McCain was physically weak after his horrendous experience as a prisoner, his convictions became as strong as steel. His nightmarish experience in Vietnam refined his natural charisma into a channeled drive for political change.

After being elected to the House of Representatives in 1982 and the Senate in 1986, McCain has never wavered in standing up for what he sees as right despite party interests. McCain has teamed up with illustrious Democrats such as Russ Feingold and Ted Kennedy on controversial issues such as campaign finance and immigration reforms. His deep conviction and resulting outspokenness concerning the situation of American-held prisoners in Guantanamo Bay have also been opposite of what many

in the Republican Party advocate. Therefore, the popular Democratic claim that McCain would be four more years of a Bush presidency is inherently false.

Does the fact that McCain suffered greatly for his country and our freedoms mean he deserves, or is even entitled to, the right to become the 44th president of the United States? Not necessarily. Does it matter that McCain has crossed partisan boundaries on several issues and gone against fellow party members? It depends on your political affiliation. Yet by examining his record, not only of conscience-guided “mavericism” in the Senate, but of dignity and courage in a foreign war zone, the American population can rest assured that McCain would provide a rare and precious magnitude of leadership we can believe in. In fact, it would be disgraceful to abandon a solid and proven record of hope and change for simple rhetoric of the same.

¹.John McCain and Mark Salter. 1999. *Faith of My Fathers*. New York: Random House.

².Frank Ahrens, “Brother on board.” *Newsday*, February 6, 2000.

MY PLEA TO DEMOCRATS

Vann B. Bentley, Freshman, College of Arts & Science

Several weeks ago I was lying in my dorm room getting ready for an afternoon nap when I heard an MSNBC reporter in the background utter the phrase “In the latest Gallup daily tracking poll John McCain is up ten points on Barack Obama.” A cold shiver went down my spine. Any prospects of a good nap were effectively killed. This made no sense. In a time of failed war, exploding deficits, and energy crisis, being the opposition party should feel much more comfortable than this. So what was happening?

I feared that Democrats were confirming a long held belief of mine: they may be better at governing than Republicans, but they’re terrible at politics. There seems to be a certain righteous indignation within the Democratic Party over tactics that they consider beneath them. While this may be admirable, it is simply not realistic. What we saw with Gore, Kerry, and now Barack Obama is a tendency among Democrats to wait to attack until hav-

ing been attacked, allowing the Republicans to frame the debate. Then once they are attacked, they finally decide to fire back...sort of.

After seeing the despicable display of truth-stretching speeches at the RNC and then witnessing McCain’s new attack ads accusing Obama, among other things, of voting for sex education for five-year-olds, I was eagerly anticipating a tough response from the Obama camp. What I got instead was Obama making fun of McCain for not knowing how to use a computer...definitely not the hard-hitting stuff I was looking for. Then there was an ad where Obama explains what change is for the millionth time. By this point, I wanted to cry.

Then early last week salvation came to the Democrats in the form of a few bank failures and a stock market crash. Although it may seem crass to acknowledge the political benefits of such an unfortunate situation, it is necessary to examine the event that could come to define Ameri-

can economic policy for the next generation and consider how each candidate would handle it.

I do not believe it was the economic crash itself that helped Obama, but rather a reframing of the debate. When issues are smaller and more removed from the people, petty attacks based on wedge issues and accusations of elitism seem to work quite effectively for the Republican Party. However, once the stakes were raised and Americans were facing the prospect of total economic collapse, distractions from the McCain campaign began to seem less like relevant political discourse and more like ideological nonsense. McCain may have provided a good show for a while with his absurd attack ads and his colorful choice for Vice-President, but when the voters see headlines announcing “Black Monday” they’re no longer looking for a show. They’re looking for a President.

