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“It’s the economy, stupid” and other such misnomers

by J.P. Coleman

“It’s the economy, stupid.” These words rang true for President Clinton in the 1992 election against George H. W. Bush, and carried him into the oval office. It was the pseudo campaign slogan of the Clinton campaign in light of the recent recession that had occurred toward the end of the 1980s (Black Monday in October 1987 to be exact) and carried through Bush Sr.’s first term. During this time energy prices soared and housing and retail prices slumped however, Bush appeared unbeatable with his foreign policy strategy paired with recent world events such as the end of the Cold War, and the Persian Gulf War, yet Clinton pulled the victory and interrupted the Bush dynasty with his message of economic prosperity that he could deliver from the jaws of the recession.

Déjà vu anyone? Our economy today, still undetermined, is more than likely experiencing a recession (You cannot be officially sure until you are at least two quarters in, or already out). This is all occurring on the eve of a presidential election, except this time there is no incumbent running to place blame, but only new fresh faces to provide leadership in this time of economic hardship. With primaries abound and the election around the corner, as informed voters you should know and understand this economic turmoil, what it means, and where the economy is going so informed decisions can be made rather than following clever economic boosting campaign slogans.

The ground work for this possible recession that the U.S. economy may be entering was laid years ago. It began with the “sub-prime mortgage boom.” Sub-prime mortgages are based on the idea that people make mistakes with their credit and with less than perfect credit still deserve to be able to borrow against others savings to build a home for the family (most commonly). The sub-prime mortgages however, due to their increased liability of the added credit risk, often came with adjustable rates. In most cases they start at a base low rate for the first two years and then can double in some cases on the newly poor borrowing homeowners. As the two years are starting to come up on a lot of the mortgages and rates begin to inflate, you are seeing more and more foreclosures on homes of people that cannot afford to pay the high mortgage. With homes continued on page 4

We welcome submissions from all members of the SMU community. Letters to the editor should be up to 300 words in response to a previously published article. Contributions should be articles of up to 300-600 words on any topic or in response to another article. Please email your submission to hilltopics@gmail.com by Wednesday at 7:00 PM to be included in the following week’s publication. Special deadlines will be observed for breaking campus events. The opinions expressed in Hilltopics are those of the authors solely and do not reflect the beliefs of Hilltopics or any other entity. As such, Hilltopics does not publish anonymous articles.
The RLSH experience: it’s kind of like Kindergarten all over again

by Todd Baty

I’m not particularly difficult to please. I don’t expect the SMU residence halls to be the on-campus equivalent of a five-star hotel or cushy spa. I don’t expect incredibly spacious rooms or cable TV with over a hundred channels—heck, I really don’t even expect a large closet or maid service. What I do expect, however, is a residential experience that isn’t like living in Kindergarten. In the four years I’ve lived on campus, I have yet to feel like my dorm room was remotely a space of my own—I have yet to feel like I wasn’t living in a McDonald’s playpen or an elementary school playground.

If RLSH is wondering why there is a mass exodus after the required first-year living experience, here are a few explanations that deserve consideration:

1. RLSH loves to hold your hand and make decisions for you.

I like to think that I’m mature enough to empathize with RLSH’s situation. I understand that firm policies need to be in place in order for everyone to live harmoniously in such a small space—anyone that leases space understands that the land owner reserves the right to create certain rules. However, RLSH takes this idea to a ridiculous extreme, an extreme that not only questions the maturity level of its inhabitants but seems to insult us as a group of uncontrollable animals. RLSH has so many rules concerning how a student is allowed to decorate his or her room it is liable to make even the most astute person’s head numb. There are even rules concerning what you can hang on the outside of your door, or the amount of the wall that can be covered up by posters. Painting your room a different color is of course out of the question, even if you promise to paint it back. Unauthorized rearranging of the furniture in a common area even comes with a fine. There are rules and fines for everything—so many that individuality and personality are completely snuffed out. Walk into any dorm at SMU and they all look the same—neatly arranged bulletin boards (like the kind you would see in an elementary school), neatly arranged furniture (that looks like no one has sat in or touched it for weeks out of fear of messing it up), and uniform halls with uniform rooms. Why can’t college students have collective discretion over their environment? Having control over their own rooms would be a nice start. Right now, I live in perpetual fear that I might break a rule (perhaps without even knowing it) and have to pay a fine.

2. RLSH loves to tell you how to spend your time (like you aren’t busy enough or need help making friends).

Why are there always so many RLSH events? Whether mandatory or optional, RLSH hosts so many events, students not only lose track of when and where they are—they stop caring. If I’m not mistaken, each RA must put on at least one event per month. That’s in addition to the other events the hall director comes up with. Often these events have the same hackneyed themes: safe sex, drug abuse, alcohol use, Valentine’s day celebration, Super Bowl party, etc. I don’t know about you, but I didn’t go to college to attend little holiday parties like the ones I had in
2008: Students Speaking Truth to Power

The year has hardly started and big things are already under way. Presently, the voters of the United States are in the process of electing a new commander-in-chief. An unprecedented election is taking place. It is historic not only because of who is running for office, but also because the next president might have to actually listen to the people of this country and make change happen.

