

Matthew Kabak
Honors Capstone: The Blank of Blank
Professor Mark Nevins, SPA Government
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Abstract

Politics is a serious business, perhaps too serious. Perhaps so serious that people have begun to tune out pundits and politicians for more lighthearted entertainment. But the success of The Daily Show, The Colbert Report and other comedic political fare show that politics isn't the problem. The problem is in the tone of transmission. This Capstone is a political blog that makes politics interesting, entertaining and, most of all, funny. The blog has informed by making government and its human components a source of laughter, instead of boredom and cynicism. It also includes a discussion of the most recent literature on political comedy, including papers that study the effects of comedians on mainstream debate as well as the informative power of comedy. In addition, this capstone contains an analysis of the blog itself and the various ways it approached political commentary.

The Blank of Blank

This capstone is a blog designed to inform viewers while keeping them entertained with humor. As this paper will go on to describe, some people, especially younger people, have begun turning off mainstream news and turning to political comedy for information. Yes, political news and commentary can be boring, but they are also important. Comedy can engage readers by giving them a reason to tune in beyond news. In addition, this capstone contains a review of relevant literature on subjects of political comedy and news consumption.

Literature

2008's presidential election was historic for many reasons. America elected its first Black president, it was a time of financial crisis and the nation was introduced to Sarah Palin. While perhaps her role in national politics will prove insignificant, especially considering she lost her bid for the Vice-Presidency, Ms. Palin nonetheless made an impression on the country.

Relatively unknown before being tapped as Senator John McCain's running mate, Governor Palin hailed from Alaska. Soon after her first appearances on national television, she began to be parodied on late-night institution Saturday Night Live. Tina Fey unveiled a brilliant impression of Governor Palin, portraying her as an uninformed political lightweight prone to making verbal gaffes. Oddly enough, Fey's impersonation ended up defining the Governor for a large portion of the electorate. For instance, though it was actually Fey who made the now famous "I can see Russia from my house!" statement, many attributed it to Governor Palin herself.¹

What has become clear, even to amateur political junkies, is that comedy about politics has a larger effect than just making people laugh. The Daily Show, The Colbert Report and to a lesser extent the network late-night television shows reach nationwide audiences with political commentary disguised as entertainment. The experts, political scientists and media critics, have noted of this phenomenon and of late have taken to analyzing the deeper patterns underlying seemingly silly political comedy.

¹ Associated Press, "Palin Defends Remark on Russia," The Boston Globe, September 26, 2008. Web. <http://articles.boston.com/2008-09-26/news/29273357_1_sarah-palin-first-term-alaska-governor-foreign-policy>.

Who's Listening, Who's Laughing?

While Tina Fey's impression of Sarah Palin was important because of its notoriety, it should be noted that a piece of political comedy becoming that well-known is an exception. The Palin sketch's generated buzz that spilled over into "soft" news programs, like Entertainment Tonight, as well as nightly news and cable news.² Not only that, the Saturday Night Live episodes with Palin sketches have the highest ratings for any of that program in the 14 years preceding it. Even more impressive, a firm that tracks online views found that the Palin sketches had over 63 million views total.³ Considering that the largest single sketch, the joint appearance by Palin and Fey, had 15 million viewers, it is fairly clear that the Internet played a large role in spreading the scenes to a larger audience.

Typically the Late Show or the Daily Show has its nightly airing and that is the end of it. Yes, some blogs will link to clips from the show and occasionally mainstream news programs will show a joke from one of the shows. But normally, political comedy is limited to its original audience, and nowadays the audience on websites like Hulu that offer free replays of the shows. So how many people do political comedians reach and who are they?

According to the Pew Research Center in 2008, 8% of Americans regularly learned about politics by watching comedy shows, defined as shows like the Daily Show or Saturday Night Live, which held steady from 2004 and went up two percentage points

² Lance Holbert and Nick Geidner, "The 2008 Election: Highlighting the Need to Explore Additional Communication Subfields to Advance Political Communication," *Communication Studies* 60, 4 (2009): 344-358

³ Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money, and Message Shaped the 2008 Election*, (Oxford University Press, 2010) 156.

from 2000. Another 20% occasionally learned about politics from comedy shows.⁴ The numbers were much higher among those between the ages of 18-29, with 39% combined and much lower among those over the age of 50, at 20% combined. The numbers for late-night talk shows are nearly identical. The same study showed that young people are also overwhelmingly more likely to regularly learn about politics using Internet sources. A senior analyst at the National Annenberg stated that viewers of the Daily Show tended to be “more educated, younger and more liberal than the average American.”⁵

Fake News?

Before Jon Stewart began broadcasting his version of late-night “fake news,” the popular term for his mix of jokes and political commentary, there was a different form of fake news. Hoaxes are discussed and briefly analyzed by Robert Love in an article for the *Colombia Literature Review*.⁶

With the yellow journalism made famous by the Hearst and Pulitzer papers in the 19th and early 20th centuries, hoaxes were sensational stories invented to sell newspapers. Tales of winged men on the moon and zoo animals running wild in Manhattan were sewed in newspapers and printed as fact, at least at their outset. Even Edgar Allen Poe sold a story to his hometown newspaper *The Baltimore Sun* about an impossibly fast lighter-than-air zeppelin trip across the Atlantic Ocean.

⁴ Pew Research Center, “The Internet's Broader Role in Campaign 2008,” January 11, 2008. Web. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/689/the-internets-broader-role-in-campaign-2008>

⁵ Annenberg Public Policy Center, “Daily Show Viewers Knowledgeable About Presidential Campaign, National Annenberg Election Survey Shows,” news release, September 21, 2004. http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Political_Communication/naes/2004_03_late-night-knowledge-2_9-21_pr.pdf

⁶ Robert Love, “Before Jon Stewart,” *Colombia Journalism Review* 45, 6 (2007): 33-37.

Love compares hoaxes to Steven Colbert's "truthiness," which he and Merriam-Webster define as "truth that comes from the gut, not books."⁷ Considering the definition of truthiness though, and that it was used to justify false facts as real, not to create facts wholesale, the comparison may not stand up to scrutiny. It's fairer to say that truthiness refers to distorting truth to fit feelings, whereas hoaxing involves creating facts where there were none. Indeed, in his "The Word" segment defining truthiness, Colbert uses the word in explaining President George W. Bush's justifications, which Colbert claims were feelings, for nominating Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court and going to war in Iraq.⁸ Still, though the straight comparison may not hold, Stephen Colbert's style, typified by his adherence to a caricature of mainstream right-wing political commentators, could be considered a type of hoax. By presenting himself as something he is not, it could be said that he is perpetrating a hoax on his viewers, at least those of them not in on the joke.

The question that must be asked then, is do people fail to see the comedy of Stephen Colbert and instead take his show at face value? If the response is yes, the further question of why is also appropriate.

