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The Daily Tar Heel

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BOARD EDITORIALS

Breath of Fresh Air

Although Brad Matthews is also a qualified candidate, Erica Smiley promises to bring much-needed change to the office.

Simply put, student government has gotten stale.

Every year, candidates who seem as if they have been groomed since birth for the office of student body president invade the Pit, promising that they will get rid of student government's elitist image and find a way to reach out to the average student.

That is a noble goal, and one to which the candidates are surely committed, but it will take someone who hasn't lived in Suite C for several years to get it done.

This year, there are two qualified candidates going head-to-head in a runoff election, but only one of those people has the perspective needed to shake things up.

That candidate is Erica Smiley.

Although opponent Brad Matthews' experience working in the executive branch would surely help him be an effective student body president, his extensive involvement

very well also could hold him back.

It is extremely difficult to change a system one has been a part of for so long.

In contrast, Smiley will be able to evaluate the executive branch as an outsider. That perspective will help her better to determine how to make it more effective.

And her experience outside the walls of Suite C will help her accomplish that often-repeated objective.

Smiley has built a reputation for being one of UNC's leading activists. She can use the contacts she has made fighting the tuition increase as a member of the Campaign for Educational Access or calling for the lifting of U.S. sanctions against Iraq as a member of Student Congress to build a Cabinet with the vision and the know-how to change things.

And as long as she follows through on her promise to give every student a chance to be part of the executive branch, that group will also truly represent UNC students.

Both Matthews and Smiley have the potential to be good student body presidents, but Smiley promises to do more than just stay the course and check off platform goals.



Erica Smiley

Trapped

Members of Young Life should not be allowed to visit high school students during lunch. Their visits are nothing but recruiting trips.

Members of Young Life should be required to stop their lunchtime visits to East Chapel Hill High School.

These visits, which are really thinly veiled recruiting trips, are justified by members as opportunities to interact with students and develop mentoring roles.

Taking time to make a difference in a young person's life is fine, but Young Life's tactics are not.

Because of security issues, most high schools restrict students' movement around school grounds, including during lunch. Young Life representatives essentially trap students who can't get away into having conversations with them.

The final goal of these conversations, of course, is to recruit students to join the group.

According to The News & Observer, "John McCormick, the (school) district's attorney, said students who sign in a visitor can talk about Young Life, religion or anything else with their guest, as long as the discussions don't take on the quality of organizing or proselytizing."

But proselytizing, inducing someone to convert to your own religious faith, is the core of Young Life. According to the group's Web site, Young Life's mission is "introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith."

This clearly violates the ECHHS policy.

Some parents claim that stereotypes of Young Life members as popular has pressured students to join the group. High school students are especially vulnerable to peer pressure, and Young Life exploits students as they go through adolescent uncertainty.

Young Life has tried to camouflage its religious tones. In a flier advertising a Young Life party, no mention was made of the group's religious goals. Young Life members from UNC continue to claim the purpose of the visits is to mentor.

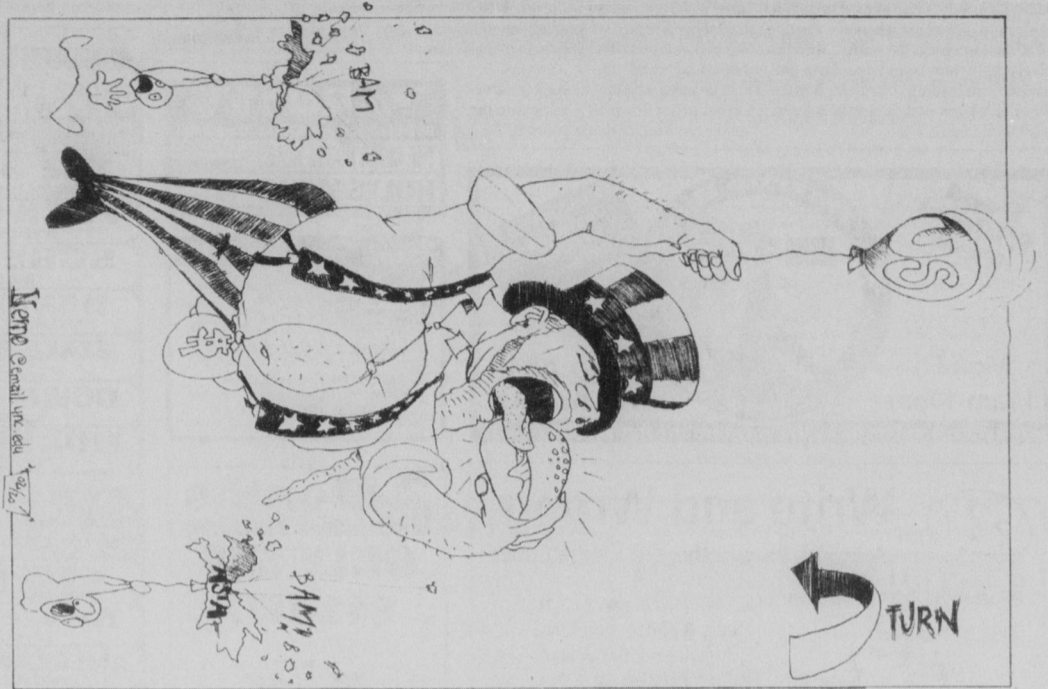
But if these UNC students from Young Life care so deeply about making an impact, they should join a tutoring program or help coach a team.

