Winning by Disappointment

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

continued on page 3
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 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.

Ashley Howe can be reached at amhowe@smu.edu
Thumbs UP
• Summer comes early in Texas
• Recycle Mania! Good people recycle
• 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

SMU Totally Fictitious Fact:
Our absurd landscaping budget outweighs our huge coaching salaries.

Hilltopics Staff
Cody Meador: Editor–in–Chief
Ashley Howe: Managing Editor
Thomas Dunlap & Josh Wood: Graphics Editors
Beth Anderson: Copy Editor
Amanda Oldham: Copy Editor
James Justinic: Webmaster
Adrienne Yim: Business Manager

Hilltopics is published every other Tuesday. It is sponsored by the University Honors Program.