Fortunately, a paper published in the International Journal of Press/Politics in 2009 attempted to answer just those questions. The paper, entitled "The Irony of Satire: Political Ideology and the Motivation to See What You Want to See in *The Colbert Report*," studied the willingness of participants to take Stephen Colbert's conservative persona.⁹

⁷ Merriam-Webster Online. "Word of the Year 2006." Accessed March 14, 2012. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/info/06words.htm>

⁸ "Truthiness," video clip, first aired October 17, 2005, Comedy Central, [www.ColbertNation.com](http://www.colbertnation.com) <http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/24039/october-17-2005/the-word---truthiness>.

⁹ Heather L. Lamarre, Kristen D. Landreville, Michael A. Beam, "The Irony of Satire Political Ideology and the Motivation to See What You Want to See in *The Colbert Report*," International Journal of

The authors begin by describing a system within the mind that creates a bias within itself for statements and facts that match with their ideologies. Put more simply, people hear what they want to hear and trust things they were predisposed to believe based on their political leanings. This effect tends to be amplified in cases in which the source of information is ambiguous. Previous social studies have show that in cases of ambiguity, people tend to make decisions regarding the validity of information based on incentives and deterrents. In cases of political commentary, the incentive is self-gratification; that is, the pleasure received from proof that you are correct.

As to whether *The Colbert Report* constitutes an ambiguous source, the authors make a simple but convincing argument that it does. They state that Colbert's use of deadpan satire forces viewers to not only determine the validity of the information he is providing but also Colbert's earnestness, whether or not he believes what he is saying. The deadpan style precludes any suggestions of parody that could indicate to viewers that Colbert is actually joking. To contrast, Jon Stewart, whose show airs immediately prior to Colbert's, inter-cuts news clips with remarks in various tones of voice, with various facial expressions that clearly denote a joke. Colbert lacks these same indicators, instead delivering his jokes in a very serious tone.

Insomuch that Colbert has taken on the role of a conservative pundit, the authors hypothesized that conservative viewers would be more likely than others to believe that Colbert was sincere in the things he said on television. Testing this theory was as simple as having study participants self-record their political ideology, showing them a clip from the show and then asking them to complete a survey on Colbert himself. The latter

section included questions regarding his credibility, what they perceived his political ideology to be and whether they felt he was serious or not.

As predicted, those reporting as conservative were more likely to posit that Colbert was also conservative speaking seriously.¹⁰ Conservatives were also more likely to believe Colbert was a Republican. The researchers also asked participants if they found Colbert funny, this time finding that political ideology was not predictive. It seems conservatives found his liberal bashing funny, while liberals thought his parody version of a conservative was humorous. Had Colbert added a few eye rolls or made his tone more sarcastic, it is likely that viewers would have understood that he was joking and that the conservative pundit he played was in fact only an act. Instead, those who wanted to believe he agreed with them did so.

Viewer Effects

The effect of political comedy on its consumers is another subject that has been a topic of study among academics. Intuition might lead one to think that comedy distracts from issues and would lead viewers to gain less information than they would by taking in a “straight” news program. One might assume that a person watching straight news does so specifically to get informed, whereas the audience for political comedy might watch not only for information, but also for entertainment.

Polling has shown, however, that this may not be the case. At least two have shown that people who watch the Daily Show are as informed, if not more informed than those who did not watch news or did not watch late night shows. During the 2004

¹⁰ Ibid, page 222-225.

presidential election, the Annenberg Public Policy Center asked survey respondent a series of questions to determine their knowledge of campaign issues. The survey was specifically targeted towards young people, the demographic group that is most likely to watch political comedy.¹¹ The average Daily Show viewer answered 48% of questions correctly, compared with 39% for young people who watched no late night television. Frequent cable news viewers also got 48% of questions correct, those who watched four nights of network news a week answered 40% correctly and newspaper readers scored 46%. Another poll, this one by Fairleigh Dickinson University in 2011, had a similar structure and showed similar results. The Daily Show's viewers consistently outperformed a number of traditional news sources.¹² In particular, participants who claimed to get most of their political information from MSNBC and Fox News were more likely to answer survey questions incorrectly than those from the Daily Show. Daily Show viewers scored similarly to frequent listeners of National Public Radio and viewers of Sunday morning talk shows.

The fact that the Daily Show uses comedy while discussing political and public policy topics may actually aid in their effort to inform their viewers. In addition to bringing in consumers who would normally eschew political television, jokes may also have an effect on how well a viewer remembers a point and whether they believe it or not. A paper published in *Communication Monographs*, a publication of the National Communications Association, delved into the science behind the persuasiveness of

¹¹ Annenberg Public Policy Center, page 2.

¹² Fairleigh Dickinson University Public Mind Poll. "Some News Leaves People Knowing Less." news release. November 21, 2011. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/73377350/Fairleigh-Dickinson-University-Public-Mind-Poll>

comedic political commentary.¹³ The authors theorize that forcing viewers to listen and wait for a punch line, a political comedian can increase the amount of attention being paid to his or her words, which the authors referred to as “message processing depth.” Plus, people like laughing and listening to comedy and like people who make them laugh. The more they like a source of information, the more credibility they will give it. This reduces the amount that an information consumer disagrees with an argument made by an information source and increases the likelihood that they accept that argument as valid.

To test their theory, the authors had participants read transcripts of monologues from the television program Politically Correct, hosted by comedian Bill Maher. The survey participants filled out questionnaires on their political beliefs before reading the transcripts and another questionnaire on the issues that were discussed and the comedic value of the monologues after reading the transcripts. The results of the survey showed that the respondents who found the monologues funny were more likely to find the source credible and had a higher level of message processing; that is, they paid more attention. These same participants also counterargued less and were more likely to find the argument made by Maher valid. The authors suggested that issues that are not necessarily ones that an audience would naturally find interesting could benefit from comedy, in that it would draw in viewers and lead them to pay closer attention than they normally would. Perhaps most intriguing, when the authors performed a similar study, this time with comedy from Chris Rock, there was an additional finding. With Rock’s monologues, there was a delayed effect. One week after participating in the initial stages of the study, respondents had undergone a significant change in attitude on the issues Rock discussed.

¹³ Sahara Byrne, Emily Moyer-Gusé and Robin L. Nabi. “All Joking Aside: A Serious Investigation into the Persuasive Effect of Funny Social Issue Messages.” *Communication Monographs* 74, 1 (2007): 29-54.

The authors suggested that his comedy had a “sleeper effect,” brought on by thoughts and discussions on his comedy throughout the week.

But though it may have a positive effect on the amount of information people take in and hold onto, it is possible that this does not create gains in political participation. Constant jokes about politicians and sarcasm directed toward the nation’s leaders could certainly cause cynicism among viewers. Cynical citizens might be less likely to participate in politics, due to thoughts that there is no hope for change or improvement.

A study published in the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* set out to find whether or not frequently watching political comedy leads to depressed political participation.¹⁴ Surveyors asked people who reported regularly or sometimes learning about the 2004 Democratic Presidential Primary if they participated in politics in various ways. Political participation, as defined by the authors was performing one of the following acts: contacting an elected official, attending a campaign event, joining a political organization or contributing money to a political campaign. All else being equal, the authors found that viewing late night comedy in order to learn about the campaign was a factor that would increase the likelihood that a person would attend a campaign event and join a political organization.