In 2006, the Democrats became the majority in Congress. Some thought this would bring about change, but the fact of the matter is that politicians on both sides of the game have one thing in common: they are completely beholden to the corporations, organizations, and individuals who donate huge amounts of money to their campaigns. Please note that you are almost certainly not included in this group of donors – only .25% of the United States population gives $200 or more to political campaigns. When donors give money to a political campaign, they expect something in return. The relationships between contributors and candidates directly and negatively affect students with regard to tuition, financial aid, and loans. Many students are familiar with the subsidized Stafford loan. Subsidized Stafford loans are the most beneficial of three major federal financial aid programs, unsubsidized Stafford loans and Pell grants being the other two. Together, these three programs provide about 60% of government aid to undergraduate students.

In his article “Money on My Mind: Paying for College,” Professor of Economics at Colgate University Jay Mandle explains that between 1996 and 2006 average tuition for a four-year private university climbed 27.6% and average tuition for a four-year public university climbed 38.2%. During that span of time, the average subsidized Stafford loan has decreased 16.7%. As a result of this trend, students and their families became, and are continuously becoming, increasingly dependent on non-governmental loans. In 1996 and 1997, private sector student loans totaled about $2.3 billion. By 2005 and 2006, that number had increased to $17.3 billion. Accordingly, student debt has skyrocketed as well.

So what’s the connection here? We can look to relationships between companies like Sallie Mae and politicians to answer that question. The article “Selling Out Higher Education Policy?” in the Chronicle of Higher Education reveals that in 2003 and 2004 members of the U.S. House of Representatives charged with reauthorizing the Higher Education Act received roughly $1 million in contributions from the student loan and for-profit college industry, most notably from Sallie Mae. (May I subtly point out that SMU maintains extensive contracts with Sallie Mae?) Needless to say, the new and improved Higher Education Act provided for less assistance to college students and largely benefited the student loan industry and for-profit colleges. There are endless examples like this that show the corrupting influence of money in politics.

Back to the idea of change. What counts as change? What do we want to happen? There is actually a pretty obvious answer: get influential campaign contributions out of the political process. There are systems of publicly funded elections that work wonderfully in seven states and two cities in the U.S. There is also a national bill called the Fair Elections Now Act (FENA) that would allow for optional public funding of House and Senate campaigns. With Fair Elections, also

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foreclosing and many sub-prime owners defaulting on their loans, banks are taking huge losses. With these losses come less available credit for banks to offer, this scenario aptly termed “the credit crunch”

At the time when the “credit crunch” began “brewing” housing prices were at an all time high, the market was booming. Banks began to offer “equity loans” which in layman terms means if you took out a $100,000 mortgage to pay for your $100,000 home, and over time the market value of your house increased to $120,000, you could take out $20,000 of equity against your home. This could be done to finance anything from getting a backyard pool to buying a car, or just extra cash it didn’t matter. Home owners did this and all was well and happy. Then with sub-prime mortgages beginning to default and more and more homes being foreclosed on, the value of housing began to drop. This was trouble for equity owners because now if they sold their home they could no longer pay off the equity they borrowed on their home. This was known as the “equity crunch”

This all carries into our present day situation. Both the equity and credit crunches strapping house holds for cash,

paired with soaring energy prices (light crude oil recently closed at over $100 for the first time in history) needed to heat homes for the winter and drive cars to work, have left most consumers with considerably less disposable income. This is trouble because consumer spending accounts for nearly two-thirds of the U.S. economy whose health relies heavily on Americans being able to shop. With less consumer spending, firms begin to lay off workers and record lower sales revenues. This brings us into the negative growth period we are more than likely entering.

Be wary future informed voters, many solutions sound feasible but in reality do not work, tax cuts and tax breaks are not the solution. Injecting money into the economy will more than likely go to paying off mortgages or saving because of a lack of consumer confidence. The root of the problem is the sub-prime mortgages, and this is what must be addressed to lead our economy to the land of milk and honey. Be informed and vote wisely, the American economy will return to exuberance, but only with appropriate leadership and correct wisdom. It’s true what they say, “it’s the economy, stupid.”