It is rare that I admit to being wrong, but this is where Barack Obama proved me wrong about his effectiveness as a candidate. What I perceived as a crippling hesitance to go on offense against John McCain now seems more

like the ability to remain Presidential in an otherwise petty race. John McCain only furthered this perception. As Obama was assembling a team of economic experts to advise him on the wisest possible next steps, John McCain was running around the country ranting about the people he would fire, the taxes he would cut and how he never believed in deregulation anyway, despite having made numerous comments to the contrary during this campaign. This contrast made Obama look like the President, while making McCain look like an angry old man.

So for the first time I am content with the tone of this race. As Americans come to terms with the gravity of the issues facing our nation, it appears that we may finally see the trading in of Palin-mania and the Britney Spears ads for a sincere substantive debate about the future of this country. Obama now has the advantage, not because he adopted new campaign strategies, but because he has run a campaign worthy of the serious debate that this country must now have.

ENERGY POLICIES: WHAT ABOUT IRAN?

Zachary Diggins, Freshman, School of Engineering

A central issue on voters’ minds this election year is energy policy, especially as gas prices reached the \$4 mark. Even the celebrity heiress Paris Hilton ran an ad about energy. A large portion of the energy debate has centered around foreign oil and possible paths towards independence from foreign oil, with focus on options such as alternative energy sources and increased domestic drilling. While both alternative energy and offshore drilling are options to eliminate dependence that should be discussed, John McCain and Barack Obama’s energy platforms are ineffective and lack a comprehensive approach towards a nuclear Iran.

Iran holds a central role in the energy supply for the world, as both a gateway for other suppliers and as a producer. Along with Iran’s role as a major oil supplier, it has pursued a nuclear weaponry program. Israel has decided that it will use whatever means necessary to prevent Iran, a nation that has publicly and repeatedly threatened Israel, from acquiring nuclear weapons¹.

The relationship between Israel and Iran affects the United States as well as the Middle East. If there is a military encounter between Israel and Iran, Iran could drastically reduce the supply of oil to the world, causing economic

impacts that extend far past the Middle East. While offshore drilling and alternative energy could offset the implications of a production disruption in Iran over the long term, they would do little to ease the influence Iran has over crude oil supplies for at least the next few years. This is especially important during a time when the US has agreed to sell Israel 1,000 bunker-buster bombs², and Israel is purportedly practicing for a strike against Iranian nuclear facilities³.

Any conflict between Iran and Israel would be extremely undesirable, not only for humanitarian reasons but also for economic reasons. Iran has a small assortment of US, Soviet, French, and Chinese anti-ship missiles⁴, all of which are capable of damaging a 1,000 foot oil tanker’s hull - a disturbing situation with 17 million barrels of oil passing through the Strait of Hormuz each day⁵. This would have huge environmental ramifications along with hampering crude oil shipments, causing the already high price of oil to climb even higher. Therefore, in order to have a complete energy policy, a presidential candidate must have a clear and effective strategy towards preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

First, let us look at Senator Obama’s policies towards

Iran. Senator Obama “supports tough, direct presidential diplomacy with Iran without preconditions”⁶. While successful negotiations would be a historic accomplishment, Senator Obama must assure Israel that he will not hamper its efforts to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities if negotiations fail. Senator Obama has publicly stated his commitment to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and has supported sanctions in the Senate⁷. These are steps in the right direction, but Senator Obama’s policies have left Israel feeling insecure through his rejection of a pre-emptive attack if negotiations fail. By not even considering the use of military force, he raises serious questions about his ability to handle the extreme threat that a nuclear Iran poses to Israel.

While Senator Obama claims that these policies will help avoid war, in reality his anti-war position is actually increasing the likelihood of a military encounter between Israel and Iran. By introducing a resolution to the Senate that would prohibit the current administration from using military force in Iran⁶, he has made Israel feel like it cannot depend on US military support if diplomacy fails. John Bolton, the former US Ambassador to the U.N. has predicted that Israel will strike at Iranian nuclear facilities between the November election and the installation of the next president in January due to fear of losing US support⁸. Senator Obama should keep the military option open as a last resort to increase the effectiveness of direct presidential diplomacy.