Key Takeaways

Political comedy is, for the most part, consumed by young people. This group is more likely to get their news from political comedy and also comprises a large portion of the audience for late night comedy. And although political comedy is just as effective at

¹⁴ Paul R. Brewer and Xiaoxia Cao. “Political Comedy Shows and Public Participation in Politics.” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 20, 1 (2008): 90-99.

informing its audience to political issues of the day, the type of comedy, whether obvious parody or straight satire, effects how audiences process a medium's content. In addition to informing, jokes have the power to stay with a person longer and make a news source more credible in the eyes of its consumers.

The Blog

Note: In-text hyperlinks will be represented by underlined text and cited in the endnotes.

Embedded videos will be linked to and briefly described in brackets. Otherwise, the posts will be accurately transcribed in the space below.

The blog itself can be found on the Internet at www.theblankofblank.us.

“About the Blog”

The Politics of World Cup Soccer. The Economics of Sumo Wrestling. The Audacity of Teacup Pigs. The some descriptive noun of some other more specific noun. The Blank of Blank is a blog designed to keep people laughing in an effort to keep them reading. Putting the Ha-Ha in politics. Pah-haha-litics. That sounds about right

“The Introduction of the Blog”

March 26, 2012

I’ve noticed, throughout my many years on this earth, that most people don’t pay attention to politics. They know it’s important, but they have other stuff they need to do and politicians can be really, really boring. Of course working parents want their kids to get a good education, but does anyone want to listen to a 15 point plan to “reinvigorate our failing schools” after a long day at the salt mines? And a lot of the hot political topics sound an awful lot like chores: balancing the budget, taxes, transportation, financial reform. These aren’t subjects that scream “fun for my free time.”

So is it really any surprise that newspapers are struggling? Is it really a huge shocker that people are politically illiterate? Politics is boring. Anyone who has watched the House on CSPAN will agree. Government is boring. Even the Department of Justice, which sounds like something created by superheroes, is just full of lawyers. Even campaigning, which the media is absolutely obsessed with, is boring. The greatest institution in campaigning, the stump speech, is the speech a candidate gives every day, multiple times. Even before we start talking about the content of the speech, it's already stale by definition.

But to be fair to the politicians and pundits, it's not easy getting people interested in this stuff. The shadowy elites tried infusing some action into the process, but no one believed that the President's motorcade was a fast-paced car chase. Sex scandals catch the attention of the masses, but the pivot from tickling interns back to the open seats on the National Labor Relations Board is pretty tough.

Perhaps it's just that I'm an elitist, northeastern liberal, or maybe it's because I fall perfectly into their key demographic groups, but it seems to me that Jon Stewart and Stephan Colbert have been managing to keep politics pretty interesting for the last few years. People like laughing. People even like the sound of laughing; if they didn't, why is the laugh-track such an irreplaceable institution? The promise of comedy brings people in, and the absolute ridiculousness of politics gets them to stay.

That's what I will try to do with this blog. I want to infuse politics with comedy and leave people on the other side of my articles with a bit of information they remember. Eventually, those bits will smush together to make a blob, at which point they will be only one letter away from having their own blog. And that's the American dream isn't it?

“The Utter Weirdness of Herman Cain”

March 26, 2012

[Commercial entitled “Rabbit” produced by Cain Solutions, a group headed by 2012 candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, Herman Cain.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=EdpN5C1_flQ]

This is a newly released video from Herman Cain’s political group. I don’t really have much to say, as I try not to wade too far into the crazy for fear of catching it. If they were going for funny, they missed and landed in creepy. Here’s a tip for all you fledgling comedians out there: people don’t tend to laugh when you murder bunny rabbits.

“The Presidentialness of Newt Gingrich”

March 27, 2012

According to the National Journal,ⁱ Newt Gingrich has begun charging his supporters \$50 for the pleasure, nay privilege, of taking a photograph with him. This is his latest desperate (and I’ve used the word desperate deliberately) to keep his campaign going, regardless of what those pesky voters do.

I think it’s time for a little thought experiment. If Newt charges \$50 for a photo, and taking a photo is a 30 second process, it is fair to say that the Gingrich campaign values their candidate’s time at \$100 a minute. And 30 seconds is a liberal estimate, given that photographers are literally dealing with the speed of light every time they snap a picture. At \$100 a minute, this man could reinvigorate the economy by himself if he concentrated himself on something other than a losing campaign for president.

But he won't do that because casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson keeps pouring money into super PACs determined to prop up the defeated husk of our former Speaker a la Weekend At Bernie's. And while "casino billionaire" is the most baller title I've ever heard, I have to fault the guy for giving Newt even the slightest hope. At this point a vote for Newt is worth no more than the chuckle you get after pulling the lever. Honestly though, I'm not surprised Newt's campaign has become a joke; his name IS the most similar to Lizard People.ⁱⁱ

So enjoy the laughs you get watching Newt Gingrich, clad in a head scarf and huge sunglasses, hide from the paparazzi like a true diva. Because the only thing more presidential than charging people to stand next to you for 30 seconds, is acting like Madonna.

"The Everything Must Go Approach of Mr. Ryan's Budget"

March 28, 2012

Before this week's Supreme Court Case on the constitutionality of health care reform, which I will be discussing at some point (heads up!), the big hullabaloo in Washington DC was the budget plan put forward by Representative Paul Ryan. Sounds like typical Washington insiders overreacting, right? I mean, come on, the guy isn't even a Senator! But, Mr. Ryan is the chairman of the House Budget Committee and a conservative darling and so we must pay attention to what he says. This and the fact that our bothersome old constitution requires that budgets come out of the House before being considered by the Senate means that Mr. Ryan's budget means business.

So, what does the budget entail? Cuts. More cuts. Then another cut. There are tax cuts and cuts to transportation funding. Medicare gets cut, as does its shy, but lovely cousin Medicaid. Defense spending actually gets increased and money for veterans would be ok. But other than that, more cuts than batting practice in a thorn-bush. That isn't the best metaphor in the world, but I'm going to stick by it because it involves a whole heck of a lot of cuts.

When we get down to the details, the programs people actually know, things get pretty ugly for Mr. Paul Ryan's budget. Ugly in a large groups of citizens with pitchforks and torches kind of way. To keep the budget balanced, everything besides defense, Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security would have to go. Not that two out of the four of those don't get cut, just that they survive, at least in name. National parks though? No money for them. The litter in the Grand Canyon is just going to have to take care of itself for a while. Food and water safety would be gone, so I hope you like lead in your tap water. I hear it adds a certain sweetness that is actually quite pleasant. See, there's always a bright side. Federal education funding would dry up, along with money for highways. I don't even have to write a joke for those ones, because it's just plain hilarious. The cherry-on-top has to be that federal law enforcement would be forced to cease. Border Patrol: Gone! Secret Service: Vanished! FBI: No more!

I have to give Mr. Ryan credit though. This *is* a budget. It is a plan for taking in revenue and spending it, which is certainly what he was going for. That much is uncontroversial. So good job Paulie boy! There's at least one thing we can agree on!

