

Labels distract viewers from real issues

By Ashley Gilmer
STAFF WRITER

In case you haven't noticed, there's a new reality show on television. It's called "Label That Presidential Candidate." TV newscasters are the major players. The winner is yet to be determined, but the losers are the viewing audience.

While the nation is in the midst of one of the most important primary seasons ever, the networks seem focused on stereotyping the candidates rather than clarifying their positions.

Hilary Clinton has been portrayed as "cold," "smart" and "driven." Wouldn't it be good to know what makes her smart, what drives her and her exact plan for turning around an economy headed for recession? Instead, we are overwhelmed with the images of her infamous "emotional moment" while on the campaign trail in New Hampshire.

The newscasters said that this moment "humanized" her. Of course she's human, just like all of the other candidates. But do we know what point she was making at that moment? Not really, because that part was not as significant as the fact that her voice broke and she became teary-eyed, according to the networks.

Mike Huckabee has been labeled as the "religious" candidate. The former preacher is also a former governor. The networks talk about his religious stance, as opposed to his plan to do away with income taxes. His evangelical calling helped to fuel the controversy behind the supposed "cross" in one of his TV campaign ads.

Barack Obama also has his label. He is the candidate of change with "celebrity backing." The support of

high profile friends such as Oprah and George Clooney has overshadowed his stance on immediate troop withdrawal from Iraq. Further, wouldn't it be helpful to know what changes Obama would like to make and how?

Mitt Romney carries the somewhat unfavorable label of "rich." The label implies that he can buy his way into the White House, something most Americans disapprove of. Perhaps rather than focusing on his personal wealth, the news should focus on how he moved the Massachusetts state budget from a deficit to a surplus.

The networks have decided that some candidates are not worthy of their labels simply because they are not considered front-runners.

They include the names that are not mentioned, such as Dennis Kucinich and Ron Paul, among others. Perhaps if the coverage was about issues rather than labels, we would hear the names of other presidential candidates who have compelling arguments.

Television is a staple in most homes (and dorms) across the nation. Though other media (such as the Internet) are gaining in popularity, TV remains the primary source for news and information. For these reasons, the networks should provide news coverage that enables its viewing audience to make informed decisions.

So what can be done about it?

I would suggest viewing television news with a very critical eye. Use your own intellect to decide between issues and non-issues. Go beyond television to whatever sources you need to make an informed decision. This presidential election is too important not to.