On the contrary, Senator McCain has taken a more realistic approach to the possibility of an Israeli air strike on Iranian nuclear facilities despite the unpopularity of discussing the possibility of another Middle Eastern conflict. Senator McCain sees the use of military force as “a lesser evil than a nuclear Iran”, an important step in reassuring Israel that military force is still an option if diplomacy fails⁹.

Like Senator Obama, Senator McCain supports tough sanctions on Iran. Senator McCain has even taken steps with Senators Lieberman and Kyle to declare the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization (a step

Senator Obama opposes). Ironically, Iran is a major exporter of crude oil but is forced to import gasoline, due to a lack of refineries⁹. Senator McCain’s support of a gasoline boycott towards Iran is an effective non-military step towards forcing Iran to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Also, Senator McCain’s acceptance that force is an option as a last resort will help convince Israel to give diplomacy and sanctions a chance.

Iran plays a significant role in the US election – an ineffective policy towards Iran is an ineffective policy for both energy and foreign affairs. Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons should not be placed on the backburner this election, for it influences not only Israel’s survival but the world economy as well. Israel will strike at Iran when it feels it must, so the US presidential candidates have the difficult task of presenting effective policy that provides for Israeli security while minimizing the chance of a military encounter. US voters must take a close look at both candidates’ policies, for careful but firm handling of Iran is essential in preventing an Israel-Iran conflict with significant humanitarian and economic ramifications.

¹<http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSL0625195820080606>

²<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,422443,00.html>

³<http://haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1019989.html>

⁴<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9b0deede163ff937a3575ac0a961948260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all>

⁵http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Persian_Gulf/Background.html

⁶<http://origin.barackobama.com/issues/foreignpolicy/#iran>

⁷<http://origin.barackobama.com/pdf/IsraelFactSheet.pdf>

⁸<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middle-east/israel/2182070/Israel-'will-attack-Iran'-before-new-US-president-sworn-in,-John-Bolton-predicts.html>

⁹<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/Press-Releases/b228d217-10dc-4bad-9883-4c9a36ff15f3.htm>

CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRAT

Leslie Kelly, Junior, College of Arts & Science

Like many students from the south, I have always considered myself a conservative. Growing up in Tampa, Florida, the majority of my friends’ parents vote for the Republican party and attend church every Sunday. We all

shop at the same stores, attend the same football games, celebrate Tampa traditions, and eat in the same restaurants. We contribute to the Republican Party and in high school, I served as a member of a youth service organiza-

tion funded and organized by our Republican mayor. I hear everything I need to know from Bill O'Reilly on the notoriously republican FOX tonight show and listen to my mom's gossip buddies on breaks. After the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, I publicly vowed, along with members of my church and friend group, that the Democratic leadership was immoral and extremely liberal.

While I led a conservative lifestyle, in the theatre, I was exposed to more alternative ideas. Gay couples directed regional shows that I performed with and I accepted new choices and different lifestyles as normal. I thank this venue of entertainment for my newfound awareness and for preparing me for a new change.

Recently, a good family friend announced his participation in the race for Florida governor and as I turned eighteen, my mom switched our party affiliation to Democrat. At Vanderbilt, I was a Republican. At home, in the voting booth, I was a Democrat. I planned on returning to the Republican Party to save face with my Vandy friends as the presidential voting day loomed ahead. And then I began to listen to McCain and study his goals for our country. Friends from high school went off to college and came home more informed. With the presidential race fast approaching and discussions heating up around campus, in class, and on the news, I realized I could no longer claim ignorance as my friend.

McCain's vision offers few changes needed by the younger voting generation who have found themselves disheartened by George W. Bush. For the first time, an African American was fighting for leadership of the free world. Barack Obama is an American that boasts change and peace. He's an American whose platform does not overlook the lower class and increase taxes regardless of income. An American who vows to articulate the purpose of the mission during a time of war, organize, carry out, and complete that said purpose while informing our citizens and rewarding those serving. He includes in his statement a commitment to better social security and health care for the underpaid in America.

