

Today's politicians are totally fucked

SOMEWHERE, JUST NOW, A POLITICIAN SAID something stupid. Did you catch it? It could have been a small-town mayor making an off-colour joke. Perhaps it was a Member of Parliament contradicting a statement he or she made just a week ago. Or it could be just another example of an unfortunate verbal misstep by a certain leader of the United States.

Three or four years ago, this wouldn't have been a big deal. A short sound-bite on the news or a write-up buried on the seventh page of a large newspaper might be the worst that came of it. Only a select few unlucky bastards would have found themselves in the middle of a Dukakis-worthy PR fuck-up (he being the only man who could make driving a tank look geeky).

People aren't as forgiving now, however. With the increasing number of political bloggers taking to the keyboard to catalogue every breath of their favourite—or least favourite—figure, public appearances are quickly becoming political minefields. One controversial statement could have internet denizens spraying the spittle of righteous outrage all over their LCDs. George Allen, a US Republican Senator, was one of the casualties of the political blogosphere after referring to an East-Indian supporter of his opponents a "macaca." Bloggers of all stripes descended like buzzards, picking Allen's politically incorrect carcass clean. Their shrill cries eventually attracted the attention of traditional news outlets, and the popular incumbent found himself dropping in the polls and, in the end, on the losing side of a re-election vote.

Even more dangerous to the ambitious baby-kisser is YouTube. Not content simply to read an account of Democratic presidential-hopeful Joe Biden claiming that you can't go into a 7/11 in Delaware without hearing an East-Indian accent? Then watch the video of him actually saying the words. In some cases, subtitles are included for the hearing impaired, and dramatic music is used to really get across that whole "racism is bad" feeling.

While the starkest examples might have to do with blunders below the 49th parallel, Canadian politicians are quickly learning as well that the Internet isn't exactly friendly territory, no matter where you fall on the ideological scale. A quick search of YouTube gives a nice mix of embarrassing gaffes and hypocritical fuck-ups from all the federal party leaders: Stephen Harper's election promise not to change the way income trusts are taxed (which of course he did), right there beside Stéphane Dion scolding the Tories for their use of negative attack ads moments before cracking wise about Harper's weight. As for Jack Layton—well, let's be polite and just say that if the NDP's turnout in the last election was at all comparable to the number of videos cataloguing his no-nos, we'd all be swimming in a sea of ugly neon orange.

Closer to home, University of Alberta politicians have taken to the Internet in the hopes of boosting support among the apathetic student base. Even before nominations have closed for the upcoming Students' Union elections, a number of hopefuls have set up virtual campaign groups with the help of the insipid Facebook—the popular social networking tool that has the insecure social posturing of junior high, all without that bothersome bit about actual human interaction. Nevermind the possible concerns this tactic brings up in regards to restrictions on pre-campaigning: the candidates that have ventured out into this bold new electronic frontier might find themselves faced with one undeniable truth about the Internet. That is, it's filled with dickweeds, in proportions rivalled only by Deke house parties. For everyone lifting you up on the Web, there are three people doing their damndest to tear you down, and given this, our young SU hopefuls might not find their battles online to be worth the cost.

SCOTT LILWALL
Deputy News Editor

Resume not caring

I-Week is over
Back to being closed-minded
Someone pass the Coke

RYAN HEISE
Online Haikuinator

LETTERS

Gateway doles out more libertarian tripe

(Re: "Comment dit-on 'xenophobe?'" 1 February). As soon as I heard of the Hérouxville resolution I knew two things: that the Gateway would write an article condemning it, and that this article would be full of the usual errors and intellectual laziness I have come to associate with the Gateway.

I won't deal with Mr Frehner's insane allegations that the US/George Bush is personally responsible for terrorism around the world. Instead let's focus on Hérouxville. Contrary to what was reported, the Hérouxville resolutions are not aimed exclusively at Muslims. One of the resolutions states that drivers licenses must contain a photo of their holder, a resolution that clearly references the controversy regarding photo-less IDs for Hutterites last year. Second, no resolution bans headscarves, which you would know if you actually read the resolutions. Instead a ban is placed on facial coverings, allowing Muslim women, along with women of many other faiths, to dress modestly, while banning the insane and patriarchal practice of burkas and similar full face/body coverings.

The basic issue at the heart of the Hérouxville resolutions is that somewhere along the line multiculturalism became synonymous with respecting beliefs that directly contradict those on which Canada was founded. The city of Montréal recently released a directive stating that female police officers should call for male backup when dealing with Hasidic males, due to the fact they can't fraternize with women. Do we respect the right of a Hasidic employer to not employ women? If respect their right not to answer police officers if they are female, why would we not respect this right? The honour killing of Farah Khan blatantly disproves the claim of Mr Frehner that no immigrant to Canada could take issue with the standards for treatment of women expressed in the Hérouxville resolutions.

