

# The Challenger

A Publication of the William Rainey Harper College Honors Program

## It's More Than a Dot on the Ballot Card: the 2008 Election

By Jennifer Bynes

"I intend to do this..." "I promise I will do that..." As time goes on and we get closer to the cut-throat election, candidates are saying things that are nice to hear. All the guarantees may sound reassuring, but hey, I can promise you anything too – it doesn't mean I will do it. Of course, in the end it isn't *who* we are voting for (this isn't a popularity contest). We need to be sure of *what* we are voting for. With the 2008 election approaching, we as citizens of the United States have the luxury to vote.

The election is on November 4, 2008. What makes the 2008 election more exciting is that this is the first election in eighty years that has no incumbents, sitting president or vice president, in the running – all assuming that current Vice President Dick Cheney, who announced in 2001 that he would never run for president and reiterated the statement in 2004, does not change his mind. The election is also hopeful ground for history making; 2008 could elect the first African American or woman president. Also, no Senator has been elected president since John F. Kennedy in 1960. Whoever wins the Electoral College will become the 44th president of the United States and that person's running mate will become the 47th vice president.

The truth is that there is more than a Republican or Democratic party to side with. Within the Third party and Independent candidates, there are the write-ins, the Constitution, the Socialist Party USA, the Green, the Libertarian, the Prohibition, the Socialist Equality, the Socialist Workers, and the Workers World Party. Parties are attempting to be added everyday; recently in the running are Cris Ericson of the Marijuana Party-Vermont and Jonathon "The Impaler" Sharkey of the Vampire, Witches, and Pagan Party-New

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### Politics

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## Tacitly Euthanized? Why Our Generation Needs to Vote!

By Brandon Czajka

Vote or die! This sums up Diddy's most recent political movement persuading America's youth to exercise their right to vote. Our country's finest achievement is democracy. Along with democracy comes the ability to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. One of these vital liberties awarded to American citizens is the right to vote. While our founding fathers sacrificed everything they held dear, such as their families, property, and their very own lives for privileges such as these, all that was gained will soon be forever lost if the voter turnout continues down the same path as it has in recent years.

According to the Federal Election Commission, in 1960, the estimated turnout of all eligible voters was at an impressive 63.1%. Fast-forward to the year 2002 and that turnout rate plunged 26.1%, to only 37% of voter turnout. The only thing more shocking than this is the youth turnout. In presidential election years between 1972 and 2000, the youth turnout rate deteriorated 16% to only 36% (Lopez 1). With such a decline in voter turnout since the 1960s, our right to vote seems to be losing its meaning. While groups such as Diddy's "Vote or Die" have slightly

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## Terror Alert! Current Threat Level: Orange

By Andrea Lett

Remember the last time you were flipping through the channels and stopped at CNN to see that the Department of Homeland Security had increased the threat level to orange, which signified that the country was at a high risk of terrorist attacks? In order to understand homeland security, it is crucial to comprehend the government's language in the advisory system. In the system, there are five different colors which each signify a different level of threatening behavior. The colors and levels are as follows: green indicating low, blue indicating guarded, yellow indicating elevated, orange indicating high and red indicating severe. This color-coded system allows the public and its officials to be informed in order to prevent another attack on American soil.

