

COMMENTARY

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Moderate Clark seems most promising of Democratic candidates

"Just because a person can subject himself to the degradations of a lifetime in politics and finally end up in the White House is certainly no reason to respect him, as Nixon has recently given us elegant evidence to confirm."

— Hunter S. Thompson

The Democratic Party has become more and more like the Little Engine That Could lately. The sad truth, however, is that nobody would really care if the damn thing fell off the tracks, rolled down a cliff and exploded into a million tiny pieces.

Which is why writing a Democratic endorsement based on the issues is difficult. In a country where much of the voting public cares more about Joe Millionaire than Joe Lieberman, issues tend to take a back seat to appearances. Like when somebody calls up his or her Great Aunt Hilda to discuss John Kerry's hideously Beatlesque mop top haircut instead of analyzing his plan to roll back the Bush tax cuts. It's much easier during the general election when both sides are, in a perfect world, polar opposites and clear lines of division can be drawn.

This isn't true for the 2004 primary where everybody and their mother and their mother's pet lemur is vying for the Democratic nod. And all the lemons want better health care somehow, less terrorism some way and lower taxes using the patented "Screw the rich!" formula (as opposed to the infamous Republican "Screw the poor!" theory).

So who can really say for sure which candidate is the best pick? Hell, we know from their sound bites and news stories that they all pretty much hate Bush. We know Howard "McGovern" Dean is angry about something. We know Al Sharpton loves to play the race card. We know Lieberman couldn't even get endorsed by his former presidential running mate. We know Kerry would look hilarious in an Elvis costume. We know Dick Gephardt is some guy from some state with some view on something.

Furthermore, these politicians are incapable of relating to anyone under 30 years old. Sure, it's terrible that no jobs exist and I'll probably end up selling oranges on the side of Interstate-5 when I graduate, but what exactly is one guy with a re-election to focus on going to do about it? And is that ingenious plan going to affect the job market in the next year? Does a Democratic candidate's view on same-sex marriage really matter in a society becoming more and more hostile toward gays? These are important questions that cut to the heart of the American political process and, thus, will probably never be answered.

But since I consider myself a moderate, I'll endorse the most moderate-looking candidate: Wesley Clark. I like his views on social policy — namely, his distaste for the USA PATRIOT Act and his ideas for decreasing the cost of higher education — and his experience with the military can't hurt in a time of world conflict like the present. At any rate, it'll make for an interesting race this year.

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Unimpressive candidates don't get my vote

I am supposed to use this space to endorse a candidate for president. I can't. I've looked around at my choices and am singularly unimpressed. So, instead, I thought I'd tell you how I plan on making a decision come



November. First, there are some issues I find more important than others. For example, I hold my reproductive rights very dear. And, as both the National Organization for Women and Pat Robertson know, we're just one Supreme Court justice away from losing that right. So, this year, I will not vote for anyone who isn't pro-choice.

At the same time, any promise to cut taxes immediately raises my hackles. The people who end up benefiting from tax cuts are never those who are actually in need. Worse, when taxes are cut we are left to face either deficit spending — a no-no in my book — or funding cuts for programs that I happen to believe in, like Head Start. So, I will be voting for someone who tells me that the goal is a balanced budget.

A new issue for this election is the war on terrorism. I'll be looking for a candidate who has a reasonable and comprehensive plan for disengaging us from our occupation of Iraq and our presence in Afghanistan. My vote will go to someone who knows that the true deterrent to terrorism is a fair, just and consistent foreign policy rather than an increase in security and military spending.

As always, I will be looking for someone willing to protect the environment. Promise me there will be no drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — and give me a reason to believe the promise will be kept — and my vote is yours.

By no means is that the sum total of what I'm looking for. There are certainly other issues that are important — health care reform, file-sharing and space exploration just to name a few. My vote, however, will be determined by more than individual issues. I want someone I can respect; I'll settle for someone who is passingly familiar with the English language. I want someone who is willing to make decisions that are in our nation's best interests 50 years from now, not just those that are most likely to win re-election. I suppose it is terribly idealistic, but I'm looking for someone who can lead us as a nation down a wise and prudent path to a future of growth, prosperity and, most of all, peace. When I find him or her, I'll let you know.

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Support of death penalty moratorium necessary in Democratic candidate

There are two Democratic candidates who strongly and impenitently support an immediate moratorium on the death penalty: Dennis Kucinich and Al Sharpton.

