

# Reform act to blame for poor turnout

Few words accurately describe the turnout of this year's student body presidential elections other than simply disappointing. Voter turnout dropped by 215 votes, derailing the trend that doubled voter turnout in the last two years.

As a percentage of total students, turnout increased 15 percent between 2000 and 2002, rising from 3,763 total voters to 7,421. The CCI laptop requirements created polling places in every freshman room, and similar increases should have been expected in this year's election and in 2004 as seniors without laptops are ushered out.

Something managed not only to negate the momentum of this voting trend but to counter general enrollment increases as well. The Daum-Larson Campaign Finance Reform Act was likely the culprit.

To save the students from the supposed anguish of three weeks of campaigning, the legislation

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discourage student involvement. During the first week of campaigning in this past election, candidates were only allowed to circulate signature petitions to secure funding from student government. At the same time, they were prevented from speaking to groups, distributing handbills and publishing their platforms on the Web. Students were asked to lend their names in support of candidates without being provided with any information about their relative experience or proposed platforms.

Even students who wanted to participate were refused the information to do so. The legislation's hotly debated "conflict of interest" measures unreasonably hindered students' abilities to participate in elections. These policies prevent Cabinet-level executive branch members, Student Congress members, the Freshman Focus Council and top-ranking members of the judicial

branch from participating in campaigns. While certainly some restrictions are warranted, too many student leaders fell under this blind blanket of "conflicts of interest," removing legitimate free speech rights from our most involved and informed students.

Student government members have useful ideas and experience that would make platforms richer, more practical and more feasible. Their opinions should not be restricted. If the student body president and the former speaker of Student Congress are afraid that student leaders might be distracted from their duty, then they should remove students in the same way they would any other who neglected their responsibilities. There is no reason why campaigning should be singled out.

Negative campaigning measures must also be clarified. While the Student Code clearly prohibits spreading malicious content, current stipulations are ambiguous

about whether criticisms of platforms, for example, would constitute negative campaigning. Candidates risk losing too much in being negative, especially the future endorsement of candidates who do not make it to the runoff election. Consequently, negative campaigning generally takes place among non-campaign workers (sometimes a tough group to define), and the Daum-Larson bill awkwardly demands that candidates be punished for acts over which they had no control.

Finally, the legislation lowered the cap on candidates' spending, eliminating some of the more attention-getting attractions and forcing campaigns to redouble their efforts on cheaper — but often more annoying — campaign tactics. Handbills, "dorm storming" and posters were out in force this year, but the pricey-yet-attractive ideas that existed in previous campaigns were made impossible. Consequently, while public

funding does level the playing field, limiting spending only decreases voter turnout because candidates can no longer pique students' interests.

Essentially, candidates have less time, less money, less freedom and fewer resources to educate students about their campaigns. Toss in a little bad weather, and 2,000 students just don't vote. Though Student Body President Jen Daum suggested in The Daily Tar Heel that the snow and this year's slate of candidates could be responsible for low turnout, student government does not get canceled in bad weather. Low voter turnout is not an act of God. In this case, it was an act of poor policy.

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## Fans a factor in team's success

North Carolina's postseason in the NIT had an unexpectedly positive consequence, beyond bringing the team to the brink of another 20-win season. It has been revealing to see just how important a true home-court advantage can be when the house is packed with real fans — tons of college students and ordinary folks who love the team — and not the big-donor faux fans who have an ironclad lock on most seats in the arena during the regular season.

The mini-season that followed the ACC Tournament was a giddy event as real Heels fans discovered one another and the

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difference they can make when given the chance.

Real fans spontaneously erupt in cheers and fill the arena with a joyful, almost deafening din that can throw a team off its game. I saw at least three free throws shot by opposing players in the DePaul game missed on account of the manic antics of the crowd. They screamed, stomped and hopped, jingled their keychains, erupted in the wave and always stuck around after the clock ran out to sing the UNC fight song. These vocal, participatory Tar Heel fans obviously lifted the team's spirits, as could be seen in their play on the court and heard in their after-game comments. True-blue fans kept the team in the Georgetown game with a staggering display of energy that made the Dean Dome feel like the epicenter of an earthquake.

Rashad McCants only had to raise his arms, and 20,000 fans erupted deliriously. Do you know how good that must feel? Can you imagine how badly that intimidates the other team? It's called the home-court advantage, and it's estimated to be worth 10 points per game. It's also a powerful recruiting tool and an incentive for players to stick around. Unfortunately, we no longer enjoy that home-court edge at the Smith Center because seats are occupied by wealthy alumni willing to drag a pen across a check.