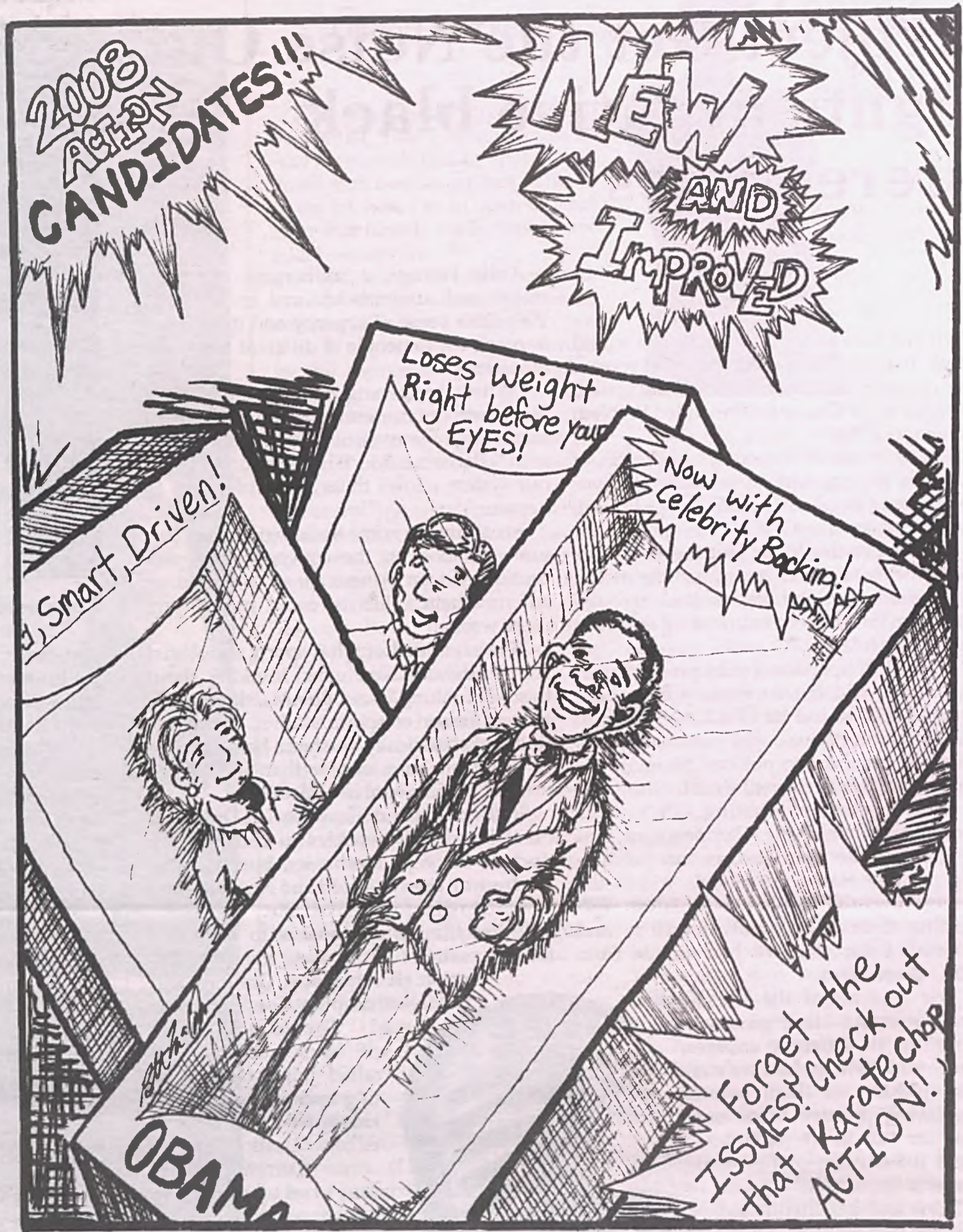


ILLUSTRATION BY BRETT McDONOUGH

Returning from abroad is like waking up from a dream

By Kevin Smith
STAFF WRITER

In a red sunset my plane circled over Los Angeles. It was the last flight of many I took over the last six months while studying abroad in New Zealand and traveling in Australia and Fiji. Circling over the city was surreal. Looking at the city lights I was suddenly reminded of the night I left LA. It felt like I had only left a day ago.

What was going on here? Why was I feeling like this? 36 hours earlier I was drunkenly attempting to save a cat on the rooftop of a Fijian resort with a millionaire banker. Before that I was in Sydney witnessing the finale of Australian idol. And before that I was exploring every possible square inch of New Zealand that I could. It was all swirling in my head at once, but it was all starting to become less vivid.

I started to prepare myself for what

was to come, reminding myself of what I would be missing. No more saving cats with bankers. No more people calling me "mate." No more cool accents. No more people using the word "pissed" to describe being drunk, joked about, or angry. No more mindless extreme sports, or hiking around volcanoes. No more kiwis curiously asking about "the fat people." No more tropical beaches half an hour away from snow-covered Alps.

I felt I had been dreaming, and from the time I got off that plane to the time I got to my home, I was reminded of the things that I hadn't seen in awhile. Hello big trucks. Hello southern accents. Hello interstate. Hello obesity epidemic. Hello Britney. I found myself suddenly fascinated by all these things, but the experience abroad was fading fast.

It's called "shoe boxing" and it's a typical symptom of culture shock. Your experience seems more distant as the

From the time I got off that plane to the time I got to my home, I was reminded of the things that I hadn't seen in awhile. Hello big trucks. Hello southern accents. Hello interstate. Hello obesity epidemic. Hello Britney.

familiarity of home takes over. The Australlearn (my program's) Alumni Handbook states that "Many fear their experience will somehow become compartmentalized like souvenirs or photo albums kept in a box."

Senior Colleen McGlory also experienced the feeling of "shoe boxing" upon returning from London. "You still have memories of your experience once you return home, but you have nothing to trigger those memories in a real way," McGlory said. "Your home is also full of things that trigger memories of before you left. This makes the transition really

abrupt, as if you're waking up from a dream."

"Shoe boxing" is just a part of culture shock. Other symptoms include simply having a completely changed perspective on your home country. Senior Chelsea Simpson experienced this after returning from doing an intensive sustainable living program in Central America.

"It's like coming back to the same place but wearing different glasses," said Simpson. "Things filter in differently. I feel like I understand what the U.S. stands for on a deeper level."

This semester many students have