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HILLTOPICS

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RFOC at Umphrey Lee has a new and improved atmosphere, but is it the same "great" taste?

by Janet Arnold

As all students know, Umphrey Lee this summer underwent extensive renovations. Towards the end of last year, it seemed to many students like RFOC had just stopped trying. The food options, fairly limited to begin with, were reduced to roast chicken, sandwiches, burgers, and the ever popular standby of the pasta bar. Again, not a horrible selection, but day after day of bland, and barely palatable food, quickly grows tiring. Near the end of the semester last year, when Umphrey Lee experienced flood damage, little was done to fix it. They knew that they were renovating in a few months, and in spite the fact that prospective students were still being shown the cafeteria, they understandably chose to just make Umph functional. Students overlooked and put up with the sub-par food/ environment, with the hopes and promises that next year, after the renovation, things would be better.

Well, after eating in "the new and improved" RFOC, I for one am unimpressed. It's the same merely palatable food, served inefficiently, in a place that has nothing but wasted space. My old stand-by of a baked potato is now self-serve. There are no plates for me to make it on, and the cheese and sour cream are just left sitting on a counter with nothing to keep them cool, or prevent a sickly student from sneezing on them. Now, perhaps I am just not adept enough at navigating this new and foreign place, but I have a harder time now, seeing what is available, than in previous years. The only dishes that are easy to find are the ones that are always there, and the menu items that change from day to day rarely look appetizing enough to feed to my cat. What happened to the promise of new and better food at RFOC? First semester last year, there were many op-

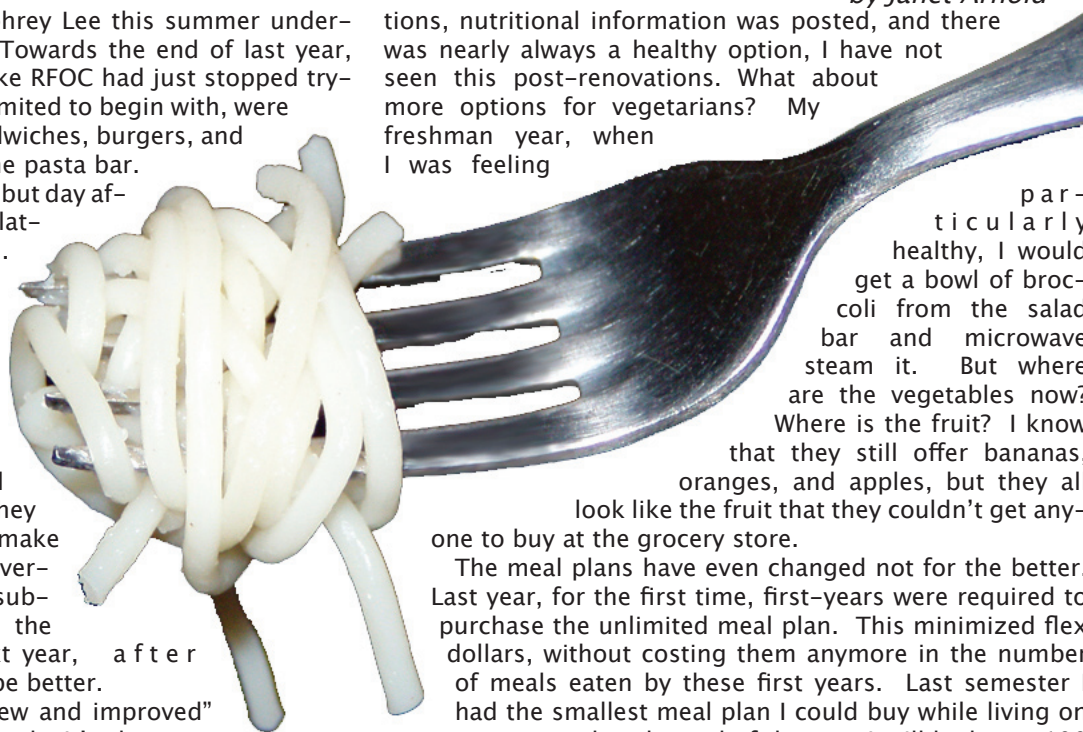
tions, nutritional information was posted, and there was nearly always a healthy option, I have not seen this post-renovations. What about more options for vegetarians? My freshman year, when I was feeling

particularly healthy, I would get a bowl of broccoli from the salad bar and microwave steam it. But where are the vegetables now?