“The Inconvenience of Details”

April 2, 2012

So I know I talked a little bit about Congressman Paul Ryan's budget last weekⁱⁱⁱ, but if you'll indulge me, I would like to pick on him one more time. It's not that I want to make the guy a constant target. But when your ideas are targeted towards a political party that believes protecting individual liberty and outlawing certain types of marriage are two sides of the same coin, things tend to get a little nutty.

In addition to the cuts he proposed, his budget also promises "Pro-Growth Tax Reform." Now, there's nothing inherently crazy about tax reform; in fact his budget^{iv} lays out a number of problems with the current tax code that are considered conventional wisdom for both parties. What Ryan wants to do is lower income tax rates and the amount of income tax brackets, while eliminating loop-holes and deductions to make up for the money lost by lowering rates. Ryan laid out a few specifics, most notably that income taxes will be 10% and 25%.

The budget is less clear on which loop-holes will be closed and which deductions will be phased out. This is where things get ugly. People like their loop-holes and deductions. Homeowners, homebuilders, bankers and realtors all benefit from home mortgage tax deductions. Denying a deduction for child dependents can be labeled as anti-family and closing loopholes for oil and energy companies will be blamed for seasonal increases in gas and electricity prices. Which is why Ryan didn't single any out for cuts. Which is a problem, because he needs to find somewhere in the neighborhood of \$4-6 trillion to keep revenue from dropping.

Republicans claim to have these great plans, but the details seem to derail them. Mitt Romney went so far as to say he wouldn't name programs he would cut.^v But vote for him anyway, because he won't cut anything *you* like, just things other people like. My well-honed political brain is telling me that there is an opening for a Republican candidate who isn't afraid of getting into the nitty-gritty. Rick Santorum can't fill that hole. Everyone says the devil is in the details, so he won't get near those. Maybe Newt Gingrich could step in though. He loves to talk and reciting statistics and obscure programs would be one way for him to hear his own voice. Gingrich: He's not afraid of the miNEWTia. That's a pretty good slogan, if you like puns. And if there's one thing America loves, it's puns. Not details.

“The Threat of Boring Vice-President”

April 3, 2012

In an op-ed^{vi} for the Boston Globe, former Republican Senator from New Hampshire John E. Sununu urged eventual GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney to choose a "dull" vice-president. It makes sense from an electoral angle. Making waves tends to offend people and that's not a good way to win votes.

I agree with Senator Sununu. In addition to a having a last name that wouldn't be out of place in a Dr. Seuss book, he has a point. Picking an experienced running mate is responsible from a governance standpoint and makes background checks all the easier. Al Gore or George H. W. Bush would have been competent taking over for the president had the worst happened.

That said, I really hope he doesn't pick a boring VP. Elections are already pretty boring. No need to dull it up on purpose. And this election hasn't been all that exciting. Some in the "elite media"^{vii} are already talking about the 2016 election. Luckily Sarah Palin is on the case, agreeing with me^{viii} as usual.

Plus, an interesting VP candidate makes my job easy. Personally, I'm rooting for Vice President Donald Trump. Why not? He's super conservative, which would shore up Romney's base and he has business experience, just like Romney. To top it off, he already has a catchphrase that fits in with Romney's message. Ok, maybe "you're fired" won't win many people over when unemployment is as high as it is. But it would sell a heck of a lot of t-shirts. Sure, he probably wouldn't make a great president^{ix} if something awful were to happen to POTUS Romney, but he would be fun.

And frankly, it wouldn't be fair if Mr. Mitt chose a boring Veep, considering that President Obama chose Joe Biden, coolest dude on this side of the Mason-Dixon line. Whether he's letting us know how he really feels^x about health care reform or just singin' a song,^{xi} he keeps it fresh. Always gotta keep yer eye on ol' Joe, you never know what he's agonna do!

“The Inevitability of Governor Romney’s Nomination”

April 4, 2012

Congratulations Governor Romney! I don't know if you heard, but you won primaries^{xii} in Maryland, DC and Wisconsin yesterday! You hadn't heard? You thought

the primaries were over? Well, thank God you read this blog. That could have been really embarrassing.

For everyone else, Mitt Romney won some more states yesterday. But I'm sorry to inform you, I really, really am, that the Republican Presidential primary is not over yet. Technically.

Before you vomit all over your screen or murder your TV for fear of accidentally catching a glimpse of a debate, I should let you know, this thing is over. Romney's got it in the bag.

This shouldn't be a huge surprise if you'd been paying attention (it's ok if you haven't, sometimes I wish I hadn't). I made a bet with a friend in November that Romney would win it all. He picked Newt (HA). Romney's had the money, the establishment and, perhaps most importantly in a Republican primary, the next-in-line^{xiii} status. And now he's got an overwhelming lead in delegates and the next states to vote are in the Northeast, Romney's wheelhouse.

Except Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania could be a problem. That's where Rick Santorum is from. And he's leading in the polls. And of all the states left to vote it has the fourth most delegates, so it's hard to ignore. Oh and that delegate lead Romney has? Turns out he only has about 57% of the delegates he needs to wrap up the nomination. So, the second half just started.

Oh and after that? The general election. That primary election was just a preview election for this next election. Which, yes, will give me a ton of stuff to write about, but who's going to read it if everyone has been bored to death?

“The Hilarity of the Federal Register”

April 5, 2012

Ah, baseball season. It's finally back. As a lifelong Mets fan, I can't let myself get too excited. Too many poor seasons and stunning collapses. What I can get excited for is that small part of the year when baseball and basketball overlap and I get to play the game Disappointment: Mets vs. Knicks Edition. Right now the Knicks are ahead, only because of the roller coaster ride of win and losing streaks they've put me through this year.

As you can imagine, it's a pretty depressing game. When I need cheering up, I turn to the Federal Register. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Federal Register, it is a daily journal of all the rules and information collections released by the Executive Branch of the government. Most people find it pretty boring. I find it hilarious.

Without context, a lot of the submissions get my imagination running wild. For instance, today the Food and Drug Administration released some information on a meeting of the Blood Products Advisory Committee.^{xiv} My first thought: "Someone is trying to get approval to sell blood to Vampires. Genius. This is a totally untapped market." In reality, it probably has to do with regulating drugs that affect the blood. A few departments down, the Forest Service announced a meeting of the National Tree-Marking Paint Committee,^{xv} which will meet in Flagstaff, Arizona to paint pretty pictures on trees. The Civil Rights Commission^{xvi} is having a meeting on the Sunshine Act, which I assume involves meeting in a clearing to discuss urgent matters of rainbows, puppy dogs and buttercups! Here's one from the Consumer Product Safety Commission

granting exceptions from lead content limits.^{xvii} That doesn't sound like much fun, but when you click through, the exception is for "children's ride-on tractors, children's ride-on cars, and other ride-on toys." Wait, what? That one isn't funny at all.

The reason the Executive Branch has to hold all these meetings and make all these rules is because Congress doesn't want to stir up controversy so they make vague^{xviii} laws and leave it up to the Executive Branch to suss things out. Except for the guy at the top (Da Prezident), the Executive Branch doesn't get elected. Now, no one has to take a vote on allowing more lead into children's toys, leaving everyone either happy or developmentally stunted.