J.P. Coleman is a junior economics major and can be contacted at jpcolema@smu.edu

Do you have an opinion about... politics, music, class, television, football, shopping, intramurals, fraternities, movies, tests, the Mavs, sex, restaurants, religion, sororities, driving, study abroad, Umphrey Lee, fashion, news, the war, parking, technology, magazines, bars, baseball, the weather, professors, the Mustang Band, dating, books, nightclubs, Texas, the Daily Campus, pets, club sports, or anything else?

we’re listening at hilltopics@gmail.com
Creationism and Intelligent Design Political Apologists: Harming Our Nation’s Youth and Future

by Ben Wells

Last year as we wound down our fall semester, prepared to go on Christmas break, bid adieu to 2007, and see friends and family something rather insidious happened in this great state of Texas. Down in Austin a long time and well respected administrator of the Texas Education Agency was recommended for termination for political reasons by a force that has been trying to change America to shape their own cultural, political, and fundamentalist world view. The force I am talking about is of course creationists and their apologists who have politicized science in many states, Texas being a prime example of their work.

Christine Comer was the Texas Education Agency’s director of science curriculum and was a highly accomplished and well respected woman for her high standards in working to teach science in public education. She became the victim of a politics when she was recommended by Lizzette Reynolds (former deputy legislative director for Gov. George W Bush) to be fired for her forwarding of an e-mail with the subject line “FYI” to various online communities. The e-mail was an advertisement for a speaking engagement by author Barbara Forrest, who knows the ins and outs of the creationist movement to alter public education and has been a legal witness to many of the court battles that have tried to place ID into the nation’s science curriculum. The TEA claims that this e-mail gave an endorsement from the TEA into an area in which it should remain neutral. Some journalists have pointed out even more insidious underpinnings, such as TEA chairman of the State Board of Education Don McLeroy who may be part of the ID efforts to “teach the controversy” by pushing ID into the TEKS and causing nationwide text book revisions.

While darker motives may be at play here with the likes of McLeroy and other pro-ID politicos I think that the most interesting and disturbing trend is the TEA’s comment that it should “remain neutral” on the teaching of science. Most ID/Creationists supporters who would read this article will at this point say, “But ID is science! There is debate, etc. etc.” We’ll my friends, while space constraints do not allow for a Theory and Philosophy of Science 101 or an explanation of what science is I must say, no ID/Creationism are not science. They are metaphysical beliefs that have untestable hypotheses because science can not prove or disprove the existence of a creator. If a theory can not be proved or disproved then it is not science, it is metaphysics and/or religion and must be taken on faith. Science has no place in proving or disproving religion because it cant and religion has no place in proving or disproving science because it cant.

Why then is the organization that is supposed to be representing scientific teaching in Texas’ primary and secondary education system not teaching science? We can look back to our Creationist/ID politico friends for that answer. They have systematically tried to target hard working individuals like Christine Comer in order to push through their own world view that they seek to force on the rest of our great state and nation. These individuals cant seem to be happy with their metaphysical beliefs remaining faith based beliefs, it is almost as if they need to prove to themselves that it is true by encroaching on the field of science. The shame is when they do this they corrupt their own spiritual beliefs as well as the integrity of science and then we arrive at the infighting that happens in places like the TEA where good people like Comer get the boot.

If you have read this far and still feel that creationism is a continued on page 7
“The RLSH experience...” continued from page 2

The presidential candidates we must pay attention to this issue part of the mainstream conversation and really make a difference, really make change. When thinking about the presidential candidates we must pay attention to their histories and stances on campaign finance reform.

John McCain passed the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA), or “McCain-Feingold.” BCRA made some important changes in the system of campaign financing, but it opened up several loopholes. It was not a final solution. Now, McCain is shying away from the issue of campaign finance reform and has not signed on to support the Fair Elections Now Act (FENA). Hillary Clinton has expressed some support for public funding of elections on the campaign trail, but she has also refrained from signing on as an official supporter of FENA. While Barack Obama frequently talks about the corrupting role of lobbyists and corporate interests, there are cracks in his claims that he takes no money from lobbyists. He does accept money from state lobbyists, because they apparently will not influence him at a federal level. Nonetheless, Obama is the only presidential candidate who is a co-signer of the Fair Elections Now Act. He has also passed legislation limiting lobbyist influence in government and helped to create an online database that allows people to track federal government spending (http://usaspending.gov/index.php).

There are candidates and legislation to support and oppose. There is that idealistic, and perhaps realistic, notion of change to chase. There is that debt piling up as you move through school to consider. There is absolutely no excuse not to be involved in politics right now. The time is now for everyone, especially students, to get involved with whichever candidate they support and try to make the change they want to see in the world.

To get to work getting influential money out of politics, get involved with Democracy Matters.