The Hérouxville resolutions are clearly crude and often sensational. But the root issues they address are real. To give communities carte blanche to carry on practices and beliefs that directly contradict the core values of Canada and its Constitution only creates Balkanization, closing communities off from the larger community that they are part of, which in turn increases alienation. The vast majority of Muslims lead peaceful, productive lives in Canada. But accommodating those who refuse to do so is not the way forward. Spouting politically correct BS that dumps the blame directly on our society won't change this.

JEFF GONIS
Software Engineering V

Frehner's Héroux-a-torial misses the mark

Matt Frehner's editorial contains a dazzling mix of internal contradictions and misrepresentations. Start with his comment that the town of Hérouxville is xenophobic and bigoted. In Frehner's opinion, it is wrong for the town to single out practices

CHOOSE YOUR OWN EDITORIAL CARTOON



SUICIDE BOMBER
BRITISH GOVERNMENT
LAZER ROCKET
SOUTH KOREAN COURT

IRAQI CIVILIANS
INFECTED TURKEYS
SCISSORS
CHUNG MONG-KOO

CONAL PIERSE

in Islamic countries—honour killings and public beatings—that could make its way to Canada; it is "preposterous," and therefore bigotry, to suggest that "anyone moving to Canada" would agree with these practices.

This view misrepresents the changing reality in Canada and Western society. Recently, the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal by Abdul Humaid, who murdered his wife by stabbing her 23 times with a steak knife after he suspected she cheated on him. His appeal was based on a defence that he killed in order to preserve "family honour." Thus, the Court should take into account Muslim beliefs and culture as a justification for murdering his unfaithful wife. This example is worthy of Mr Frehner's consideration. People in Canada too can be guilty of importing their vile cultural practices into our culture. It is simple-minded to assume that people who condemn such practices are bigoted, merely because they defend our liberal Western way of life.

Frehner is also internally inconsistent. On one hand he condemns the West for imposing its culture and beliefs on heathens in the past and present (in Iraq). This oppressiveness, he says, fuels terror. Yet, on the other hand, he also insists that the West imposes its values on the Middle East. The [Middle East's] problems can be solved by letting "cultural diversity to play itself out—keeping in mind, of course, certain base human rights." However, human rights are a distinctly Western value. Kind of like one of those "abstract ones" that "Bush & Co" are foisting in Iraq.

Isn't suggesting that [Middle East] countries adopt human rights pretty much the same as what the West did in the past when it imposed its culture on the East? Yes, it is. Apparently, imposing values on

another culture is okay as long as "Bush & Co" or Christianity isn't involved.

JOHANNES CLIMACUS
Law VIII

Well, what would you write on 17 000 posters?

While I can appreciate the idea of this year's election awareness posters ("What would you do with \$1 760 000?"), in practice all the posters accomplished was 1) Campus was sent the message that student fees are just money to burn, and 2) Campus was subject to an SU-financed penis-drawing contest. Apparently the sexually devious eye-catching posters of the past (S&M, vibrators, toys, etc) were deemed too controversial, but there must be a middle ground that does not leave students wondering, yet again, what are they doing with my money? The only problem I had with the vibrator campaign of the past was they were so damn funny we couldn't keep them on the walls!

MICHAEL JANZ
President
Lister Hall Students' Association

Campus anti-tobacco group blown off

I wanted to express my extreme disappointment in the Gateway's seeming lack of interest in a student group event when the paper is supposed to be for the students. Last week was National Non-Smoking Week, and both the Dentistry/Medicine Faculty and the Tobacco-Free Campus Student Action Team promoted it with special events. I contacted the Gateway, both in e-mail form with a press release and

[speaking] with two editors (one on the phone, one in person), with no response whatsoever.

I was told that they were already writing an article on Dentistry's Tobacco Cessation Program (I have yet to find this article), but that they would not be able to run anything regarding a special screening of a Tobacco Industry Conspiracy film or a Campus-Wide Quit and Win Challenge for students looking to quit, with the grand prize being an iPod Nano.

We had Les Hagen, head of Action on Smoking and Health, at the film screening ready to field any questions, and yet no one showed up. I am shocked and dismayed that this extremely important cause (tobacco-reduction and cessation) for students (as 18-24 year olds are over-represented in tobacco statistics) has been given no attention from our University newspaper. It was, however, important that a small note on Kevin Federline and his Superbowl plans were inserted into Tuesday's issue. Call me crazy, but I don't understand how the Gateway deems what is important and what is not.

KIM HARDER
Tobacco-Free Campus Coordinator
Arts IV

Letters to the editor should be dropped off at room 3-04 of the Students' Union Building, or e-mailed to letters@gateway.ualberta.ca.

The Gateway reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity, and to refuse publication of any letter it deems racist, sexist, libellous or otherwise hateful in nature. The Gateway also reserves the right to publish letters online.

Letters to the editor should be no longer than 350 words, and should include the author's name, program, year of study and student ID to be considered for publication.