So make sure to check out the Federal Register, and remember, have fun with it!

“The Dual Nature of the Buffett Rule”

April 9, 2012

In the next few weeks, we can expect^{xix} Democrats to start bringing up a new tax increase called the Buffett Rule. The Buffett Rule has nothing to do with all-you-can-eat taxes, but is actually named after Warren Buffett.^{xx} Buffett, the richest man in Omaha, Nebraska, once commented that he has a lower tax rate than his secretary, who earns considerably less than him. Thus, the Buffett Rule will raise minimum tax rates on millionaires and two millionaires to 30%.

The money raised from this tax would go towards reducing the deficit, but don't let that fool you. The Dems are using it to pound Republicans. Most American's are fine with raising taxes on the rich and Democrats know that. If Republicans stay true to form

and reflexively shout "NO!" at anything with the word tax in it, Democrats end up on top. Plus, stirring up some extra hate for the rich can't hurt considering Mitt Romney is obscenely wealthy.^{xxi}

The polling^{xxii} suggests that a majority of Americans are for this tax, but I can imagine a scenario in which this strategy backfires on the Democrats. 30% seems like a lot to most people. Plus, a tax increase is always a tax increase. Still though, it will be hard for Republicans to defend voting against the Buffett Rule, especially when it plays into the stereotype that they are overly protective of the rich.

“The Potential for Backfire of Mr. Romney’s Campaign Strategy”

April 10, 2012

Now that you've finished reading that incredibly long title, I think it's time we begin discussing the general election. The general Presidential election. The one that comes after the primary.

Now that Mitt Romney has wrapped up the Republican nomination, he is concentrating on attacking President Obama. He's recently criticized President for being out of touch^{xxiii} and spending too much time at Harvard (oh snap!).

HOLD UP. Lets run this back one minute. Romney is calling out Obama for being out of touch. Even though he's the guy who has an elevator for his cars. And the Harvard thing? Mittens Romulus has not one, not three, but TWO degrees from Harvard. Here's a video of Al Sharpton exposing this hypocrisy. The reason he keeps referring to Romney

as Willard is because that's Mitt's real first name and the name Willard is way less cool than Mitt.

[MSNBC clip of Al Sharpton discussing Mitt Romney and his degrees from Harvard University. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04Ica0briOU>]

It seems like a risky move to attack someone in areas that you yourself are weak. The smart play here for el Presidente is probably to say something along the lines of, "Is he serious? He's joking right? It's the same... We both went... Car elevator." And here's a tip to anyone thinking about getting into politics: whenever your strategy can be effectively countered with two questions and three incomplete sentences, you need to rethink your strategy.

“The Sadness of Mr. Santorum’s Exit”

April 11, 2012

[Music video for Sarah McLachlan’s “I Will Remember You.”

youtube=<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSz16ngdsG0>]

Please play the above song for the duration of this post. Not only because it describes my emotions over losing Rick Santorum from the Republican primary, but also because it is his favorite song.

I'll miss you Rick. We've had some good times these past few years. Whether you were beating up on^{xxiv} Mitt Romney or threatening military action^{xxv} with Iran, you kept us entertained at the very least. Not to mention you put out the most terrifying political

ad^{xxvi} I've ever seen, and not even in a "Wow that guy could be the President, oh my God what is this country coming to" kind of way.

I can only hope we'll see you again in 2016.^{xxvii} Good luck running against some combination of Chris Christie, Paul Ryan, Marco Rubio and whatever random Herman Caines or Michelle Bachmanns decide to show up. And Ron Paul. Gotta bet on him to run again. Yea, it's going to be hard. No one said it would be easy, Rick. But someone has to stand up to fight porn,^{xxviii} and why the heck shouldn't it be you. Excuse my language, but dang it Rick, you're a winner. You won Iowa and you won Mississippi and Alabama at the same time. Sure none of that really matters because you didn't win the nomination, but that's just a technicality. No one is going to remember that in four years when they google you to remind themselves of who you are.

You had a great run buddy. I can't wait for next time.

“The Embarrassment of the Democratic Party”

April 12, 2012

Nothing makes a Democrat slap his forehead and sigh like the name John Edwards. The guy was their Vice-Presidential candidate and had a chance to head up the ticket in 2008. Thanks a lot Obama. Seriously, thanks for winning that one.

What are Edwards' sins? How about an extramarital affair while his universally well-liked wife was battling cancer. Take a moment to process that and then get ready because there is more. He tried to cover up the affair and the child

produced by it. Today he goes to trial for using \$1 million of campaign money to hide the affair.

According to his friends, Edwards is upset that he is being treated worse than other notable political philanderers. That's right. HE is upset about the way HE is being treated. Sorry John-Boy, but you don't get to be sad. Right now you should focus on remorseful.

Imagine, for a minute, if this guy had been the Democratic nominee for President in 2008. He would have won the election because George W. Bush and then all of this stuff would have come out. While he was sitting in the Oval Office. With nukes on nukes on nukes at his disposal. Democrats would never be allowed to even stare wistfully at the White House again.

So if you're one of those people who think I only pick on Republicans, here you go: Democrats are stupid too.

“The Worst Gaffe of 2012”

April 16, 2012

Soon-to-be GOP nominee Mitt Romney (end rhyme) was caught on tape doing the unthinkable. Something so vile, so disastrous, that I doubt his campaign will survive the week.

What did he do? He revealed details on his plans were he elected President. (Gasp!) He said he wouldn't do it, but here it is.^{xxix}

Before I get into what he actually said, can I just ask how these guys running for office can think anything said in front of a crowd, even a super secret fundraiser crowd, is going to remain secret? Literally everyone in the room has a device in their pocket that can record video and instantly upload it to the Internet. I know you want to believe that these guys are on your team, but everybody wants to get a scoop sometimes.

The highlights of Mitt's slip:

- He plans on cutting tax deductions for second home mortgages and state income and property taxes to pay for an across the board 20% tax cut.
- He wants to frame his campaign around jobs and kids. Real controversial Mittster. Really pushing the envelope with that one.
- Finally, he wants to make Republicans an attractive choice for Hispanic voters.

Knowing Republicans as well as I do, I assume Governor Rom-com will achieve this goal by offering a mix of tax cuts, tax credits and something slightly offensive/ridiculous^{xxx} to minorities.

There you have it folks. The first dip into the minutia of the Romney 2012 platform. Not much to it yet, but I'm sure after a few more big-money fundraisers we'll get a bit more.

“The Truth of Independent Voters”

April 17, 2012

As we get along in the campaign, you're going to start hearing a lot about "independent voters" on cable news. In fact, you might already be hearing a lot about

them. I don't really watch much cable news because watching cable news makes me excited, bored, mad and then snarky in that exact sequence. The worst one is snarky. You wouldn't like me when I'm snarky.

But I don't brook any hatred towards those who do partake in cable news. Newspapers leave ink on peoples' fingers and are a real hassle to fold up. And blogs? LAME. Get out of your mom's basement, amiright? But if you do watch cable news, I want you to know the truth about independent voters, because in the next few months Wolf Blitzer is going to talk about them so much that you'd think he's in love with them or some weird thing like that.