Could a conservative really believe in a Democrat for president?

In an intensive study on the Katrina Hurricane disaster and the Bush administration reaction and response with FEMA, one must not ignore plans for social security in case of emergency. Following the Katrina hit, Bush leisurely visited the New Orleans two days following the tragedy and FEMA failed to provide the victims with

trailers habitable for humans. Time and time again the Bush administration squeezed their way out of funding and sending assistance as they focused on issues overseas. Similarly our homeland security includes safety from terrorists. The committee of the 9-11 Commission Bill passed a number of recommendations for the Bush administration to improve funding and security in each state and after four years, in 2005, published a follow-up review of the implementation of such recommendations. President Bush received an "F," the first of five, when he failed to allocate funding based on threat to each state. We need a conscientious president. Yes, I recognize we're at war but is it too much to ask him to multitask?

After further homework, I realize that serving in the military does not constitute legitimate grounds for presidency. Rather, ideas to prevent exponential tax growth for the lower class and assessment of the war abroad are more important for America.

For some residents, the prospect of a healthier economy accompanies a potential loss of liberty. A recent report in the New York Times reveals the outpouring of traditionally conservative black voters to the polls in November might support a ban on gay marriage. Proposition 8 is a new amendment to the Supreme Court bill passed in May that would virtually cancel the legalization of same sex marriage in the state of California. Liberal residents fear the more conservative of the democrats will seize the opportunity to support their presidential candidate and vote for Proposition 8 to maintain conservative ideals.

Beyond the political strategy and ballot manipulation, Americans, conservative and liberal alike, must collaborate to elect the man best suited to lead the country. Neither candidate will procure a peaceful middle east, maintain low gas prices, find new ways of drilling for oil that do not affect our environment and avoid international tension, find a middle ground in gay marriage, secure our borders and provide free health care to every citizen in need. But we do have the opportunity to choose a man who comes close. We are seeking the candidate that best emulates qualities of a patriotic American who is concerned with the security and well being of our nation, and every single person in it- gay, straight, black, white, poor, rich, democrat, conservative.

As I prepare to go abroad and send in my vote via an absentee ballot, I won't be defined by my community's vote. I stand strong and proud, believing in a renewed America, as a conservative Democrat.

INCONSISTENCY WITH VP SELECTIONS

Nathan Rothschild, Sophomore, College of Arts and Science

John McCain and Barack Obama have been running their campaigns on several fundamental platforms and mantras. Senator McCain has emphasized that his extensive experience in the military and in Washington will make him an effective commander-in-chief. Senator Obama has underlined his campaign with the idea that his youth and vitality will bring a change and a freshness that Washington has rarely seen. However, when these two candidates selected their vice-presidential running mates, both went against some of the most important underlying messages of their campaigns, basing their choices solely on political motives. By choosing Sarah Palin, John McCain arguably chose one of the most inexperienced vice-presidential running mates in the history of American politics. Palin was virtually unknown in the weeks before senator McCain picked her. She is only 44 years old, making her one of the youngest vice-presidential candidates, and, after Geraldine Ferraro's 1984 bid, is only the second woman to be nominated for vice presidential. However, most pundits view her political inexperience as her greatest flaw. Palin has been the governor of Alaska and for only 20 months. Furthermore, before her term as governor, she was the mayor of an Alaskan town with a population of 7,000 people. Though very popular in her state, Palin has virtually no foreign policy experience and is dramatically less experienced than Obama in national politics. However, by choosing such an inexperienced running-mate, McCain is undermining the one major critique of Obama he had centered his campaign upon. While there are thematic inconsistencies with McCain's pick, the political motives seem quite clear. By picking Palin, McCain has solidified the conservative base and at the same time has undeniably added a spark of interest and intrigue into a campaign that many had said was previously on a losing trajectory. While two weeks she was virtually unknown, people are now saying that Palin is the future of the Republican Party and will invigorate the party all across the country come election time in November.