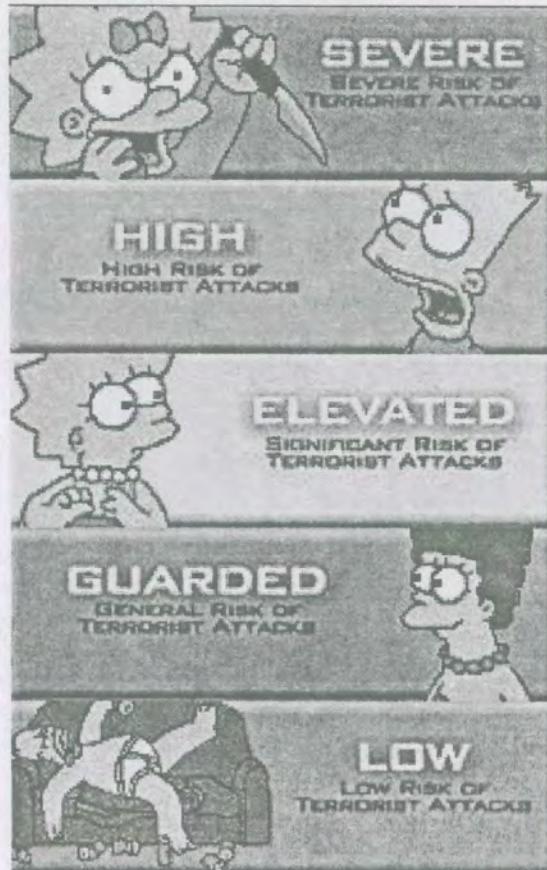
Critics believe that raising the threat level can have a major economic, physical, and psychological effect on society; however, the Department of Homeland Security argues that post 9/11 research has shown that it is a useful tool in order to prevent future acts of terror.

On February 8, 2006, President George W. Bush stated, "I'm very proud of the hard work of the men and women of the Homeland Security Department. This vital department is actively engaged in the war on terror. We are still a nation at risk. Part of our strategy, of course, is to stay on the offense against terrorists who would do us harm. In other words, it is important to defeat them overseas so we never have to face them here. Nevertheless, we recognize that we've got to be fully prepared at the homeland." The Department of Homeland Security directly affects U.S. citizens through travel and security procedures and United States immigration laws. For example, Homeland Security is responsible for airport safety procedures such as forcing you to take your shoes off before the x-ray scan. These Homeland Security officials feel that by doing every little thing possible in terms of security the government will be able to prevent future acts of terror in the United States.

On March 5, 2007, Governor Rod Blagojevich appointed Andrew Velasquez III as director of the State of Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA). Velasquez formerly worked as the head of Chicago's Office of Emergency Management and Communications; now he has been presented with a larger role to fulfill. The new director will be in charge of maintaining a close eye on disaster response efforts in Illinois in relation to our security. The Governor of Illinois stated that he was proud to appoint the first Hispanic ever to the state's top safety agency.

The main goal of homeland security in this country is to keep United States citizens safe. Many people hear this and think that they are protected; however, as Professor Bobby Summers states, "It is impossible to have complete homeland security in a democracy. America wants absolute security, but they don't know what that means. The only way to have complete homeland security is in a fascist state." Overall, the

daunting challenge of the government is to preserve the security of our democratic state while avoiding fascism. For more information, please visit the Department of Homeland Security website at [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).



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## Let There Be More Light

By Ian Taylor

Disregarding the fact that we do not live under a truly democratic government, such a system seems ideal. Indeed, our government, throughout its history, has gone to great lengths to support it, which was the case for the Spanish-American War. Although the war was initially waged because of the sinking of the Maine, a battleship stationed off the coast of Cuba, throughout the war it became much less about the Maine and more about freeing Spain's colonies from the evil empire. Despite most of the colonies finding they had been freed from Spain only to be conquered by America, the idea of freeing the poor oppressed people from a

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Jersey.

In reality, bipartisanship in the United States seems unrealistic. It is as if we are forced to choose between two sets of standards while those touchstones are hazy. The most challenging component in the distinction between the parties is exactly what the parties stand for. We are forced to choose between a donkey and an elephant. Our ideas are modeled into black or white in politics, although some politicians' actions may be in the gray area.

Although some of us will go straight to the workforce after our time at Harper, many of us will transfer to another college or university to continue our higher education. As we all know, the higher the education, the higher the cost. Senator Hillary Clinton fails to address her plan for better education on her website. She stresses the significance of early education in New York on her senator website, but does not refer to the national issue of education reform.