So here's the thing about independents. They aren't all so independent. Shocking right? In a blog post^{xxxi} (LAME), George Washington University professor John Sides breaks down 40% of voters who call themselves independents. The first group, pure independents, make up 10% of the total vote share. The other, independent leaners, are about 30% of all voters. These guys say they are independent, but lean towards being Democrats or Republicans. And polling shows they vote nearly identically to the people who call themselves Democrats or Republicans. Those of you keeping up can see that these independents are not acting very independently. Anyone who's fallen behind should read this last paragraph again. Go ahead, we'll wait.

So when the nice man comes on MSNBC and starts talking about how independents are growing in number and we should celebrate by watching Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum save the world from aliens at his lake house in the fourth largest city in Missouri on the 4th of July, tell him to hold up a minute. You tell him, look Christopher Matthews, I love that you have two first names and watching a movie

together sounds like a whole lot of fun, but lets get one thing straight. These independents you speak of, they aren't all that independent. So lets cut the baloney and figure out what's really important. Namely, who is bringing the potato salad to your super-fun 4th of July party.

“The Constitutionality of Health Care Reform”

April 18, 2012

OBAMACARE!

Ok, now that I've scared the poop out of your butts, why don't we have a little chat about the case that recently came before the Supreme Court calling the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act's (PPACA, pronounced pee-pah-cah if you want to sound cool) constitutionality into question. "But Matt," you may say, "how are you qualified to talk about this extraordinarily complicated issue? For goodness sake, you said the word poop in your last sentence!"

Well my friend, I happen to have taken not one, but two classes on health care reform. Plus, as a college student, I am required to hold a strong opinion on every issue ever raised. Luckily for all of you, I've read up on the topic. And as to the poop thing, those of us who've read PPACA (well, parts of it anyway) know that Congressmen love to throw toilet humor into their laws. It's in there, you just have to know where to look. Most importantly though, I'm not going to go into the minutia and I'm certainly not going to pretend I'm a lawyer. But by the end of this post, you're going to have some idea what's

going on. At least, enough to impress the ladies, or your grandparents, or whoever else is claiming Obamacare is ruining this country from the inside out.

First off, a little background. The case itself is called U.S. Department of Health and Human Services v. Florida. It's no surprise that the biggest case in front of SCOTUS (Supreme Court of the US, pronounce it sco-tuss if you want to sound cool) since Gore v. Bush once again involves Florida. They aren't alone though. 13 other states are in on the case, along with the National Federation of Independent Businesses and four individuals. Their main point of contention is the individual mandate, which is a requirement that all U.S. citizens obtain health insurance. That's what the big hubbub is about. And guess what. The individual mandate will affect about 2% of Americans, according to the Urban Institute. That's it. 2%. The Court will be answering four questions, which is very convenient for bloggers trying to simplify things.

Question 1: Can we even do this now? Can't we just do this later?

First thing's first, the Court had to decide whether or not it was even appropriate to hear the case yet. Under the Anti-Injunction Act, a law passed in 1867, no one can sue to stop a tax until the tax has already started collecting money. Since the individual mandate, which we will get to in a minute, is the major piece of PPACA under fire, and it doesn't begin taxing/penalizing people until 2015, this one seems obvious. Both sides agree, but not in the way you might expect. They both say that the Anti-Injunction Act doesn't apply. The states say that the individual mandate is not a tax, but a penalty, and therefore not subject to the law. The Obama Administration argues that the individual mandate doesn't quite fit the definition of a tax affected by the Anti-Injunction Act.

SCOTUS, in a blatant attempt to put off their work until later, conscripted a lawyer to fight for their right to do this some other time. Because they have a lot going on right now and Con Air just started on TBS. But seriously, its actually standard practice to hear the merits of the other side an argument when both of the contenders are together on it.

Question 2: Is the individual mandate constitutional?

This is the big one. Does the federal government have the ability to compel people into buying health insurance?

First off, it's important to understand why the individual mandate is included at all in PPACA. The people this is aimed at are the ones who don't buy health insurance because they are healthy. Healthy people don't need health insurance because healthy people don't need doctors. Sick people need health insurance because they have to go to the doctor a lot and doctors are expensive. Before PPACA, insurance companies could and would avoid the sick people because they cost more to cover. PPACA outlawed that practice, which is good for people with asthma and cancer, but bad for insurance companies' bottom lines. To compensate, the individual mandate attempts to add more healthy people into the pool of insured people. Healthy people don't need doctors and so they don't cost a lot. You think allowing people under the age of 26 to stay on their parent's insurance was just to help young people? You should know by now that politicians only pretend to care about young people. That was to make it easier for insurance companies to keep young, healthy people on their roles. Just like the individual mandate.

Why is it such a big deal? Well it's not often that the government compels people to buy something. Under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution, the government has the ability to regulate economic activity. Proponents of PPACA claim that the individual mandate falls under the Commerce Clause. Failing to purchase health care affects others, they say, when the uninsured gets hit by a bus and expects care at the local emergency room. These events drive up costs for the insured, and thus requiring people to buy health insurance is a necessary and proper way to regulate the industry. Their opponents argue that this is an unprecedented overreach of government power. They say that if the government can force a person to buy health insurance, it can force them to buy other things as well. The example that often comes up is broccoli. Not sure why broccoli, but my guess is that Americans generally and Supreme Court justices specifically hate broccoli with the passion of a four-year-old.

Question 3: Can reform go on without the individual mandate?

As you should realize by now, the individual mandate is pretty crucial to the effectiveness of health care reform. If you don't, read the last two paragraphs again. And this time really try hard. The third question before the Court asks whether they should strike down the whole bill if the individual mandate is ruled unconstitutional. Insurers would crumble if they were forced to take on every sick person who wanted coverage without a guarantee of an influx of healthy souls to suck on. Yes, it's weird to pity the health insurers only a few years after using them as a club to beat health care reform through Congress, but it's always been said that the Supreme Court makes for strange bedfellows. (Well, I guess that's only been said since Thomas got on the Court.)

But anyway, the Obama administration argued that if the individual mandate gets shut down, only the insurance provisions (ie: requirement that insurers take people with pre-existing conditions) should too. Everything else though, Medicare reforms, payment reforms, etc. should stay. The States think the whole thing should fall if the mandate does, as the whole bill was an attempt at universal health coverage, and without the individual mandate that becomes impossible. I have a sneaking suspicion they really just don't like the whole bill, but I can't prove it. Once again, the Court called in an independent lawyer to make a third argument, this time that if the individual mandate is ruled unconstitutional, everything else should stay, including insurance provisions. Because why not?

Question 4: What about the Medicaid expansion? Is that ok?

PPACA, in addition to creating the individual mandate, also expanded Medicaid to people earning up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Line. In 2012 that means families of four making up to \$31,809 or individuals making up to \$15,414 would be eligible for Medicaid coverage. In total, Medicaid will be covering 16 million more people if PPACA survives. The States argued that the Medicaid expansion was coercive, as if they refused to comply the Federal Government would pull all funding for Medicaid. The Obama administration argued right back saying something like "Hey, that's always been the case and it's never been a problem before. Plus, we're paying for 90% of the expansion, so what are you complaining about?" In response the lawyer from the states kind of shrugged his shoulders and then when the Justices weren't looking stuck his tongue out at the lawyer for the government. Maybe. I wasn't there, but I heard that from someone.