Where is the fruit? I know that they still offer bananas, oranges, and apples, but they all look like the fruit that they couldn't get anyone to buy at the grocery store.

The meal plans have even changed not for the better. Last year, for the first time, first-years were required to purchase the unlimited meal plan. This minimized flex dollars, without costing them anymore in the number of meals eaten by these first years. Last semester I had the smallest meal plan I could buy while living on campus, and at the end of the year I still had over 100 meals left unused. The solution to RFOC's growing money problems isn't to make students buy unlimited meal plans and give them less flex dollars, but rather, make food that students want to eat. I would rather eat a good "free" meal with my meal plan than go out and spend the little money I have on a meal elsewhere. When RFOC, actually becomes real food on campus, they will stop hearing complaints.

Janet Arnold is a junior marketing major.



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In a world of political pansies, kudos to Venezuelan Pres. Hugo Chávez for speaking his mind

by Monica Chavez

Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez's remarks this week drew a variety of reactions, from ridicule to incredulous laughter to applause. In case you missed it, this week Chávez compared President Bush to the devil in an address to the UN General Assembly, claiming he could smell the sulfur in the air from Bush's presence, and then crossing himself and gesturing as though in prayer. He also had a few choice words for the United Nations itself, calling it ineffectual under the predominant sway of the U.S. and its close allies on the Security Council.

The administration and Bush-supporters are understandably not happy, and even liberals and much of the global community seem to think Chávez may have gone a bit overboard with this one. Chávez has had a history of verbally sparring with Bush throughout his time in office, chastising the President and his administration most notably for their actions in Iraq and for their disregard for the well-being of underprivileged people in the U.S. and abroad. Calling Bush the devil has been his most scathing comment yet.

It's not that I fall in line completely with his political ideologies, but I have to give President Chávez credit for being one of the few politicians out there (particularly from a region lately seen as relatively innocuous towards the U.S. in world affairs) who won't hold back, who will fire as much rhetoric at Bush as Bush fires at his enemies. And in that, I believe Chávez is entitled to his use of hyperbole, a tactic politicians use all the time to get their messages across. Bush himself has used it on several occasions, sounding equally serious, such as his well-known designation of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the "Axis of Evil". Perhaps we take him more seri-

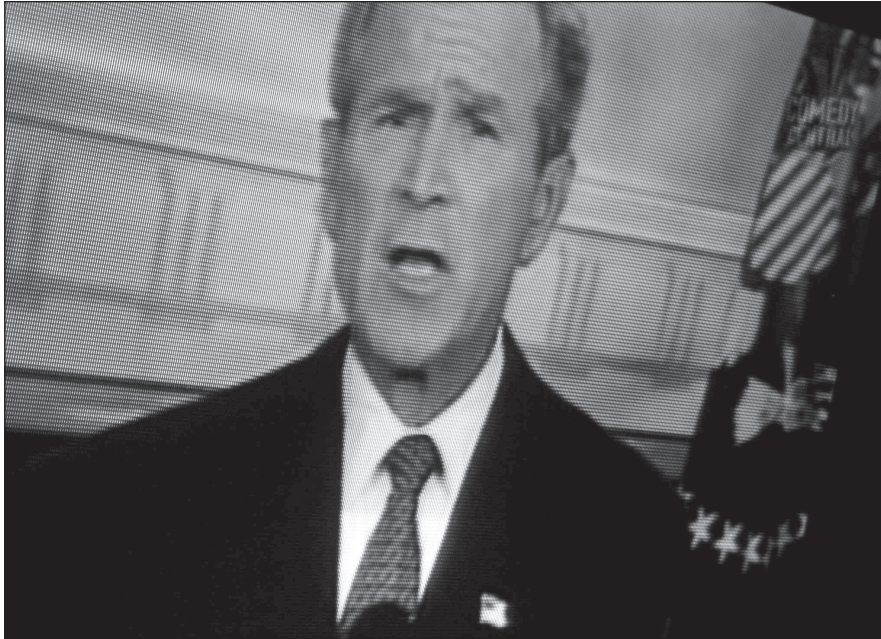
ously because he followed up those comments with an invasion of Iraq, but prior to that, many in the international com-

munity thought it was just a rhetorical device. And when you think about it, it's no more ridiculous than Chávez's comments. At least Chávez limited himself to one man whose policies he disagrees with; the U.S. president labeled three entire countries as "evil", and if that isn't simplistic thinking, I don't know what is.