Senator Obama's vice-presidential pick also shows inconsistencies within his own campaign. Obama has based his campaign on the message that he is the candidate that will bring true change to Washington politics. In picking

Joe Biden, Obama is picking a senator that has been in office for nearly thirty five years and has served Congress under seven different presidents. Indeed, Biden's long Washington service has a solid reputation. No one denies that. But, by picking such an experienced and established politician and a Washington insider, Obama is not bringing any substantial change to the scene in Washington. If Obama were truly sticking to his idea of change, shouldn't he have picked someone less conventional and a new fresh face to Washington politics that complements Obama? It seems as if McCain made the type of choice that Obama should have made, a younger politician that mirrors Obama's charisma. Obama just as easily could have picked Senator Hillary Clinton to be his running mate, which would have solidified the white working class vote as well as gaining a considerable amount of women voters. He could have picked Governor Bill Richardson from New Mexico, a more idealistic politician with very similar views to Obama about how to change American foreign and environmental policy. In Richardson, Obama would be bringing a fresher viewpoint along with critical executive experience. Other picks besides Biden would have helped Obama reaffirm and further resonate his message of change to his constituency across the country. Picking Biden also had several key political motives. Obama picked Senator Biden because of his congressional experience, especially in the area of foreign policy, which certainly adds credibility and gravitas to the ticket. Unfortunately by picking Biden, Obama is showing that he is more conventional and pragmatic than most thought he was and is looking to the future. The Biden pick shows that Obama is looking past the election and wanted a solid vice-president who could advise Obama as a young president. If elected, Biden will assuredly do an excellent job as vice-president. However, one would think that in a close race such as this one, and running against a seasoned veteran such as McCain, Obama's first priority should be winning the race and that he would have picked a running-mate that gives him the best chance of defeating his opponent. A candidate like Hillary Clinton or Bill Richardson would have done exactly that.

THE CONSTITUTION: LIVING OR DEAD?

Nicole Franklin, Candidate for Doctor of Jurisprudence, Vanderbilt Law School

Abortion. Gun laws. Iraq. With the terrible economic downturn, these divisive issues have taken a backseat in the minds of many Americans. Still, with the election only months away, it is important to remember what is at stake. The future President has the potential to change our legal landscape through new federal judiciary appointments, particularly the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court consists of Chief Justice John Roberts and eight Associate Justices as proscribed by Congress¹. The President has the power to nominate the Justices, with appointments made with Senate approval². Currently, Republican appointees heavily dominate the Court. Presidents' Ford, Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, and G.W. Bush appointed six of the seated Justices, the remaining two appointed by Democrat President Clinton³.

The question of who is appointed to the Court is not simply a matter of terminology - "conservative" versus "liberal" or Democrat versus Republican. Potential nominees' judicial records serve as a tool for evaluating their judicial philosophy. Judicial philosophy is one of the key factors in determining how, or from which perspective, a judge will deliver his or her opinion. Some judges see the Constitution as a fixed document, while others view it as a living document. Where a judge falls on the spectrum is generally indicative of his or her philosophy.

John McCain claims to be a strict constructionist⁴. He believes that judges should show considerable restraint in their decisions, "faithfully apply the law as written," and respect the separation of powers⁵. Though this appears to be a straightforward application, it is slightly misleading. The law is rarely black and white. It is applied according to one's interpretation, which is partially illustrated by our adversarial system. Judges have the ability to read the law narrowly or broadly depending on what they believe Congress or the original drafters of the Constitution intended.