John Edwards' plan for education reform is promising but expensive. He created a program in Greene County, North Carolina called College for Everyone. In his program, first-year students working part time while attending a public university will receive full tuition in exchange. Mr. Edwards believes that education is vital to eradicate poverty in the United States. I asked Jennifer Psaki, Barack Obama's Press Secretary, whether Obama believes if education is the key to ending poverty. I addressed the fact that those who've become successful without attending college may be offended by this. Ms. Psaki proclaimed that Obama believes "everyone is entitled to go to college. While it is beneficial in ending poverty, Obama's plan is to make college affordable." Mr. Obama has plans to increase access to federal college loans. In his plans to do so, he will make the loans more affordable for students, although it was not clear on how he will go about it. He will also increase the Pell Grant from \$4,050 to \$5,100. I also asked Ms. Psaki why Senator Obama reaches out to students (because most of us don't have any money!) and she replied, "Students are underestimated." In otherwords, Obama feels as if students are not given enough credit.

As for Republican candidates, neither Rudolph Giuliani, Mitt Romney nor John McCain have presented an in depth plan for higher education. In 2000, John McCain did declare that he was pressing for unrestricted block grants that let the states decide spending – but if we allow the states to decide it leaves the question if those in need would actually receive grants. Mr. McCain has not addressed any recent propositions for improving higher education.

On April 24, 2007, the House of Representatives, with a vote of 208 to 218, approved a bill that commands the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. This bill

was vetoed. The majority of our troops are ages 18 to 25; it is imperative for our generation to understand each candidate's plans for the war. One lesser-known candidate, Dennis Kucinich (D), who did not vote for the war from the beginning, said, "It must be really tough for presidential candidates to come before the American people and claim that they were tricked, deceived, and misled...by George Bush?" It is shocking to see how many candidates actually voted for the war. Both John Edwards and Hillary Clinton did in 2002, but both are now highly critical of our involvement in Iraq. Mr. Obama, along with other presidential candidates, want to have, as Ms. Psaki said, "all combat troops out by the end of 2007."

Keep the troops over there or bring them home? In honesty it is an unanswerable question as long as we, the American people, have no real understanding of why we are over there. Most candidates are now claiming that they regret voting for the war, but some are still supportive. Mitt Romney (R) and Mike Huckabee (R) are both backing the war but are critical of how things are handled over there. I question if the candidates have a real understanding of our purpose over in Iraq – democracy for Iraq or oil? If we are over there for oil, then our plans to defeat global warming might as well be sent over to Iraq with our troops.

Global warming, along with the other problems our country faces, will most likely be left for the next president to deal with. Senator John McCain (R) said, "The debate is over, my friends. Now the question is what do we do?" Many of us understand the negatives of global warming; we recognize that it is a serious issue. All of the candidates, except for Representative Duncan Hunter (R) and Representative Tom Tancredo (R), have touched on the issue, at least briefly. It is surprising that only a few hopefuls say how they would attempt to correct, or at least limit the phenomenon. Senator Mike Gravel (D), Senator John Edwards (D), and Governor Bill Richardson (D) have all stated what they are going to do about the worldwide issue. It was former Mayor Giuliani who declared the harsh truth about the threatening topic. He stated that the existence of global warming is unnecessary "because we should be dealing with pollution anyway." It truly showed his concern for the world by addressing the fact that the current problems are only the result of previous ones.

Beyond global issues, we have problems in our own country that need attention. Nine million children in the United States have no health insurance. 35.9 million people live below the poverty line. Each hopeful candidate proclaims a "new generation." A new generation is promised every four years, but the problems in our country still exist and have, in fact, increased within the last decade. While people seek for an exciting and innovative future in the idea of a woman president, Hillary Clinton cannot fulfill this hope. It is a shame that one woman can get ahead by riding on the coattails of her former-president husband; which contradicts her profile as a feminist candidate.

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elevated turnout, more must be done!

Today's youth faces the war on terrorism and skyrocketing college education fees, so it is imperative for all involved to educate themselves and vote accordingly. When faced with a very similar situation, the youth of the sixties grasped and manipulated this concept to better their quality of life. Before the twenty-sixth amendment was passed, limitations restricted citizens under the age of twenty-one from voting. In a time when the Vietnam War became futile, underage students were left voiceless. They believed the only means through which their voices could be heard were through protests and demonstrations. In a recent presentation, Harper College professor Tom DePalma explained that through multiple youth movements, students were able to end *in loco parentis*, in which universities acted as the student's parents away from home. This meant colleges could no longer set curfews or dress codes, and students were able to retain their freedom of speech without fear of being expelled.