Moreover, by ignoring the conservative standards of carefully constructed political speeches, Chávez gives a voice to the masses whose harsh words for Bush would not otherwise

be heard on such on such a prominent stage. His gutsy criticisms of Bush were even harsher than Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's the previous day. The Venezuelan leader also distinguishes himself by limiting his harsh words to American politicians rather than firing away at the American public in general. During the Katrina disaster last year, his was the first government to offer assistance to victims in Louisiana and Mississippi (help which we promptly turned down), and this will be the second year he has offered reduced prices on heating fuel for economically disadvantaged Americans in the Northeast. Given what is at the very least good public relations, Chávez should not be written off so quickly as a maverick Latin American dictator; considering the alliances he has built with fellow Latin American leaders Evo Morales (Bolivia) and Néstor Kirchner (Argentina), his influence should not be underestimated, and his criticisms not dismissed.

Monica Chavez is a junior political science and foreign languages major.



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In leaning left, are Republicans contemplating a move toward the political center?

by Carter Twitty

A recent *New York Times* article highlighted a new trend in the campaign strategies of Republican gubernatorial candidates. With elections a short seven weeks away, many candidates, incumbents and challengers alike, are retreating from the conservative front of the Republican Party that has been so powerful and pervasive in recent years to appeal to a broader range of perspective voters. By focusing the public's attention on their more liberal positions on issues including abortion rights, stem cell research, environmental protection, and social welfare programs, the candidates are hoping to attract a significant number of voters that would normally be beyond their prospective constituency. The *Times* article quickly and cogently pointed out these strategies are being seen in states with large populations of moderate or Democratic voters. While it appears that these tactics are purely political and not a dynamic shift in philosophy, the shift should be taken in and election results should be noted. Will this shift be successful? And, how will it effect future elections, most prominently the next presidential election cycle?

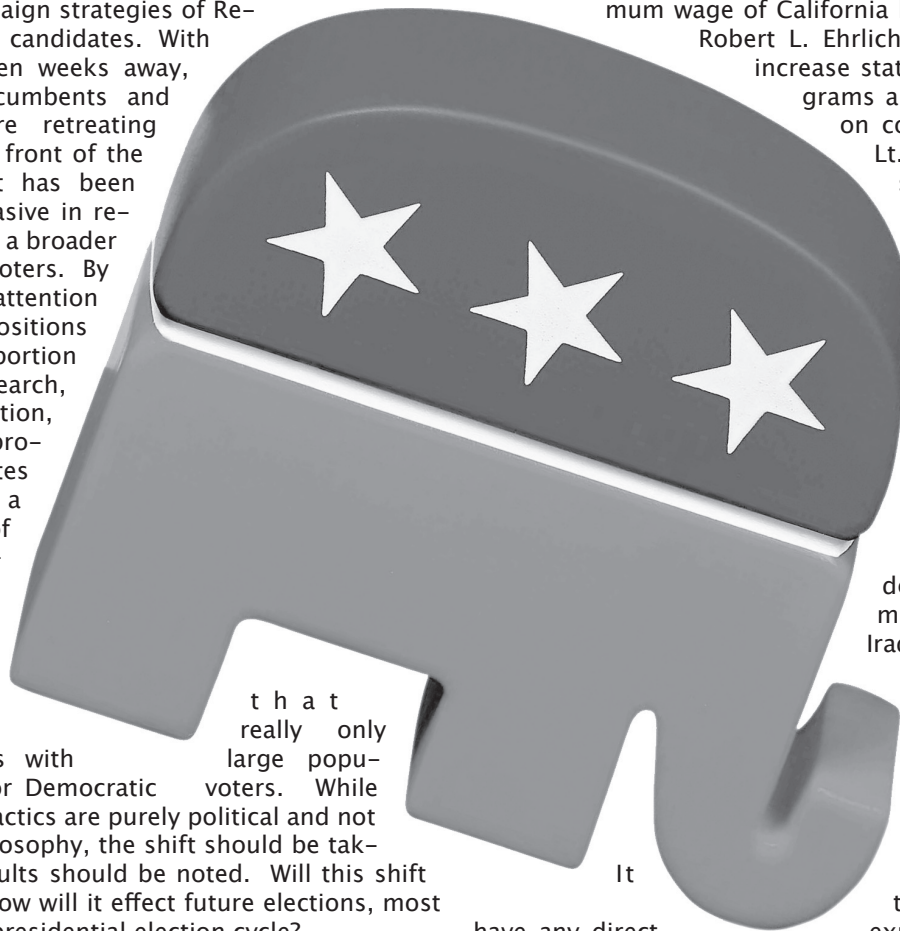
Though the questions posed above will take weeks to be answered and years to be understood, there are a few implications that can be made immediately. Republican gubernatorial candidates in Massachusetts, Maryland, Illinois, California, Hawaii, and Connecticut have all parted ways with the conservative side of the Republican Party on a variety of domestic social and economic issues. The specific issues in each state vary to some degree. Gov. Schwarzenegger in California is trying to lower greenhouse gas emissions,

