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## ■ In my opinion

# Election frenzy fallout

Today marks the one-year anniversary of the 2004 presidential election. Prior to that election, the nation was all atwitter with everyday conversations that naturally moved toward gay marriage and nuclear proliferation. The bumper sticker industry was booming, and one could hardly go anywhere without seeing Viva Bush or The Real Deal plastered somewhere in red, white and blue. Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw, and Dan Rather dutifully reported one state, two state, red state, blue state.

Every minute of it was fun. That is what presidential elections are all about. You get to go completely nuts for a little while. Everything your guy says is audio gold, and everything the other guy says seems to leave brown on his teeth. You find out the political views of people you might never talk to during non-campaign life. The littlest news story or gossip suddenly seems like the biggest, baddest, be-all, end-all deal-breaker for the whole election. And sometimes it is.

But this frenzied state of mind is not meant to be permanent. The election is over, preferably, by the first Wednesday morning of November, and things go back to normal. We go back to having conversations about regular, everyday topics and take a break from debating the morality of stem cell research. The mud slinging stops, and Washington is back to business as usual, save a few new faces.

This year, however, the United States just hasn't been able to get out of campaign mode. Perhaps the cuts between Democrats and Republicans ran a little too deep in '04. Maybe the activate-the-base over the traditional get-the-swing-votes campaign technique stirred up some extremely muddy waters that have yet to clear. Whatever it is, the results are bazaar.

Over the summer, grieving mother Cindy Sheehan set up camp (4 miles) outside President Bush's Crawford, Texas home. She simply wanted to ask him "for what noble cause" did her son Casey die. For whatever reason, the president refused to meet with her. The parties disagreed and that surprised no one.

The weird part was the anti-Sheehan



ARMY FETH  
RHETORIC CHECK

backlash. They attacked her personally. Ann Coulter said, in reference to Camp Casey, Democrats need to learn how to grieve. The mass media made her into a political figure and asked her questions about international issues as though she were some sort of expert. Someone even ran a truck through the row of crosses set up as a tribute to Sheehan's son and other fallen soldiers. Now Sheehan is leading a national anti-war campaign. She's writing editorials and making speeches. How did this happen? People feel so strongly pro- or anti-war that one woman's symbolic statement turns into an all-out political battlefield complete with smearing and violence, and the end result is somebody's mom on a national political campaign.

Political ads are also completely out of control. Not only did non-profit 527s play a huge role in last year's election, they proved to have staying power. The Tom DeLay trial in Texas has sparked many an ad from both sides. Liberal interest groups are running ads against DeLay and even his temporary replacement Roy Blunt. DeLay's camp is running ads hoping to target potential jurors of the case. He also tries to personally discredit the prosecutor and judge every chance he gets, mostly claiming partisanship. If this absolute madness does not stop, they won't be able to find an impartial jury. Then Tom DeLay may get his wish, and get his trial moved out of Austin to a more conservative place.

The constant campaigning is a real risk to the effectiveness of our judicial system. It is one thing to report the news, it is quite another to turn characters in the story into semi-factual reality TV figures.

There is another campaign going on

in America today, one that I just heard about. According to an article in Tuesday's New York Times, Wal-Mart has employed a highly experienced team of political operatives. What are they fighting for? Swing shoppers. According to Michael Babaro's article, Wal-Mart has suffered tremendously from recent poor press and a bad reputation. Sophisticated groups like Wal-Mart Watch and Wake Up Wal-Mart have been increasingly successful in waging "the public relations equivalent of guerilla warfare."

Wal-Mart has hired seasoned political campaign professionals like Michael K. Deaver of the Reagan administration and Leslie Dach, who helped Clinton control his image through the impeachment crisis. To combat Robert Greenwald's upcoming film "Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price," team Discount Retail for America has produced its own counter-film. Currently, they are working on a second pro-Wal-Mart film. This "campaign" to convince undecided shoppers to be with or against Wal-Mart has turned into an all-out propaganda war.

The campaigning never seems to stop. Politicians, the mass media, corporate interests, non-profits: They all play a role in the constant division of America. Campaigns are intense, and they usually divide voters into only two camps. This works in a presidential election because there are only two candidates, but this format does not apply to the United States in general. Whenever there is a controversy or difference of opinion, mud-slinging and propaganda are not the answers. Americans deserve to be presented with multiple views and allowed to decide their positions on their own. They should not be presented with two biased opinions from talking heads and told to make a choice.