Another more momentous accomplishment was their effect on the War in Vietnam. "Both the counterculture and student activism, finally, fueled a backlash [in relation to the Vietnam War and the way youth were looked upon] that blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s" ("Vietnam War Era Ephemera Collection" 4). If the baby boomers were capable of revolutionizing the face of America in the sixties, who's to say that today's youth can't have the same impact? Professor DePalma believes that today's students are actually one step ahead of those from the sixties because we now feel empathy versus just sympathy. Students now more often question and are intrigued by America's problems rather than just feeling remorse. If this is true, imagine what we can accomplish by simply practicing our right to vote.



As many suggest, the War in Iraq is becoming another Vietnam. Countless numbers of troops are lost each day and it seems as if nothing is getting accomplished. Democrats constantly bash George W. Bush for taking us into this deadlocked war even though the majority of them voted for it. Republicans continue to stand with the president despite him having one of history's lowest presidential ratings. Like Iraq, our own government is in an indecisive, chaotic mess. Unless we want to continue our lives in bedlam with constant fear of terrorism, something must be done to clear the disorder. Richard Krupa, a political science instructor at Harper College, said, "Are we asking too much from today's college students to become politically active? We have to make them understand that all parts of our government affect their lives and are closer to them than they think." The most efficient means of shaping our future into a safe and secure environment is through

voting. Stephanie Blanchard, a freshman at Harper who regularly exercises her right to vote, stated, "With the world being as dangerous as it is, it is essential for today's youth to become politically educated because sooner or later they will be affected, whether by possibly being drafted or by having to raise their children in an unstable world."

According to most college students, the major problems with government and politics are the lack of trust and interest. Mr. Krupa went on to declare, "I think being politically active is somewhat inherent in one's psyche. You either care about politics or you find it incredibly boring. The only way to change that is education on the issues first, followed by political activity." While politics may be incredibly boring, our future is in its hands. Fully learning and understanding the issues will equip us with the necessary tools needed to cast an appropriate vote. This knowledge can eventually cut and eliminate all distrusted politicians, if done correctly. Hanady Khourshid, a freshman at Harper, declares, "All politicians lie! It seems hypocritical to believe and vote for any of them while they lie through their teeth." The fact of the matter is political issues will permanently decide what our future holds. If today's youth wants their voices to be heard and opinions to be expressed, they must recognize that their votes do count.

Similarly to the Vietnam generation, we must become politically active by becoming educated first. The simplest way to become informed is by taking a political science course at some point. Harper College offers several of these courses that all do a fine job of properly enlightening students on politics. If taking a course for whatever reason presents a problem, tune in to the numerous political news networks that offer up-to-date, 24/7 news coverage. The Harper College Democrats even allow students to launch their own political activist careers. After becoming aware of the workings and activities of the political world, we can advance to acting. Using the knowledge gained, we can properly cast smart votes and shape our future to our own likings. Every vote counts! No matter if you're a Republican in a Democratic region or vice versa, voting will make a difference. If voting isn't enough, protest and attend the numerous demonstrations that are held nearly every day. Be heard! As Diddy says, "Vote or die!" There's not much to it. We need to exercise our right to vote; otherwise, our voices will ultimately expire.

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## The PATRIOT Act

By Andrea Lett

On September 11th, 2001, nearly 3000 mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, grandparents and, most importantly, Americans lost a loved one due to the outrageous acts of hatred and terror inflicted on this country. After the gruesome events of that infamous Tuesday morning, the United States government questioned its security procedures and methods for the protection of American citizens. Just forty-five days after the horrible events of 9/11, President Bush passed a law that has made many people defensive about their right to privacy. On October 26th, 2001, the government put the USA PATRIOT Act into affect. Standing for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism, the USA PATRIOT Act works to protect America from future attacks of terrorism and many believe has done so thus far. This act gives agencies such as the FBI and CIA an expansion of power and enables federal officials to write their own search warrants, also called National Security Letters.