Cody Meador can be contacted at CodyLM@gmail.com.
country’s scientific practice that should be taught in high school science classes then I have one more thin left to say. If we keep railroading good scientists and educators who are attempting to teach good science (which the concept of evolution is, keep in mind the “how” of evolution is debated, not that it happens) then the damage will go beyond merely hurting science as an academic inquiry. The damage will be economic. The fundamentalists who propose “doing away” with evolution due to their misheld notions of some secular conspiracy, fear of the unknown, or inability to truly believe on faith what they force on the rest of us will end up costing our state and nation untold amounts of economic and scientific opportunity. To renounce science (which ID/creationist supporters do) is to renounce genetics, biology, chemistry, physics, etc. With the rise in economic and social value of high-tech industry, bio-medicine, nano-tech, etc. then the danger is clear. Countries like China, England, and Singapore are pushing forward with cutting edge scientific research while states like Texas languish in the backwaters of scientific advancement. While we debate if dinosaurs lived with man Singapore is building “bio-cities” that are havens for cutting edge research. While we railroad good educators in the name of fundamentalist political agendas other states are preparing their kids for the future. The onus is on fundamentalists, creationists, and ID proponents – do you want to hold the rest of us back for your metaphysical beliefs or let our great state and economy get to work on the next big advancements? Science and religion don’t have to be in conflict and they most certainly shouldn’t be in politics. The case of the fundamentalists take down of Christine Comer is a prime example of what happens when they intermix.

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Second Annual Hilltopics Campus Essay Contest 2008

This spring semester, Hilltopics is hosting its second annual campus-wide essay contest, and you are invited to participate! Contestants will write one essay according to the prompt and guidelines below for a chance at $800.00 in prizes: one grand prize, $500; two honorable mentions, $150 each. In addition, the top three essays will be published in a special issue of Hilltopics.

Prompt: Increasingly, institutions of higher education seem to be adopting a more corporate function, choosing to invest in revenue and/or image boosting ventures like athletics departments, campus building and beautification projects, or aggressive undergraduate recruitment programs. As the PBS documentary Declining by Degrees addresses, this shift in priorities has substantially hindered traditional educational structures, such as undergraduate teaching and residential learning. Many are deeply concerned by this trend in higher education. Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?

Submission Requirements

Contestants should follow the instructions below carefully or else risk disqualification:

- Essays should be between 600 and 750 words.
- All essays must be emailed to hilltopics@gmail.com by 5 p.m. on April 4, 2008. IN ADDITION, each contestant must turn in THREE hard copies to Clements 109 by the same date and time.
- All essays must have a cover page with the following information: contestant’s name, email address, telephone number, major(s), classification (year graduating), and student ID number. Nothing but this personal information should be on the cover page.
- The contestant’s name should NOT appear on any page OTHER THAN the cover page. All other pages should include the contestant’s student ID number in the upper right-hand corner.
- All essay titles should appear on the first page of text, not the cover page.
- All pages should be double spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman.
- If resources are used or quoted, students should create footnotes following MLA style.
- All pages should be numbered, not including the cover page.

Adjudicating Criteria

Essays will be judged according to the following elements:

- clarity of thought, argument, and idea
- syntax, spelling, word choice, and grammar
- use of specific examples, information, and details to support assertions
- essay addressed the prompt fully and creatively
- essay adhered to the submission requirements listed above

Questions? Contact Todd Baty at tbaty@smu.edu
Thumbs down:
• Cramming for midterms. Try not to forget your own name.
• Mother Nature taunting us with 90 degree weather in February. You just know it’s going to be freezing in a week.
• “Step Up 2” being completely snubbed by the Oscars. I smell a rat!

Thumbs up:
• SMU is officially set to receive the Bush Library. Whatever your opinion of its namesake, it’s a huge asset for the school.
• Every SBO candidate endorsed by Hilltopics won. Are we good or what?
• American Idol has finally picked its finalists so we don’t have to listen to any more ear-splittingly terrible auditions.

Headline of the week:
“Evil Elmo Doll Voices Death Threats To Toddler”

Upcoming Events:
Sooner than you think – Midterms. Get to studying, slackers!
March 2nd – Last day for priority Residence Hall sign up
March 2nd - Last chance to see the current Meadows Museum exhibit, “Jerry Bywaters: Interpreter of the Southwest”
March 4th – Texas Democratic and Republican Presidential Primaries
March 4th – Tate Lecture series presents ABC News Anchor Bob Woodruff and wife, Lee Woodruff
March 6th – Take Lecture series presents former prime minister Tony Blair
March 10th – Spring Break! Don’t do anything you wouldn’t tell your grandparents about. And for pete’s sake, don’t put it on facebook.

SMU Fact:
1943 was a tough year for Southern Methodist University students. World War II was raging, and both Easter and Thanksgiving breaks were cancelled.

Southern Methodist University played its first intercollegiate baseball game in 1916 against Texas Christian University. It played its last intercollegiate baseball game in April 1980, with a 21 win and 22 loss record that season.