So how did it all turn out?

Well, we don't know yet. And we won't until June. A lot of pundits say that the Obama lawyers did a terrible job and that the Court is poised to strike down the law. They always use the word "poised." But we'll find out in June. I suggest that you don't think about this until the decision comes down. That way it will be a big surprise! And surprises are fun!

“The Rules of Interning”

April 19, 2012

Ah, summer in DC. That time right after the cherry blossom tourists leave and before school trip tourists arrive. A singularly sweaty, smelly, stuck on the Metro time when interns flock into the city to take care of all the little tasks no one else wants to do. Interns, I've been in your position. I've worn a suit while lugging jugs of water in 90 degree weather. I've spoken with some of the less than lovely folks who feel an urge to participate in the civic process by screaming at someone, anyone who works in a congressional office. My point is, I've taken the abuse. And I'd like to help you avoid some of the humiliations that mark the typical DC summer internship.

First tip, people don't care too much about what you're doing. Yes, you have an exciting internship and everyone back home is very proud. But keep in mind that whomever you're talking to in DC is fighting for the most important cause on the planet. If it wasn't, why would they do it? When someone asks you what you do, keep it short and simple. Maybe throw in an anecdote about a time you were particularly embarrassed.

Self-deprecation makes people feel better about themselves and if they feel better about themselves while talking to you, they'll like you. And we all just want to be liked, right?

Here's something you're going to hear about a dillion times: Stand Right, Walk Left. That's in regards to the filling order on Metro escalators. God help you if you stand on the left. The range of punishments go from a terse swear word in your direction to a violent drop kick aimed at your head. I didn't really need to tell you this one, because people from DC love saying it. If living in DC was a secret club, this phrase would be the password. The official DC motto translates to Stand Right Or Die. (Disclaimer: I speak only one phrase in Latin. Sancti Navis = Holy Ship!)

If you aren't being paid, never forget it. Do your work, and do it well, but don't forget that you are doing it for free. Keep tabs on the briefings, hearings, panels, etc. that have free meals. There should be more than one a week on the Hill and some downtown too. And if you get sent out of the office, take your time. Have a nice stroll, see the sights. DC is a lovely city.

That's what I've got for you. I could remind you not to be an idiot, but you should know that already. I don't have to say things like "don't brag about how much you drank last night in front of supervisors" or "if the Congressman asks you to meet him at his home at 3 AM, it's for sex or murder or both." You're a smart kid. You got the internship, didn't you?

“The Tilt of the Constitution Party”

April 23, 2012

Great news everyone! The Constitution Party has announced^{xxxii} their nominee for President of the United States of America. After months of speculation we can finally say that former Representative Virgil Goode is the choice of the Constitution Party.

What's that you say, with a whisper? You've never heard of the Constitution Party? Why it's a third-party, one of the institutions that keeps America's democracy strong.

I get tired of talking about all the differences between Democrats and Republicans, so I think today I'll talk about how different the Constitution party is. For one, their standard bearer for 2012 has only been a member of the Constitution Party for a short time now. As a Congressman from Virginia, he began his career as a Democrat, switched to an Independent and then finally made it all the way over to the Republican Party. That's easy enough to spin though. Truly Independent.

The Constitution Party itself is pretty, um, non-traditional(?). For the party that named itself after a document that has a section about not establishing a national religion, they sure do talk about Jesus a lot! They mention him right in the first sentence of their platform.^{xxxiii} Actually the first five paragraphs are about religion or the Bible. The stated goal in paragraph three is to "restore American jurisprudence to its Biblical foundations and to limit the federal government to its Constitutional boundaries." Ah, that's where they got the name Constitution Party.

You'd think they'd base their stances on the hot topics of the day on the Constitution. But alas, the Constitution says nothing about immigration, abortion or a whole lot of other things. Luckily the Constitution Party figures things out using a mix of the Federalist Papers and the Bible, with a hint of individual liberty. Think of the conservative wing of the Republican Party, but then go even further off to the right. Really far right. Like abolishing Social Security, prohibiting pornography far right. It also seems like they are against Social Security Numbers, which is something I'd never heard of before.

So when you go to vote in November, don't forget about the Constitution Party. They're here! They're real! They don't appreciate your jokes about them! Get used to it!

“The Meaninglessness of Most Politics”

April 24, 2012

Ezra Klein is out today with an article^{xxxiv} on the factors that actually predict the outcome of presidential elections. And surprise, surprise the answer isn't "who loves America the most" or "who looks best with his sleeves rolled up." In other words, the things that pundits love to talk about.

No, Klein claims that there are three factors that affect who wins the Oval Office: growth in the economy, the sitting President's approval rating and whether or not one of the candidates happens to be the President. Lets break this down one-by-one using science, or as I call it, intuition and sarcasm.

The economy. It's retaken center stage as the most important issue in politics. For a while there in the 00's (the aughts? the zeros? the oh-ohs?) national security was top dog, but no longer. People care about their job and their finances more than anything. To paraphrase esteemed political thinkers the Wu-Tang Clan, cash rules everything around them. Folks vote with their wallet. Now, whether or not a President can do all that much to affect the economy is not all that clear, but that's a discussion for another post.

On to approval rating. This one is kind of a no-brainer. Oh, so you're saying if people approve of the President, they are more likely to vote for him? Thanks for the insight guys, never would have thought of that. I guess if we are talking about two non-incumbents, that one becomes a little less obvious. Anyway, the President's approval indicates voters' happiness with the party in charge. Low approval for the head of a party means worse chances for his party mates in the election. This is especially true given the parties' monolithic (I'm not going to baby you guys anymore. If you don't know a word, look it up. You're already on the Internet, it isn't that hard) platforms and emphasis on conformity.

Finally, incumbency. People don't like change. Unless there is a problem that is so glaring that ignoring it would be more effort than fixing it, people tend to let things be. Plus, who is more presidential than the President. I already know he loves America and looks good in a flannel shirt, because a bunch of people already voted for him.

Scandals though, like leaving your dog up on your car roof or a few security agents getting weird down in Colombia, don't matter too much in the grand scheme of things. And you know what? I'm ok with that.

“The Great Loss of Newt Gingrich”

April 25, 2012

My roommate was watching Fox News today, because he thinks it pisses me off (it does, but I hold in my anger just to spite him), and I heard that Newt Gingrich is going to be suspending his campaign in the upcoming week. Yeah, he's still going.

Of course, I couldn't contain my emotions when I heard that. Folks, I'm heartbroken. He was my favorite candidate in the GOP primary, if only because he could be relied on to say something that ripe for satire. And so, to commemorate this loss and to squeeze one more post out of his campaign, I give you my favorite moments from Newt Gingrich's 2012 campaign for the Republican Presidential Nomination.