The United States is more divided now than ever. It does not have to be that way. If the people in charge spent more time solving problems and less time trying to persuade everyone that they are right about everything, we might just make some progress.

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## ■ Guest commentary

# Protecting animals is happier than selfishly wearing them

I was disappointed to read Army Feth's fluff piece last week about how she feels "liberated" to wear her rabbit coat ("Free to wear fur," ODE Oct. 26). It reminded me of Cartman's "Whateva! I'll do what I want!" and you never want your ethics to mimic Cartman's.

Why should anyone be impressed that Army is no longer afraid of what other people think when that means she takes advantage of others without thinking about them — namely non-human animals who can't defend themselves. We might not need to care what others think, but we should care about what we do to others and what we stand for. And it doesn't show much caring to glamorize a needless fashion product that pro-

motes the trapping of rabbits in leghold traps or raising them in cramped cages and then electrocuting them up their butt or sending them to a primitive gas chamber.

Although it's perfectly normal that this columnist wants to seek happiness, it is a mischaracterization of the Dalai Lama's peaceful Buddhist principles to suggest he supports hedonism and egocentrism. True happiness and enlightenment can't come at the expense of others — hence the Buddha's support of vegetarianism. No one's "freedom" should come from stepping on the backs of others. Think of the conscientious consumers who boycotted slavery in the 19th century by refusing to buy cotton

products, similar to how people today can refuse to buy sweatshop products or fur and leather.

Animal lovers are compassionate people and therefore most are not going to yell or throw anything at anyone in a fur coat. They are just going to feel sad to see another person who is contributing to animal exploitation and doesn't seem to care. So if you can't be without rabbit fur, how about liberating a bunny from the local shelter instead of sporting his remains. The animals need people like you on their side — protecting their own right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ... it can make you happy too.

Carrie Freeman is a doctoral student in communication and society.

## ■ Editorial

# We must prepare Eugene for earthquake

The city of Eugene and the University are not adequately prepared for natural disasters that could potentially strike this region, and after seeing the devastating effects of the 2004 tsunami and recent hurricanes, we cannot pretend that a catastrophic event will never strike this area.

A city study estimated a subduction zone earthquake off the Oregon coast would cause \$1.6 billion to \$1.7 billion in building damages in Lane County. A daytime earthquake could injure up to 2,700 people. Using more current information is estimated to raise damage and casualty calculations by 14 percent.

A Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake last struck the Pacific Northwest in 1700, but geological predictions indicate that subduction zone earthquakes occur about every 300 to 500 years. As time passes, it becomes increasingly likely we will experience a large quake.

A low chance of occurrence is no reason to delay protecting our community. Although loss of life in a massive natural disaster may be inevitable, taking preventative measures today could protect lives.

We have taken steps toward creating an emergency response command center for the city. Yet centralizing commanders in a single durable shelter would help improve communication and provide emergency services in the field with clear, organized plans. Having civil authorities frequently drill and test such systems, with the help of the general public, would help prepare Eugene for The Big One.

At the same time, simply preparing to react to the worst is not enough.

At the University, the structural safety of several buildings is near dismal. A recent study by the Oregon Natural Hazards Workgroup found several campus buildings will be damaged by an earthquake. Damage to aging and vulnerable Straub Hall, which houses the Department of Public Safety, could hinder DPS' response to an emergency.

The University doesn't realistically have the funds to upgrade or replace these structures. But an earthquake during a basketball game at McArthur Court or during busy office hours at PLC could be disastrous because many students aren't aware of structural hazards or proper escape routes. Retrofitting buildings when possible and training students in how to seek shelter and evacuate buildings is vital.

During an earthquake or other disaster in Eugene, we need to be prepared to help ourselves. Many bridges and road overpasses that serve as main arteries of transportation in and around the city are considered temporary, and these roads do not meet stringent seismic codes. In the event of an earthquake, they may not fail, but they might be inaccessible while officials check their stability. Power, water and phone service may also be disrupted.

A parallel situation is currently progressing nationally. Concerned about the threat of an influenza pandemic, President Bush recently asked for \$7.1 billion to create vaccine. Although he didn't propose a clear way to pay for his proposal, we should follow his example and finally prioritize disaster preparedness.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Yesterday we announced our Commentary section would move to Page 4. This change will not occur.