After the PATRIOT Act was put into affect, many people were critical. Some Americans feel that the PATRIOT Act is a direct invasion of privacy; however, security is also a key necessity for them. An interview with Michael Bellanger, a citizen of the United States, revealed, "I think it is an excuse to throw the constitution away. They're trying to sell it by naming it the 'PATRIOT' act." The main argument that many people pose is that it is unconstitutional in regards to the first, fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, and fourteenth amendments. The act gives the federal government superior power to interrupt and follow communications, both for law enforcement and the functions of foreign intelligence officials.



One public branch of life that is directly affected by this law is that of libraries. The American Library Association states, "Libraries provide information on all kinds of subjects and from all perspectives to their communities; this includes access to government information. Libraries also fight for civil liberties, including freedom of expression and privacy. Libraries are key sources of information for their

communities." All of these things are threatened by the power that the PATRIOT Act gives to law enforcement authorities. Public library officials offer many criticisms of this particular act as well.

In a conversation with Lynn Stainbrook, the executive director of the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, she revealed strong opinions regarding the changes in library policies. Regarding the PATRIOT Act, she stated, "The PATRIOT Act has been helpful in alerting the general public of the reasons why libraries keep information confidential. However, I fear that the abuse of putting too much power into one branch of government, in this case the executive branch, will lead to a worse future in regards to the branch's abuse of power." Librarians are not the only ones who worry that the PATRIOT Act is tipping the balances of power. Political Science Professor Bobby Summers stated, "I think the PATRIOT Act is very unconstitutional. It is basically a battle between freedom and order. America wants more order."

According to the Washington Post, Al Qaeda and various other terrorist groups threatened to "cripple the American economy and demoralize its people." In order to act upon threats much like this one, the United States reauthorized the Patriot Act in order to better serve this country's needs. Therefore, on March 9th, 2006, President Bush signed a bill that slightly changed it by increasing the surveillance privileges that the government currently has.

According to former Supreme Court judge of New Jersey Andrew Napolitano, the revised edition of the new PATRIOT Act "allows federal agents to obtain records about you from your accountant, bank, boat dealer, bodega, book store, car dealer, casino, computer server, credit union, dentist, HMO, hospital, hotel manager, insurance company, jewelry store, lawyer, library, pawn broker, pharmacist, physician, postman, real estate agent, supermarket, tax collectors, telephone company, travel agency, and trust company, and use the evidence thus obtained in any criminal prosecution against you."

The PATRIOT Act allows the federal government to invade the privacy of people more than ever in the history of America. Critics believe that it is a direct offense to the United States constitution and a complete invasion of privacy. It is interesting to see that just months after the occurrences of 9/11, people felt extremely safe and protected in large part due to the PATRIOT Act. However, now most people have come to realize that they do not agree with all parts of the act because of the limitations that are placed on their rights to privacy.

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despotic ruler sounded good to the general public and it still does.

Woodrow Wilson had difficulty convincing Americans to involve themselves in World War I for it was, to many, "Europe's war." Wilson therefore took a more convincing stance, proclaiming America would be "making the world safe for democracy." Although this slogan would eventually come to define America's foreign policy for the rest of the century, Wilson obviously failed at making the world safe for democracy. Despite the outcome of World War I, democracy almost immediately found itself on the brink of extinction. Governments began to destroy individual rights and autocracy quickly developed around the world: Bolshevism in Russia, Fascism in Italy, Germany and Spain, and militarism in Japan.

Luckily for democracy, this only created further chances to spread or defend itself against communism. Yet during the cold war, when America did not have the political capital it has today, politicians were far more prudent about using force to depose dictatorships and to create in their stead governments more akin to their liking. Foreign policy executives generally used more subtle tactics against non-democratic rulers. These policies consisted of either economic embargos, like the one that America for nearly half a century has imposed on Cuba, or refusing to admit that the state even existed, as was done when the Maoist revolutionaries seized power in China. America's greatest step towards imposing democracy was merely not allowing a country under its control, i.e. Vietnam, to vote when they were likely to vote for a non-democratic ruler, i.e. a communist.