3. Drama with the Many Mrs.^{xxxv} - At some point in the campaign the inevitable happened. One of Gingrich's two ex-wives came forward to talk about how much of a jerk he is. Normally this might be dismissed, you know jilted lovers and all that, but he *was* running for the nomination from the party that prides itself on family values. But Newt has tons of family values! He has three families! That's so many families! Also, the stuff she was describing was pretty torrid. Affairs, talk of open marriages and of course his divorcing her only a few months after she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Which, actually, depending on how you look at it might be an improvement for the Newter, as he divorced his first wife while she was struggling with Cancer. Depends on where you rank Cancer and MS on your own personal hierarchy of diseases.

2. Poor Kids Should Become Janitors^{xxxvi} - During one of the debates and in a few interviews, Speaker Gingrich mentioned that he thought it would be a great idea for poor children and teenagers, specifically the Black ones that are unemployed at higher rates, to work in their own schools as janitors. He said this plan would make it so poor young people wouldn't "have to become a pimp or a prostitute or a drug dealer." Middle school and high school can be a tough time for kids, especially for the ones who Gingrich believes might be persuaded into taking one of these jobs. Imagine for a second how much harder things would be if you were a janitor in your own school. Kids can be cruel and you can bet your butt these child-janitors would get thrown in a dumpster more than once.

1. Moon Base Gingrich^{xxxvii} - As you probably remember, Gingrich came under some scrutiny for proposing that the US set the goal of a permanent base on the moon by the end of his second term in office. To be perfectly honest, I'm all for this one. I'm kind of a nut about space and I think we should just be dumping money into NASA. I don't really care about a border fence and I think fighter jets are as cool as the next guy, but I don't anticipate a lot of dog-fights with al-Qaeda and friends. So if we are spending money on anything, it should be on space exploration. One thing of note though, my motives (go where no man has gone, discover the secrets of the universe) may differ from Newt Skywalker's. He published a book in 1984 that proposed space tourism, with the justification that a honeymoon that included weightlessness would be mighty attractive. And I think we all know why.

Newt, you will be missed. Stay close my friend, and please take a job on a cable network. Your giant, constantly talking head would be perfect for it.

“The Truth of Honesty”

April 26, 2012

Former President Jimmy Carter is at it again! Of course I'm talking about his comments^{xxxviii} yesterday about Presidential candidate Mitt Romney. WARNING: Don't take a sip of any beverage, particularly sticky ones, before reading the next sentence, as you are liable to spit it all over everything in utter shock! If you'll believe this, and I understand completely if you don't, President Carter said he thought Romney would be an acceptable President!

CRAZY! Carter is a Democrat and Romney is a Republican! Carter says that even though Romney took some extreme positions during the primary, it isn't clear that those positions will reflect his stances during the general election or in the Oval Office.

Jim, Jimbo, Jimmer, look here for a minute. This next bit is just for you. I know you've had a pretty admirable post-presidential life, Nobel Peace Prize or whatever, but we've talked about saying what everyone is thinking. Keep that stuff on the down-low man! Democrats are trying to win an election here. Yeah, I get it, you don't quite "get" reelection campaigns or whatever, but this one is obvious. The Republican is the one who will destroy America if he sets even one perfectly pedicured toesie into the West Wing. Those guys are going to privatize Social Security, insult seniors' grandchildren and sell off the Grand Canyon to a billboard company.

It's not that hard, buddy. I know what you're going to say. It was honest. Well listen here peanut boy, this is an election year and honesty is just about the LAST thing we need. I'm not saying you need to lie to anyone. Of course not! Just keep some things to yourself.

Everyone else who definitely did NOT read those last two paragraphs because you respect the private bond between amateur bloggers and former Presidents, please ignore President Carter. He's getting up there in age and he's started to think that just about everything is a peace negotiation. But this is an election. Which means it's war, but meaner, uglier and a whole lot more petty. And that's the way it has to be. Because it's the way we've always done things here in the world's first democracy. God Bless America and God Bless Division.

About the Blog: Lessons Learned

By far the most difficult part of this blog was deciding what to write about each day. It was not so much a matter of picking a topic that the audience would find interesting, as the jokes would be the main force in keeping them interested, as it was finding a subject that had potential for comedy while also being relevant or important information. There are a lot of hot-button issues in politics, such as abortion or the death penalty, that when joked about would end up more offensive than funny. That does not mean there is no room to talk about them and there is no way to joke about them, it just means that a writer needs to be very careful when doing so. I tended to avoid these issues, as I did not feel confident in my own ability to navigate between the controversy and the comedy so early in my foray into political satire.

To find topics my first stop was to Taegan Goddard's Political Wire. Mr. Goddard provides a highlight reel from American politics and media. The stories he chooses to cover are the "hot" topics in the mainstream media and within the Washington beltway. After his site, I usually went to the New York Times or the Washington Post's Wonkblog. The stories from the New York Times usually end up being the topics covered cable and network news and Wonkblog's morning "Wonkbook" delves into the bureaucracy to find stories that might be too policy heavy for mass-consumer targeted media.

I look for subjects that scream "make fun of me." Some are absurd and some are just off a little bit. Newt Gingrich was a frequent topic because of the statements he would make to differentiate himself from his rivals in the hunt for the Republican

nomination. Other times a story would be too important or too widely talked about to be ignored. The Paul Ryan budget, the Vice-Presidential speculation and the Supreme Court case on health care reform are all examples of widely talked about stories. Had I not commented on them, the blog would have been irrelevant and I would have been doing my readers a disservice. The last type of post was on subjects that I hold a personal interest in. Because these are based on pet interests, I tried not to write this type of post too often and to relate it back to current events. For instance, the post “The Truth of Independent Voters,” which dealt with voting patterns of so-called independent voters, was based on a blog post I read a few years ago that stuck with me. Even though this subject wasn’t in the news or obviously funny, I made that case that the obsession that political pundits have with independent voters during the campaign season made it significant.

To the extent that I had a writing style, I tried to keep the posts conversational. My estimation was that people would keep reading if they felt comfortable with the words on the page and the flow of the sentences. Since the blog was geared towards people with a casual interest in politics, I assumed that it would be best to avoid stiffness in my writing. The same went for my comedy style. I wanted to avoid the ambiguousness and confusion that article on Stephen Colbert’s comedy style discussed and so for the most part I avoided his brand of deadpan satire.

While I thoroughly enjoyed writing the blog, I was disappointed by the low rates of readership. The first week of posts had about 100 readers each. That number steadily declined to around 40 per day. I would post each article on Twitter and Facebook pages I created for the blog, but each of those only had about 25 followers. To be perfectly

honest, I had more success plugging the blog on my personal Twitter and Facebook pages. Occasionally I would post an article that I was particularly proud of on Reddit.com, a news and entertainment website that allows users can personalize the content they are exposed to. I had some initial success with this, but again with declining results. I understand now why most successful blogs are partnered with traditional media, think tanks or universities. Not only do these established sources provide credibility, they also have resources for marketing their blogs.

Regardless, I have enjoyed writing the blog and I can tell that it has made me a better writer. I have also improved at explaining political issues to others, which is a valuable skill. In addition, I have made some people laugh while I was teaching them something and there is no better feeling than that.

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