focusing on large companies, and just increased the minimum wage of California by \$1. Incumbent Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich of Maryland wants to increase state aid for disabled programs and increase restrictions on coal power plants. And Lt. Gov. Kerry Healey has split with her outgoing predecessor over abortion rights and stem cell research. These are just a few examples. The prominent issue for all these candidates is not what they share in their liberal shift but what seems to be strikingly absent from all of their campaigns: the President and any significant mention of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To write adequately, impartially, and intelligently about these two other issues is the work of a different article and a more informed writer. It also must be noted that Governors do not have any direct responsibility in the U.S. foreign affairs. What can be highlighted by the absence of President Bush and the war against terror here is that Governors and their campaign managers do not feel they can use these issues to win elections. One has to wonder what this will signify for future elections. If these political maneuverings work, and the Republican candidates are elected, will we see more Republicans in a variety of political campaigns attempt the same strategy? If they lose will that cause a harsh retreat back into the conservative fold? Will the next Republican presidential candidate attempt to distance him or herself from President Bush and his policies and, therefore, narrow the gap between Republican and Democratic candidates? Does this mark a turning point in the collective consciousness of voters?

While there is no way to know this now, and probably not even after the elections unless all the Republican candidates win or loose, the fact that these candidates feel they need to move left in order to be elected does show that the country is not the same as it was during the last Presidential election cycle. Whether or not these changes mark a nervous lean by a few candidates or a more forceful shift in Republican politics, it will be interesting to see what's next.

Carter Twitty is a senior English major.



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Todd Baty presents part 2 of the 10 things I love about SMU. This week: Tate Lectures

#9: The Tate Lecture Series

For the past twenty-five years, the Tate Lecture Series has brought some of the most influential world leaders to campus. Ranging from Barbara Walters to Sidney Poitier to Henry Kissinger, the list of past and present speakers is impressive in its variety of speakers from diverse backgrounds. SMU is truly fortunate to host such a high-profile speaker series each year.

In addition, these guest lecturers come with the purpose of sharing with us the wisdom of their lives: the successes, failures, and lessons of people who have achieved much as human beings. After all, how better to augment instruction in the classroom, than to listen to the lessons of some of the most knowledgeable and successful individuals of the world?

I love the opportunities the Tate Lecture Series provides to the SMU community. Increased publicity, fund raising, and community enrichment are very positive results for the university on a variety of levels. However, the Tate Lecture Series is marred by the blatant precedence of money-making/publicity policies over the edification of students.

For example, in September of 2004, Al Gore and Bob Dole spoke in panel format with David Gergen only a few weeks before the November presidential election. Obviously, I (and many other SMU students) wanted hear these influential policy makers' comments on the impassioned political race between President Bush and Senator Kerry. However, at both the student forum and evening speech, most of the SMU students that made the effort to show up to hear were turned away. At the afternoon fo-

rum, SMU had presumably taken measure to ensure a full audience and had allowed high school students from the area to fill most of the allotted student seats in Hughes-Trigg. At the evening main event, almost all of the seats were occupied by wealthy Dallasites who had paid (at least) \$40 a ticket to attend.

Now, I understand the logic of SMU's decisions; obviously, a sparsely attended student forum reflects poorly on the university, and the evening event is a very lucrative fundraising opportunity. However, which is more important to the intellectual and academic growth of this university: raising money or student education?

Is it not reasonable to expect an SMU event to be open to any student that chooses to attend? After all, what is the function of SMU—to edify its affluent financial supporters or to provide its students with a myriad of educational opportunities? It is long past time that we, the students, voice our frustration at such a blatant display of misplaced priorities.

I love the Tate Lecture Series and the vast financial and publicity opportunities it holds each year for the SMU community, but isn't it time for the students to be

its first priority? Tomorrow, when Tom Brokaw and Ted Koppel take the stage of McFarlin Auditorium, life lessons will be shared and an opportunity to learn and grow will be afforded to the audience. I only hope every SMU student has an opportunity to experience it.

Next week....#8: Campus Beauty

Todd Baty is a junior music and history major.



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