Any candidate who weakly supports (Wesley Clark), flip-flops (John Kerry, John Edwards and Howard Dean) or strongly rejects (Dick Gephardt and Joe Lieberman) a moratorium on the death penalty does not deserve the Democratic nomination.

Capital punishment is the most sinisterly racist institution in America today.

Since reinstated, 80 percent of those receiving the death penalty have been executed for murders involving white victims, even

a vocal supporter of a moratorium, has dropped out of the race and thrown her support to Howard Dean.

My vote (if I were a Democrat) would go to Dennis Kucinich or Al Sharpton. The fact that neither has a chance of winning speaks volumes about the misplaced priorities of the Democratic Party and of Democratic voters themselves.

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Mistakes after Sept. 11 should have us looking for more in 2004

I'm scared for the future of our nation and for the future of humanity.

Every day more of our freedoms are being taken away. Every day more of our resources are overused and over-exploited, more adults sit in jail cells, more children fail in their classes. Every day something goes wrong, and as an audience, we don't always hear about it.

I'm not sure I believe in our government anymore. I love our nation and the people who live here, but so much that goes on within the walls of the White House and the Pentagon seems backward and wrong. I'm not sure we as humans are meant to rule over one another.

It's very easy and obvious to blame the current president, George W. Bush, and his administration for the problems we are experiencing. A slow economy; destruction of the environment; ongoing military action; the failure of public schools; the inadequacy of the power grid; Social Security and health care; and the retraction of basic rights, courtesy of the ever-changing USA PATRIOT Act, are just the beginning of things that have gone wrong in the last three-and-a-half years.

But Bush and his staff, though horrible, are not the only ones at fault. After Sept. 11, 2001, I hid in my room, listened to National Public Radio and tried not to cry as one disaster after another took its toll on the people of our nation. I didn't know what to do, so I pretty much did nothing. Oh, I went to a couple protests and wrote a couple stories, but mostly I just kept doing the same things I had been doing before the world turned sideways. Now it's different — I'm different.

I still don't know what to do, but I know from my experience that doing nothing is no longer an option. Standing aside didn't do any good three years ago, and I'm willing to bet it won't do any good now.

The Iowa caucuses are coming up, and I'd like to say that I know who I'm going to support, but I don't. Dennis Kucinich, the congressman from Ohio, looks OK, but what can you really tell from a couple interviews and some sound bites on the "important issues?" I do know that what's going

on can't continue, and it's up to all of us to make sure it doesn't.

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Clark's campaign is dead-on and drawing attention of rivals

Presidential primary campaigns are one of the most underrated segments of the political process: They're a good way to bone up on which prominent politician thinks what, and they're fun to watch. (I'll put down Mario Kart to soak in the latest primary debate on C-SPAN on any school night.)

And for the amateur poli-sciCQ wonk, it's a rare opportunity to see statesmen take potshots at their fellow party members in a five-month one-party free-for-all.

Howard Dean dropped his least conventional bomb to date just this week.

"(Former Gen. Wesley) Clark is a good guy," Dean explains, "but I truly believe he is a Republican."

That Clark — the race's latecomer — is drawing such sweeping barbs from the arguable frontrunner (the two are locked in a statistical dead heat, according to many recent polls), suggests that he's a serious contender, and that he's doing something right. That Dean's remark effectively paints Clark as a moderate suggests that he's doing something else right, too.

On many of today's hottest issues, Clark is dead-on. As a responsible moderate, he understands the importance of diligently maintaining civil liberties in the rush to introduce USA PATRIOT Act-style anti-terrorism laws.

"I believe that law enforcement needs all the tools necessary to deal with the problems of terrorism," he explained, "but I'm concerned that the Patriot Act expands the authority of government investigators too much without sufficient judicial oversight."

The social planks Clark emphasizes the most are the most important social services, too: He calls for universal health care coverage and expanded education funding.

Clark isn't the perfect candidate. His grasp of economics is sufficient, but his plans to hike taxes on the upper class suggests that he'll fund probably unnecessary programs (admittedly, this doesn't separate him much from his inside-the-Beltway comrades). Still, his economics promise to be sounder than President Bush's. (Hiking spending — often on programs of dubious value — and then slashing taxes should feel like a fiduciary no-no to fiscal conservatives and first-year economics majors alike.)

Finally, Clark's extensive foreign policy credentials promise an Apollonian approach to international relations and problems.

I'm not registered as a Democrat — or as member of any political party, for that matter — so I won't vote in the upcoming primary. But if you are, vote for Wesley Clark.

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The (un)scientific method for selecting a Democratic candidate

With the number of Democratic candidates seeking presidential status