

Editorial

'Youth vote' isn't a pawn up for political play

When this paper hits Elon University newsstands, the 2012 presidential election will be 565 days away. But it might as well be next week with all the media fervor surrounding it.

Just last week, President Barack Obama announced he will officially run for a second term. Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney threw his hat in the ring, launching an "exploratory committee," joining former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Texas Rep. Ron Paul in the unofficial race for the GOP nomination. Celebrity businessman extraordinaire Donald Trump has continued to threaten joining the race himself because, according to him, Obama needs to hear the words, "You're fired."

OK, that's stretching the truth just a little bit.

But what isn't a stretch is that it's a circus out there already, and the country seems powerless to stop it. At this point, it's hop on board or get crushed under the swelling tide of political fervor, no matter which party you align yourself with.

One topic that's come up frequently is the concept of the "youth vote," a term generally applied to members of the millennial generation between the ages of 18 and 29.

In the 2008 election, nearly 70 percent of voters under the age of 29 voted for Obama. In March, a Harvard Institute of Politics poll showed that 60 percent of college students have a favorable view of

the job the president is currently doing.

FOX News commentator Billy Hallowell recently wrote that the key to the GOP winning back the White House was harnessing the power of this "youth vote," and that the key to America's future was educating the millennial generation about the wonders of conservatism.

While you might not agree with Hallowell's statement, it cannot be argued that both parties consider this block of young voters of vital importance to their future, as well they should.

But is it as powerful a block as it should be?

A 2007 Census population estimate put the number of 18-29 year-olds at about 48 million. If every one of those people turned out for the 2008 election, they would have accounted for 36 percent of the vote. But since only 56.8 percent of Americans voted nationally, this seems unlikely, especially considering the number of young voters who are away at college and face barriers voting in many states where they are not full-time residents.

A November 2010 Pew Research poll showed that members of the millennial generation were only able to answer two out of 13 questions correctly more often than their peers in older age groups. Young adults were able to identify that Android is the operating system for Google's cell phones, and more than half also knew the United States spent more

on defense spending than three other programs listed, compared to only one-third of older adults.

The point, you ask? The point is that the "youth vote" is huge. It's big in numbers and it's also big in smarts.

Take a look around Elon or any other college campus. It is stocked with a generation of people who may not be the most politically aware, but are definitely the most technologically savvy, and probably the most skeptical.

This is a generation and a voting block that doesn't take anything at its face value and questions what is being said and what is actually being done. It is the responsibility of the members of this group to carry those qualities as badges of honor and to respect its implications.

As vital parts of this society, it is the duty of young adults to recognize the enormous sway they hold in political games in the upcoming election and to take full advantage of it. If potential leaders recognize that their constituents, especially the young ones, hold them to a higher and tougher standard than anyone has been held before, they will rise to that occasion, or at least they should.

The "youth vote" isn't a pawn for candidates to juggle around and then ditch as soon as the campaign banners come down. It is a crucial piece of the societal puzzle and needs to be treated with respect, provided its members respect themselves.

College is as much about consequences as independence

It's been said to students around the country, probably multiple times: "Enjoy college. It's the best four years of your life."

While quite possibly one of the most overstated and overplayed adages about college life, there is a kernel of truth in this statement. And it could even be taken one step further — college should also be the most defining time of a young person's life.

Beyond the knowledge gained in the classroom and experience from internships and jobs, college brings a new level of independence that should be embraced and taken advantage of to the fullest extent.

It's during these four years students learn to wisely manage their money, write a letter of resignation following that first bad job experience and, essentially, handle whatever problems come their way with maturity and courtesy.

In some cases, students demand the independence offered by college without completely loosening the hold they have on the former lifestyle they enjoyed before arriving at school. They want all the benefits of acting like an adult without having to deal with the consequences.

Something's broken in the apartment? "I shouldn't have to pay for that."

Classes didn't work out as planned? "I'll have my mother call the academic advising office and demand it be fixed."

Caught in an academic violation? "It will work itself out. It doesn't matter, anyway."

This is the mindset that many have witnessed on Elon's campus.

But obviously, not all students work the system this way. They come to



RACHEL SOUTHMAYD | Opinions Editor

college craving independence and the responsibility that comes with it.

But for those who enjoy the freedom without thought of the potential costs that come as a result of certain actions, life after college will be much more challenging.

The great thing about college is that it represents a transitioning period — students aren't thrown entirely into the "real world," but instead learn to live independently and conscientiously in a controlled environment.

The decisions made now not only affect life outside of college, but also prepare students for what they will face once they

graduate. Whether it is paying bills or finding a job, students alone determine their success and won't have anyone else to rely on if trouble does come.

That being said, take advantage of the self-reliance offered by college. Manage money on your own and don't rely on parents to pay all the bills and keep track of balances. Work with the administration at Elon or management at a job to correct issues or problems you may have.

Perhaps most importantly of all, when consequences do arise for actions, step up, take responsibility, correct it and learn from the experience.

MORE ONLINE: OPINIONS

Caitlin O'Donnell narrates her experience working at a food bank as part of her 2011 resolution. Read her story and the stories of four other Pendulum staff members www.pendulumresolutions.wordpress.com

There's always something going on at Elon and always more to read about at: www.pendulumopinions.wordpress.com

Columnist Rebecca Cummings reflects on her experience working for the Elon Poll and encourages involvement at: www.elon.edu/pendulum

TO COMMENT ...

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Letters to the editor and columns can be emailed to pendulum@elon.edu or sent to 7012 Campus Box, Elon, N.C. 27244. Content will be edited for clarity, length and accuracy. All submissions must include a name and phone number.

A message board also accompanies each article online at www.elon.edu/pendulum where commentary can be quickly posted.

THE PENDULUM

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