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HILLTOPICS

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Winning by Disappointment

by Cody Meador

New York is officially short one liberal Democratic senator. Former U.S. Representative Kirsten Gillibrand has been appointed by New York Governor Paterson to replace Hillary Clinton, who vacated her Senate seat to fill the role of Secretary of State under President Obama. Gillibrand is a Democrat, but she is known as both a centrist Democrat and a conservative Democrat, depending on who you ask. In the House of Representatives, Gillibrand represented a rural, conservative district in upstate New York. She espoused notoriously conservative viewpoints, opposing gun control laws and fighting for strict, enforcement-only immigration policy. Nonetheless, she has also been a strong advocate for women's rights and gay marriage (although she changed her stance on gay marriage rather abruptly, which some speculate was a calculated move to win Governor Paterson's favor).

Many liberal New York activists and immigration activists are angered by Gillibrand's appointment. They argue that her extremist views on immigration are out of line with New York's greater population. As a Representative, she opposed any amnesty or path to citizenship for illegal immigrants and advocated deputizing local law enforcement officials to enforce federal



immigration laws. She was vocal in her opposition to Governor Eliot Spitzer's proposal to allow drivers' licenses and insurance to illegal immigrants, and she joined others in a crusade to cement English as the official language of the United States. These various stances cause many in New York to see Gillibrand not only as out of touch with popular views in New York, but also as out of touch with her party and as an opponent to New York's large and vibrant immigrant population.

However, a recent Siena College Poll found that 51% of state voters approve of their new Senator. To her credit, Gillibrand has also agreed to reconsider immigration issues as well as urban gun control policy now that she is a representative of the entire state. Nonetheless, the stark difference between Gillibrand and her predecessor, Hillary Clinton, raise questions about the process of replacing vacated Senate seats, and if an appointment must be made, who

should be chosen.

Unlike when a member of the House of Representatives vacates his or her seat, Senators are generally replaced by

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Reading Days: Josh Wood discusses the detrimental effects of losing the privilege of reading days.
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Movics: Ashley Howe provides a response to Clint Eastwood's latest film. page 3

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.

Reading Days Reminiscence - Another Policy Shaped by a Few Bad Apples

The last ten days or so of the fall semester seemed significantly more hurried and stressful than previous years, didn't they? Over the winter break, I routinely pondered what went wrong. Was it a lack of effort? Perhaps I just practiced poor time management skills? It took me quite some time before I could put my finger on it, so the epiphany was intensified: "What happened to my reading days?"

Oh yeah, the SMU Drug Task Force happened. If you don't remember, two of the three recent student deaths occurred during the 'reading days' before final exams but after the last day of classes. Now, I genuinely thought that most of the suggestions made by the task force were great; this one left me scratching my head. By removing the reading days between the last day of classes and the first day of finals, the Task Force basically decided to punish the very students who are trying to make a good name for this university. Think of the hardest partier in your group of friends - do you think his or her class schedule has a significant influence on his or her drinking or drug-abusing behavior? Taking away reading days has no impact on these individuals whatsoever. Now consider your most studious friends. Are they taking 18+ hours and enduring 6 finals every semester? Did they seemingly disappear during the last two weeks of each semester, even when we had reading days?

Even for the rest of us (you know, those students trying to keep a decent GPA so that we can get hired in this quagmire



by Josh Wood
of an economy, while also desperately attempting to cling to the remnants of our social lives), those few days are vital. Here's a lovely example: one of my friends had a professor whose syllabus called for three exams in one semester before the final. The class got behind schedule, and therefore the third exam was held on the last day of class. If we had a buffer between class and finals, this would be a nuisance, but not a catastrophe. Instead, my friend had back-to-back tests in a difficult class, with 60 or more percent of his grade being determined in a span of 2 days.

The point I am trying to make is that good students taking challenging classes are the only victims of this rule. By removing this vital study time, these students become more stressed. And you know what I do when I'm stressed? I binge drink.

Josh Wood is a senior electrical engineering major and can be reached at jlwood@smu.edu

Movie Review: Gran Torino

by Ashley Howe

“Gran Torino” is by far the most profound and thought-provoking movie I have seen. When I read the movie’s summary: “A widowed bigot deals with ethnic violence in his neighborhood,” I thought that this would be one of those straightforward action movies where you leave the theater no different than from when you walked in. THIS IS NOT ONE OF THOSE MOVIES. As soon as you are about twenty minutes into the show, you are confronted with all of the conflicting and emotional sides of the evolving definition of what it is to be an American today. The previously mentioned “bigot” is played by Clint Eastwood – and he is not a bigot. He represents all Americans who face a changing national population and are not quite sure what to think about it. His neighborhood was once a bastion of ‘50s conservatism, but now it is a rundown neighborhood with an increasingly ethnic population. A gang starts causing trouble and creating violence while trying to recruit the Hmong boy who lives next door to Eastwood. Overcoming his pessimism about his neighbors, Eastwood tries to set the boy on the right path and steer him away from a life of crime. The movie is full of courageous virtues that reiterate quite accurately what it is to be an American. One person, leaving the theater, just kept saying “So many lessons....” If you think you know how you feel about immigration, guess again. This movie will destabilize any notion you once had.

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Appointment

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appointment and then run in the next election. Most state legislators have the option to hold a special election, but it is not commonly done. Senators were not originally meant to be elected at all; they were selected by state legislators. However, tensions between ideological parties among state legislators often prevented any decision from being reached, and there were also problems with corruption in choosing Senators. Public pressure for Senate reform was maintained through the turn of the century, and by 1912 up to twenty-nine states had implemented elections for Senators. The movement for reform culminated in the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1913. Nonetheless, there is still a differential between the House and Senate, with House replacements elected by vote and Senate replacements appointed by the state government. Some states require that an appointee be of the same party as his or her predecessor, but for the most part it is up to the state government.

In New York’s case, it was known that Governor Paterson wanted to replace Clinton with a woman, which is a nice gesture (after all, there are only seventeen women currently). With that in mind, however, one wonders whether Paterson simply picked a look-a-like of Hillary Clinton (Gillibrand also has short blonde hair and an affinity for pantsuits). Gillibrand and Clinton may share a similar look and the same political party, but their stances on issues like immigration are worlds apart. Was Gillibrand really an appropriate choice with this in mind? Or was she the best option of the female sex? There’s no way to know for sure (unless Paterson gets caught saying something incriminating on tape like another governor we know), and we’ll just have to wait until 2010 to see how voters evaluate Kirsten Gillibrand. In the meantime, it seems that we should all think carefully about the value of an appointed official versus an elected official. Perhaps it is time again to pressure government to allow for a more democratic approach to filling vacated Senate seats.

Cody Meador is a junior political science major and can be reached at CodyLM@gmail.com

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



Men's Basketball
SMU v. Houston
Wednesday, February 11, 2009
8:00 PM
Moody Coliseum



Thumbs UP

- Summer comes early in Texas
- Recycle Mania! Good people re-cycle
- Beginning of the end for seniors
- Left 4 Dead Free DLC



Thumbs down:

- Men's basketball record
- Summer comes early in Texas
- Beginning of unemployment for seniors

Upcoming Events:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| February 12 | Democracy Matters Meeting
8:30 H-T Portico E |
| February 14 | Valentine's Day |
| February 21 | SMU Vs. Rice
Moody Coliseum |
| Through May 17 | Etruscan Treasures
Meadows Museum |

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