While religious groups do have legal access to schools, their visits should be restricted to before or after school.

At UNC, many campus religious groups exist; they are student-led and student-supported. College students are less likely to follow the crowd because "it's cool."

And if UNC students don't want to listen to representatives from InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ or Waymaker Christian Fellowship preach to them on the quad, they can stand up and leave.

ECHHS students don't have that choice, but the school shouldn't put them in that situation in the first place.



Change at Heart of Today's Vote

I used to hate student elections.

Every February, a bunch of young wannabe politicians would descend on campus, talking their talk and trying desperately to convince themselves that "Joe Average" student actually gave a damn.

They would hang cheesy posters featuring their best fake grins and spout off about an array of lofty and, most likely, empty campaign promises.

This carnival of self-importance would culminate on some Tuesday when less than 10 percent of campus would actually show up to cast a ballot — the student body's annual shrugging of their apathetic shoulders.

I expected much of the same this year, but somehow things have not quite shaped up that way.

Today, a few thousand students will head back to the polls and cast a vote for either Brad Matthews or Erica Smiley as the next student body president.

And it's anything but politics as usual.

The race pits a bonified student government veteran against a self-described outsider known more for her "radical" stances than ability to climb the ranks. It's the most intriguing race this campus has seen in years.

Yet even with the spice of political polarity thrown into this election season, something disturbing lurks behind the scenes.

As Smiley has emerged as a serious contender in the race — gaining important endorsements and winning the support of many contenders she beat out in last week's general election — a strong resistance has evolved as well.

People have become quick to dismiss Smiley for her eccentricity and for her liberal political beliefs. In some circles on campus, she is considered a joke candidate whose only support comes from her "wacky" progressive followers.

Well-established student leaders and



ROB NELSON
EDITOR

Matthews supporters seem to fear that her off-the-wall appearance and advocacy of issues beyond the precious walls of UNC invalidate her campaign and would jeopardize an effective, productive presidency.

But the problem here is not Smiley's appearance or her political stances; the issue at hand is *change* and whether UNC is ready to vote for a president who breaks the hell out of the mold.

There's a disturbing comfort zone on this campus when it comes to the student body presidency.

Candidates are usually white, usually Greek, usually male and usually soaked in student government experience.

Smiley brings none of these things to the table and that, for some, has set off a panic button.

And, quite frankly, these folks need to get a clue and a grip.

Smiley has challenged the political status quo on this campus, and that is something that should not be dismissed but rather applauded.

It is narrow-minded and arrogant to assume that she would be a less effective student body president because her tactics and beliefs don't actually mesh with the almighty powers that be at this university.

What a wonderful thing for some of the stodgy "good ol' boys" who sit on the Board

of Trustees and Board of Governors to have sit down at a table with Smiley and be forced to listen to her new perspective.

And be forced to realize that good work and good ideas can happen on this campus even when an Abercrombie white boy isn't president.

The University is at a critical point in its history, facing the selection of a new chancellor, the filling of key administrative posts and the onset of technology initiatives and tuition increases.

With these changes about to sweep through campus, now seems to be the perfect opportunity to let new, fresh hands get the chance to wrangle with student government and perhaps inject within its ranks a new attitude and personality.

All things must change, and that rule does not exclude the distribution of power on this campus.

If we continue to worry about what a student body president *should* be and lose sight of what he or she *could* be, nothing will ever move forward.

During the last few weeks, Smiley has proven she has the maturity, commitment, enthusiasm and passion to handle the demands of the job.

More importantly, she has proved throughout the year that she is as good at shaking things up as she is at getting things done.

Matthews is a qualified candidate and would do a fine job as president.

But, eventually "doing fine" becomes boring, and new routes must be taken.

Eventually, people must stop fearing change and just give it a shot.

Erica Smiley has done that.

Will you?

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At Times, Making News is 'Good Old-Fashioned Journalism'

When editors of this paper decided to run a five-word, full-page editorial before the Duke basketball game, it caused a stir both within and outside the newsroom.

A senior writer at this paper asked a thought-provoking question. Were editors making news at the expense of reporting news?