Barack Obama, who taught Constitutional Law at the University of Chicago Law School, has a more progressive view of the Constitution and its interpretation. In a rally in Ohio he used prior Chief Justice Earl Warren⁶ as an example. Warren, who was nominated by President Eisenhower as a conservative, ended up with a reputation as one of the most liberal members of the Court⁷. One of his more noticeable judgments was the outlawing of

school segregation in the 1954 case, *Brown v. Board of Education*⁹. This viewpoint allows judges more flexibility, but blurs the line between judges and legislatures. The argument is that this method allows appointed judges, not elected by the people, to usurp the legislatures' power.

Both candidates have great platforms as well as precedent on their side. In politics the question is not usually "right or wrong", though it is often shaped that way, but rather which perspective or philosophy resonates with the individual voter. The difficulty lies in deciding what issues are important. Conservatives fear that liberals do not care about the sanctity of life. Liberals fear that conservatives do not care about civil rights. The arguments go back and forth. However, the reality is not that simple, which is why it is important that we have intelligent Supreme Court Justices applying the law. That said it behooves us to remember the Warren appointment. Even though a Justice may be appointed as a conservative or liberal, he or she is free to vote according to their conscious. Contrary to popular opinion, Justices do not always vote according to party lines. Perhaps the question of whom the future President's appoints to the bench will not have as huge an impact as supposed.

¹Judiciary and Judicial Procedure, 28 U.S.C. § 1 (2006).

²U.S CONST. art. II, § 2, cl. 2.

³The Justices of the Supreme Court,

⁴<http://www.supremecourtus.gov/about/biographiescurrent.pdf>.

⁵<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/b8529d0e-381e-4a29-9c39-6a57c7e182c9.htm>

⁶Id.

⁷Neil A. Lewis, Stark Contrasts Between McCain and Obama in Judicial Wars, N.Y. TIMES, May 28, 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/28/us/politics/28judges.html>

⁸U.S. Supreme Court Media, http://www.oyez.org/justices/earl_warren/

⁹U.S. Supreme Court Media, http://www.oyez.org/cases/1950-1959/1952/1952_1/

(Interview Continued from Page 5)

we need is less regulation. I think the greatest threat to the quality of higher education is this excessive, burdensome pile of regulation that we heap upon our colleges and universities from Vanderbilt to Nashville Auto Diesel College, as if the people in Washington know how to run a class better than the teachers who run the classroom. And I think we need to up our investment, increase our investments in research so we can continue to have the innovation and high standards that maintain our quality of living. In K-12, we need a whole sale remodeling of our schools, especially our high schools, but most of that is the responsibility of governors and local communities. There is a limit on what you can do from Washington and Washington only provides about 7% of the funding. I like senator McCain's support of school choice, giving parents more opportunity to choose among schools. We do that in college, half our students have federal loans to help pay for college, and the money follows them to the school of their choice. I take the more we do in the and in K-12 and involve parents in the schools and put children in the schools that are best suited for them.

VPR: When you editor of The Hustler, you went against the prevailing political winds and supported civil rights. How important is it that young people develop a political or moral compass and follow it in spite of cultural and institutional opposition?

Senator Alexander: I think it's extremely important. Usually young people have good moral instinct because they're not corrupted by some experience. I think they should do it, even if they're going to make a mistake. They should express their outrage, feelings, or strong position and it may be 10 or 15 years down the line at least when you'll change your mind, but at least you'll have acted in a way that was honest and true to yourself. In 1962, when I was editor of The Hustler, Vanderbilt was still segregated in the undergraduate school. So a group of us that thought it was wrong forced a student refer-

endum and the students actually voted to keep it segregated. But it created such a buzz that the board of trust met and decided to integrate the school in order to attract an outstanding new chancellor because Dr. Branscomb was retiring.

VPR: You said Vanderbilt was a place where students from all over the country could come and take advantage of many wonderful opportunities; however, every election cycle finds Tennessee incredibly low young voter turnout. Do you have any ideas as to why this is and how to address it?