Having gone to such great lengths to influence democracy might be an indication of its grandeur. Certainly despotic regimes make democracy look great and freedom is, indeed, priceless, but many people erroneously believe that democracy eclipses all other governments (even all possible governments) and support it without considering alternatives. The suppositions that democracy makes a free and peaceful society perpetuate this; however, both are false. America constantly proves that a majority can and often will tyrannize the minority. Furthermore, America is equally as capable of starting wars.

James Madison, fourth president of the United States and a key figure in the shaping of the constitution, once wrote in The Federalist no. 47, "The accumulation of all powers... in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny." America's government faces no immediate threat of usurpation. However, we must be constantly on guard against the possibility of a tyranny of the majority, and lately people have taken this threat less seriously than they should. For instance, after the 2004 elections, George W. Bush proclaimed the American people had given him a political mandate after winning only three percent more of the

popular vote than his rival. America's rich history of oppression only further discredits this view.

Both America and Americans also fail to qualify as particularly peaceful; war seems as vital to our government as violence is to our culture. Although many altruistic intents have a tendency to develop after a war has begun, America seldom proves itself reluctant to go to war. Generally speaking, America has a history of declaring war first. Save for World War II, America has always been rather quick on the draw, so to speak, particularly in unpleasant conflicts many of its people tend not to remember. There is also the issue of manifest destiny, somewhat reminiscent of a sentiment of which Hitler was rather fond.

Violence has a peculiar place in American culture as well. Everyone seems to agree that it is undesirable, particularly in the aftermaths of tragedies, but they can never seem to have enough of it. To a large extent, violence has always been a popular form of entertainment and a reality of life, but America, at times, seems less successful at reducing its influence on our culture than other developed nations. Many often posit Canada as an example of this, but without a deep cultural comparison, complete with superlative research, one cannot say. Nonetheless, violence, gun or otherwise, plagues our culture.

All this does not entirely refute arguments for democratic government, but for the most part it is probably superfluous in either case. A well-informed and intelligent electorate is the crux of any democracy, and this America does not have. Over two-hundred years of hindsight proves that many of the founding fathers placed great faith in this inherently flawed belief, as people consistently demonstrate that they are neither well-informed nor intelligent.

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who served from 1902 to 1932, famously stated that the first amendment does not protect the right of a man to shout "fire" in a crowded theatre, but as the founding fathers imagined their government, shouting "fire" would not be illegal or dangerous. In the free market of ideas they imagined, anything proposed would immediately meet an opposing argument or arguments, and the people would weigh each argument against one another until one won. Therefore, a man who shouts "fire" in a crowded theatre would immediately be answered by another asking where this fire was, and they would proceed to analyze the evidence for and against the first man's proclamation until they determined whether there is, in fact, a fire. This, however, seldom happens, either in theatres or in government. In the more common scenario, one man shouts "fire" and the crowd proceeds to rush chaotically towards the exit, trampling people beneath them.

Essentially, people are stupid. They often come to conclusions based on little evidence or reasoning and when proven wrong, rather than admitting they were mistaken, proceed to defend them fanatically. Even those who

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Senator Obama has a plan for a "new generation" as well. According to Ms. Psaki there has to be "a will to do it, a plan to do it, and support to do it." Senator Obama's major concern is uniting the country. "He is running because there is a divide," Ms. Psaki stated. When asked to embellish on the "divide" she responded, "In general; generations."

Unsurprisingly, this election is projected to be the most expensive yet. In previous years both Democratic and Republican Parties have racked up a total bill of \$649.5 million in 2000 and \$1,016,500,000 in 2004. Michael Toner, Federal Election Commission Chairman, estimated that the 2008 race will be well over a "\$1 billion election." If we do not understand the candidates and what they are truly fighting for, the United States can end up paying a bigger price in the long run.