There can be no doubt that the back-page spread of "Students Yell Louder Than Money," written to advocate better student seating at basketball games, made news.

Students waved the paper at the Duke game. A Raleigh television station interviewed the paper's editor, Rob Nelson, as he handed out the edition outside the Dean Dome.

Was it wrong to break with an editorial page tradition of local columns, letters and opinion for what amounted to a five-word poster? Absolutely not. Brevity is effective.

Sometimes the work of a newspaper staff does make news, which is a far cry from a belief that it is wrong to create news. Editorializing that gives readers pause for reflection or a banner to wave rallying support for a cause is just good journalism.

A couple of other incidents this semester illustrate well the make vs.



TERRY WIMMER
OMBUDSMAN

create debate. The Brian Bersticker write-in campaign for student body president initiated by columnist Brian Frederick made news. That's what a well-written column can do.

One issue, however, that treads too closely to the creation line has become known as the Full Nelson Affair.

Some background: When Carrboro Mayor Mike Nelson was running for re-election last fall, an off-the-cuff remark offended DTH Editor Rob Nelson.

The paper had asked the mayor and all candidates for local office to complete surveys that would be used to educate DTH readers about the candidates and their views. Mayor Nelson's response was flippant, at best.

He said his most admired political figure was Che Guevara, a South

American revolutionary. His favorite book: Dr. Seuss' "Horton Hears a Who."

When a Chapel Hill Herald reporter asked the mayor about his answers to the DTH, he was quoted as saying, "They can ask some silly questions sometimes, but we were just having some fun with them."

His seemingly condescending attitude irked Editor Nelson. So, he went to a Carrboro Board of Aldermen meeting and challenged the mayor, saying: "I found your sentiments insulting, discouraging and entirely unprofessional. To insinuate that you take the paper or its reporters less seriously than other papers is disturbing to me." And to me.

So, I scheduled an office visit with the mayor to learn how this conflict escalated into a public rhetorical shootout. He explained how during last year's campaign his time was limited. He received a packet from the DTH about two weeks before the election and then set it aside.

In the meantime, he had opportunity to fill out requests from The News & Observer and other newspapers seeking election-related information, but the DTH request did not receive the same priority.

When he did turn to address the issue, only days before the deadline, he discovered three separate surveys inside. Realizing he had no time to complete three surveys, he called the DTH.

He spoke with whomever answered the phone in the newsroom, and explained his predicament. He said he answered some questions by phone. All, he believed, was well. It wasn't.

The DTH did not endorse him, and in his words labeled him "just another arrogant politician. It wasn't accurate. It wasn't fair. It wasn't the truth."

In hindsight, he wishes he had opened the DTH mail sooner. He debated whether by setting it aside and addressing other requests first, he gave the DTH unequal treatment.

He believes he did not. I believe he sees the DTH and its staff as half-baked journalists and deserving of only half-baked attention. We agreed to disagree. He had some valid points. Why this paper did not coordinate the three different surveys into one is a good question. The quick answer is organization. All too frequently, the right hand has no idea what the left is doing at the DTH.

There is a level of professionalism that is acquired in this business through

experience. Mayor Nelson has seen many a DTH staffer come and go. But as a public figure living in a university community I believe he has the duty to hold this staff to the same professional standards to which he would hold other journalists. And the obligation to afford them the same respect.

He believes he did. But rapping the paper's knuckles in print ("It's hard to respect The Daily Tar Heel sometimes") is condescending. It made what happened next even more egregious in his mind.

Several days after this winter's huge snowstorm, Mayor Nelson flew to Miami and attended a rally supporting the return of the young Cuban boy to his father. The DTH editorialized that he should have been home dealing with snow-covered streets and other storm-related emergency issues.

To Mayor Nelson, the editorial was salt poured into his open wound. In short, he was furious.

The editorial was petty, but I do not believe vindictive. It was not written as revenge for his public DTH dissing. It was just not well-thought-out or soundly argued. By the time of his trip, Carrboro was in no trouble. He's a city figurehead, not a street cleaner. His presence in town would have made no

difference.

A better argument might have been why he presumed to represent a majority view in Carrboro that the boy should be returned to his father.

Editor Nelson's reaction to the mayor's public statements surprised me for many reasons. The primary one is that Rob and his staff have worked so admirably this year to build better connection to community. In this instance, it seemed that work was being torn apart.

Rob said he felt obligated to defend the paper in a public forum because the mayor took his concerns about the DTH public. I believe it would have better fit Rob's community-building agenda if Rob had called the mayor and had a face-to-face discussion about both of their concerns before escalating the issue into a public showdown.

What it accomplished is that a wedge seems driven now between Mayor Nelson and this newspaper. News was created by both Nelsons.

And sadly, neither the paper nor its readers are better served.

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