By contrast to the real fans who savored three rare chances to attend Tar Heels games at the Dean Dome, faux fans are a jaded pack of deadbeats. Engorged on Beemaster franks and barrel-sized cups of soda, they wheezily occupy their seats, adding nothing but poundage to the arena as they fret privately about the stock market, digestive ailments and their golf game. They show up late and leave early. They stream for the exits even when the score is tied with many minutes left on the clock. With three minutes remaining in the Duke-UNC slugfest at home, which had 21 lead changes, some of them could be seen hobbling out. They had to get their Beemers and obscenely oversized sport utility vehicles out of the parking lot before the mass exodus, you see?

These are not the priorities of real fans. They are the prerequisites of wine-sipping, cheese-eating basketball dilettantes.

Stocking a campus arena with college students is not only a way of assuring more victories, but it is the right thing to do. Look at the demographics. The crowd

of old farts who assumed their seat assignments back in 1986 — the spoils of having donated to build the facility — weren't exactly spring chickens then, and the ensuing 17 years have witnessed the steady graying and atrophy of the live audience for Tar Heels games. By contrast, students remain the same age, 18 to 22, year after year. They bring youthful vigor and excitement to the games.

It is time to bust the unholy "gentlemen's agreement" that allowed a certain cohort of wealthy individuals to purchase what amounted to personal seat licenses — and access to the best seats, at that — at the Smith Center. Athletics Director Dick Baddour, dutifully protecting deep-pocketed alumni donors, has talked about the need to honor the big shots' right to their court-side perches because, after all, they paid for the arena. That might be true, but could the multitude of students stuck in the nosebleed seats or their rooms really care that the Dean Dome was paid for with private money? It would have been more democratic and equitable if UNC had taken some public money, as N.C. State University did for the Entertainment and Sports Arena, so that students could be a court-side presence at home games like they are at virtually every other ACC school.

It is baffling how this state of affairs could have ever come to pass, but I'd urge Coach Matt Doherty, who seemed elated by energy level at the Dean Dome during the NIT games, to lobby for a ticket redistribution scheme that favors students and not gray ghosts who have long since graduated. Perhaps a new athletics director with conviction and vision could make it happen. Maybe the chancellor should weigh in. A word from the arena's namesake wouldn't hurt, either.

Let the oldsters have their season tickets, but boot them to the upper deck and give them a gratis pair of opera glasses. Whatever. Just make sure that the lower arena is packed with as many students as possible, creating 360 degrees of intimidation for opposing teams.

I know, it's a pipe dream. Everything boils down to power and money, and the Educational Foundation and the Ram's Club hold the cards.

But you'd think that even they might realize they're hurting their own cause, since future donors might well resent their treatment as second-class citizens, relegated to the upper deck or behind the goal, if they're lucky enough to get tickets at all.

When the fund-raisers come calling after they graduate, will they have the same passionate attachment to the Heels given their bum treatment by the snoozers in the lower deck and the administration that allowed them to be marginalized?

Remembering that this is supposed to be a "University of the people," the student body should exploit the momentum of the past week, make some demands and take a stand. You have nothing to lose but the distance separating you from good seats at the Dean Dome.

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YOUR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF IS WRONG!...



—YOUR MISSION IS WRONG!...



—AND YOUR BUDDY WHO JUST DIED IN AN AMBUSH DIED IN AN ILLEGAL AND IMMORAL WAR...



—BUT WE SUPPORT YOU!



## Protests not limited abroad

As a UNC student living in Sevilla, I think it is important to add the experiences we are having here to those described in the March 26 Daily Tar Heel article, "War impacts study abroad experience."

The author assumes that it is the desire of most U.S. students to avoid talking, thinking or protesting the war against Iraq. DTH staff writer Kirsten Fields repeatedly mentions the frustration of students at being "unable" to avoid protests and conversations about politics. I would like to share a little of my experience here in the hope of expanding on what was shared in her article.

On Feb. 15, I marched with other UNC students, 350,000 Spaniards and 5 million Spaniards to protest the war. We carried a sign that read, "Estudiantes de la universidad de carolina del norte decimos NO

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WAR IN IRAQ!" (University of North Carolina students say NO WAR IN IRAQ!)

Parents took pictures of their kids with us, young people came up to us and practiced their English, saying, "We are so happy to see you here; we hope there are more people like you in America," while others told us we must be brave to speak out against our government. It didn't occur to them that we would be afraid of them, although it seemed logical to be afraid of repression at home given the crackdown on civil liberties in the United States.

On the 28th, the government of Sevilla made this year's theme the struggle for peace. They wanted an American and an Iraqi to represent the hope for the

future between the two countries.