Senator Alexander: I'm surprised at that because Tennessee has such a competitive political system, and that goes all the way back to Davy Crockett, Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson, and Sam Houston. We've always had competition with the parties and we have it today. We have a very competitive system. I was inspired to go into politics by a Senator Howard Baker, who helped build the two party system in Tennessee. We have a Democratic governor, two Republican senators, and congressmen both Republican and Democrat. So I hope young people see an opportunity to improve their lives and their communities by getting involved in politics. I would say to my friends at New York University Law School where I went: it's a good idea to go to law school and learn to sue the government, but it's more important to go to law school or go to college and learn to serve in government. We need talented people serving in government. We need more talented men and women like those who go to Vanderbilt to say that, "for a part of my life, I'm going to be on the school board and improve the schools. I'm going to run for state legislature and improve the roads." We need more people serving the government instead of suing the government.

Interview performed by Spencer Montalvo, VPR Editor

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NEXT ISSUE: US FOREIGN POLICY

Please note that this topic is just a suggestion and is by no means a requirement for submission. Please submit your academic essays of 500-1000 words to vanderbiltpoliticalreview@gmail.com

The Vanderbilt Political Review selects essays based on how well they are written, not the stance that an author takes on a particular issue. If you have any questions about its nonpartisan method of selection, please direct them to the gmail account.

CHANGE THE WORLD

Best Buddies

The mission of Best Buddies is to enhance the lives of people with intellectual disabilities by providing opportunities for one-to-one friendships and integrated employment.

Best Buddies Colleges (including Best Buddies Vanderbilt) matches people with intellectual disabilities with college students and creates one-to-one friendships between them. In the past, individuals with intellectual disabilities have not had the opportunity to have friends outside of their own, often isolated, environment. By becoming a College Buddy, volunteers offer a Buddy the chance to explore life in a new way.

Best Buddies Vanderbilt has events on or around campus once a month that are open to Buddy Pairs as well as members of the Vanderbilt community. Anyone who is interested in experiencing the dynamics of an inclusive group of individuals with and without disabilities should try it out!

E-mail carlton.l.owens@vanderbilt.edu if you have any questions.

Volunteer Tennessee

The mission of Volunteer Tennessee is to encourage volunteerism and community service. This program is affiliated with Americorps. They are a great resource for planning volunteer programs and for helping to find placements for interested volunteers.

Serving through local nonprofits and schools, national service members and volunteers tutor children, coordinate service-learning and after-school programs, build homes, organize neighborhood watch groups, clean streams, recruit volunteers, and do other things to improve and strengthen communities. Whether serving full- or half-time, as a part of AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, or the Senior Corps, citizens of Tennessee are making schools better, children healthier, streets safer, and the environment cleaner.

For more information, e-mail jim.snell@state.tn.us or visit <http://www.state.tn.us/finance/rds/tcnsc.htm>

Special Olympics

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Special Olympics Tennessee has its headquarters in Nashville, just a few blocks away from Vanderbilt's campus!

Special Olympics Tennessee conducts 17 different sports throughout the year. SOTN supports 32 area programs that include all Tennessee counties. Area Programs are lead by volunteer teams, who recruit and train athletes, conduct local and area competitions and raise funds to support their efforts. Full participation is granted to every athlete regardless of his or her economic circumstances. Over 12,000 Special Olympics athletes are registered with Special Olympics Tennessee.

There are many opportunities to get involved with special olympics that range from a longer-term commitment of coaching a team to volunteering one time at a specific sporting event. For more information, visit www.specialolympicstn.org

The Lost Boys Foundation

The Lost Boys Foundation of Nashville was created in the fall of 2004 by photographer Jack Spencer and a small group of volunteers, after witnessing first hand the tragic circumstances many of the young men still face in the Nashville community. The Foundation's mission is to the reunification and living enhancement of the Lost Boys of Nashville by working with the Lost Boys of Sudan and their leadership to create and fund a community complex.

This foundation hosts fundraisers and utilizes volunteers. For more information, visit www.thelostboysfoundation.org.