Politics are hot and heavy. While mentioning politics in a public place is like swearing in a church, it appears most people, including myself, have something to say. While I'm not the president and I don't intend to run until the 2020 election, I just want the candidates to not tell us *what*, but tell us *how*. Words can be deceiving, but a plan means that you've actually thought about it. If we could take Barack Obama's education plan, Rudy Giuliani's ability to lead through tough times, Chris Dodd's plan to legalize medical marijuana, Bill Richardson's plan of attack on global warming, and Mitt Romney's standards of American values, our national problems may get resolved. So if you are going to vote in the 2008 election, think about it before you make any moves. This country has seen what happens when we do not think before we act. Find what issue is most important to you and look into it. It would be an indignity not to take advantage of our luxury of having influence on our country; it would be a bigger mistake to vote for the wrong person.



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supposedly prove themselves capable of governing commit this error, and as our system is representative rather than truly democratic, this tendency is utterly ruinous.

The system by which we elect our representatives also fails to nurture a successful democracy. A qualified candidate is a person of a certain age with the means to advertise himself. Geography and demographics determine his beliefs, and a glorified popularity contest and wealthy donors determine his success. Skilled demagoging does not make an effective leader or politician, but we rely on it to employ our government.

It really is quite a joke and terrifyingly enough, many people recognize this. Yet rather than proposing something better, they concede that it isn't perfect but it is best. Perhaps because intelligent people have more sense than to concern themselves with the herd, people either settle for what they have and turn to more interesting and less demanding matters or speculate randomly and fruitlessly.

For centuries, largely because of this, the progress of government has been stagnant, and what few new ideas we find are met with distrust. Although the world direly needs a new system, without people working towards one this will not happen. Nevertheless, even if we cannot make democracy perfect and have of yet no other alternative, we can still better it.

Anything I say regarding fixing the problem of an uninformed and unintelligent electorate will immediately sound elitist or fascist, but if we cannot keep the unintelligent and uninformed from voting, we will have to make them intelligent and well-informed. This also goes for the elected. Running a country, much like a business, is a science and an art and requires some sort of education, but with our government, we cannot afford to work by trial and error; we need a government equivalent of an MBA (an MGA perhaps).

I may not make it with you to see this glorious, intelligent democracy (I hear Sealand is for sale and I intend to look into that), but with strong principles of education, intelligence, and qualification (perhaps even a degree of elitism) you can avoid many of the pitfalls that have plagued our democracy. These proposals are only a start, but stagnation has led to the destruction of enough civilizations to suggest that now is certainly no time to stop.



Sealand for Sale!

### Go Ahead, Throw Your Vote Away By Ian Taylor

With the presidential elections apparently drawing nigh, many people are beginning to consider for whom they might vote. Judging by the media's general focus, it seems the Democrats have already won, but regardless, if you live in Illinois you probably should not take it too seriously. Certainly, it is fun to discuss politics around the water cooler and incite arguments over the internet; however, in the end, one vote does not really matter.

Of course, many regard the 2000 elections as incontrovertible proof that this opinion is false; yet, for those in Illinois, it is almost dishearteningly true. On the infamous red state/blue state map, Illinois is blue, deep blue in fact, but were one to look at such a map of Illinois divided into counties (and such a map is available on [cnn.com](http://cnn.com)), one would see that Illinois is not so blue after all. In fact, it is rather red; of the 102 counties in Illinois, 83 voted Republican.

Nevertheless, counties do not determine to whom a state's electoral votes will go; people do, and of the 12,831,970 people in Illinois, 5,288,655 of them live in Cook County, which is notoriously blue. In the 2004 presidential elections in Cook County, John F. Kerry received 1,439,724 votes out of 2,048,607, or 70 percent of the vote. Statewide, however, Kerry received 55 percent of the vote.

Overall, nearly half of Kerry's statewide votes came from Cook County, and disregarding Cook, George W. Bush received 56 percent of Illinois votes. However, to have beaten Kerry by one vote, despite Kerry taking Cook County and without considering the Libertarian Party's strong presence at 1 percent of the vote, Bush would have needed to win over 66 percent of the rest of Illinois, which, even with Illinois' otherwise strong Republican tendencies, would be unlikely.

Essentially, if you plan to vote for a Republican president in Illinois, you may as well stay home.

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