I met a man from Iraq who fled the Hussein regime eight years ago and came to Spain but was tired of the suffering of his people because of the U.S. embargo and this new war that continues to devastate the country. Together we spoke about peace. I feel lucky to live in a country where there exists a space for dialogue, for these two countries to come together and for people to speak of the real causes of this war without fear of repression because I don't see that freedom at home.

Being abroad during this time is an experience that most people will never have — seeing our country the way the world sees us and in some of the hardest and most controversial moments.

No one has told us that the safe thing to do is stay away from demonstrations, only to use our heads and our right to free speech

wisely. Many of us are exhilarated to have an opportunity to stand united with millions of people, something that I have never done in the United States.

The reality of the situation today permeates every conversation and every classroom, as it should. I don't want to escape the situation we live in, and I think most of us enjoy the opportunity to talk and share our thoughts with people from a different culture.

I have felt nothing but respect and curiosity from the people here, and many of us find the constant spirit of protest against the actions of the Spanish and U.S. governments inspiring, creative and a healthy part of democracy — perhaps a spirit we can bring home with us.

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## Cramer denies APS leader's assertions

I was very interested to read the (March 17) guest column by Laura Walters, executive director of Animal Protection Society.

As The Daily Tar Heel has noted, Ms. Walters has been under siege because of her (alleged) incompetence in mismanaging the Chapel Hill animal shelter and her well-documented history prior to coming to Chapel Hill.

The DTH has reported that Ann Clark, South Sebastian County deputy sheriff and animal warden, concluded that "the condition of the shelter while supervised by Laura Walters was borderline cruelty to animals," while Tommy Young, Sebastian County Sheriff's Department chief deputy, said, "We realized we were being charged way more than the animal control officer was saying we should."

Letters from the only two veterinarians in Greenwood, Ark., have been submitted to Orange County officials. Dr. Craig Smith wrote, "Ms. Walters, came in to town from out of no where, presented herself as a qualified animal shelter director. ... She did not seek any professional help. As a result the disease control was totally absent. ... Parvo and respiratory infections were rampant.

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... The saving grace for the shelter and its inhabitants was when Ms. Walters moved to your fair city."

Dr. M. W. Singer wrote, "I believe she is grossly deficient in the skills to keep a shelter in business."

Rather than responding to these critics, Ms. Walters has chosen to personally attack Judith Reitman and me. She claims that our intention is to "discredit Animal Protection Society and destroy the organization." On the contrary, Ms. Walters and the APS board that supports her are doing a remarkable job of self-destruction themselves. Within the past month, three board members have resigned out of dissatisfaction with board policies.

Our aim was never to destroy APS but to help reform it. In fact, on Oct. 14 I said to the APS board, "I suggest that the board reconsider its board nominations and consider supporting five of us nominated by the membership. We would be eager to work with the current board to bring back community support and assure a bright future for APS." Rather

than cooperating, on Nov. 4 the APS board illegally took voting rights away from the membership, giving them to the board. This was done at a so-called "open" meeting, and no explanation has ever been given as to why the bylaw change could not wait one week until the regular meeting at which I and other "lame duck" nominees were introduced to the board.

Ms. Walters is lying when she says that my "40-year relationship with the Schopler family has fed (my) interest in revenge on APS staff and board members." In my 25 pages of correspondence with the APS board, I find NO mention of him. At the APS November board meeting, I praised the statement of APS board member Virginia Ellington who wrote, "Why can't we work WITH the Piedmont group — let them use our aviary, raptor cage, duck pond, etc. until theirs is up and functional and let them take care of wildlife while we continue our exemplary care of domestic animals."

Unfortunately, Ellington has now resigned and Laura Walters has been unwilling to cooperate with Schopler's organization. As has been publicly stated, the Piedmont Wildlife Center has

no involvement with PAWS (<http://www.ourpaws.org>), our group, and we have no involvement with them. Our lawsuit deals with the APS violation of state law in denying us our rights as members of APS. Our additional concerns are with the mismanagement of the Orange County Animal Shelter by APS, given its county funding of over \$450,000. Laura Walters closed the APS wildlife program in July, dismissing Schopler and his staff. It is clear that the APS wildlife program is dead and that the \$450,000 animal shelter contract with Orange County is in jeopardy. Ms. Walters says, "The APS is not about self-serving people who only wish to 'win' at any cost." No, it is about an incompetent and corrupt board who have hired an incompetent director without checking into her past dismal record.

Dr. Schopler has moved on; we have moved on. Laura Walters has not moved on, but we hope that she will.

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