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Singing the Blues

Republicans lose majority

By Sean Augabright

A blue wave washed over the country on Tuesday, November 7th that swept away many red state Republicans. America woke up Wednesday morning to a Congress of a different color. For the first time since 1994, the Democrats are in control of the House of Representatives and the Senate. There was also a Democratic majority of elected governors, and several gubernatorial positions swung from red to blue in some unexpected places including Arkansas, Colorado, and New York. Massachusetts elected its first African-American governor in history, Deval Patrick.

The Democratic landslide will place Nancy Pelosi (D–California) in the coveted position of Speaker of the House, previously occupied by Dennis Hastert (R–Illinois). Pelosi will become the first female Speaker in history. The president called her early Wednesday morning to offer his congratulations. The phone call was described by Fox News as “cordial” and both reportedly pledged to work together.

The Democrats are calling the sweeping victories a mandate by the people and a referendum for change. Voter discontent translated into Democratic control of Congress and the Senate for the remaining two years of the Bush administration. A Fox News exit poll shows that 62% of the voters considered national issues more important than local. Thirty-seven percent considered the war in Iraq the single most important issue.

The Republicans relied primarily on their staunch conservative base to carry the day and fell short. Liberalism, though, was not the tint of this political blue hue. Ex-quarterback of the Washington Redskins, Heath Shuler (D–North Carolina) won his campaign on evangelical Christian beliefs and a moderate political platform. Baron Hill (D) defeated Indiana Representative Mike Sodrel (R) on his support for traditional marriage. The Democrats that appealed to the moderates and centrists seemed to carry voters on both the left and right.

The winds of change have blown, but what will these winds bring? Pundits predict the first Democratic moves will be to raise the minimum wage, allow tax credits/deductions for college tuition and, maybe, enact some sort of immigration legislation. What about the 400-pound gorilla in the room—Iraq?

Reporting on the new Democratic Congress’ ability to enact positive changes are as varied as those reporting it. A quote about the situation in Iraq from the recently ousted head of the Department of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, can be applied to the future Congress’ perceived mandate: “Reports that say that something hasn’t happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns–the ones we don’t know we don’t know.”

The Democrats are now on the hot seat. The decisions are theirs to make. From this point forward, the accountability that has been clamored for is now theirs.

Smokers and Society

By Peter Lovie II
Staff Writer

National Smoke Out Month is upon us. It is time to discuss smoker’s etiquette.

Smoking is still seen by some as a fashionable thing to do. Cigars or cigarettes after a good meal can be viewed as a means of relaxation and enjoyment. However, as smokers live in a world that increasingly frowns on the habit, it behooves them to follow the rules of etiquette for smoking as a means of being considerate to others.

Smoking should be done at least fifty feet away from non-smokers. Doing so allows for everyone to have their own space. In this spirit, it is especially important for businesses and organizations to have separate designated smoking areas. This is especially true when children are present or when smoking can cause harm to people’s health such as with hospital patients.

Today’s smoker must be especially careful with his or her habit. Be sure to use a fan or some type of filter in multi-family residences such as apartment buildings. There have been cases where smokers have received eviction notices because other residents have been bothered by second hand smoke. Smoking is increasingly a segregated activity.

There is more legislation against smoking now than ever before. An increasing number of states are banning smoking in social centers. These include bars and restaurants as well as public parks and museums. Remaining places that allow smoking are usually heavily restricted.

Smoking is still allowed in some hotels and restaurants where bans have not yet been enforced. However, more and more lawmakers want to crack down on the practice. There will be a new law in Houston next September banning smoking from bars and clubs. The practice of smoking is on its way to being put out for good.

More and more Americans are trying to quit this long standing custom. Ads discouraging the practice are common. Heavy restrictions on advertising smoking related merchandise (such as Joe Camel) are in place to discourage smoking among young people. Smoking is losing the social acceptance it once enjoyed.

For those who continue to smoke there are still ways for them to do so. Showing tolerance is important for all affected by this habit. Learning to compromise is the key to ensuring that all people have the freedom to enjoy the lifestyle they want. Mutual respect is important, although smokers should not resent the efforts of those who wish to show concern for the health of those who smoke.

There are many programs for those who want to stop smoking. Consulting a doctor can be helpful. Changing habits may also help attempts to stop. Try chewing gum or hard candy. Exercise or a new hobby is a good substitute for replacing your habit. Comedian and actor Denis Leary, who made a name for himself with his comedy bits on how he was a rabid smoker who would never quit, finally kicked the habit for his kids thanks to the outlet of video games. Loved ones will encourage you and support is always available.

National Smoke Out Month is a good time to quit. Make a resolution for yourself as well as for family and friends that will add to the well being of all. Ending the smoking habit shows courage and strength and adds to the betterment of society as a whole. Doing this may discourage others from starting and help promote more positive habits.

Be Careful What You Wish For

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Students vs. METRO
An unexpected ride to save U-Pass

By Kristopher Overholt
Staff Writer

Do you ride the bus to school? Do you ride the MetroRail? Then you probably have a Metro UPass, which costs only $22 and gives you unlimited rides on Metro’s local buses, park and ride buses, and the “world-class” MetroRail that runs up to the front door of our university. Of course, Houston is vastly different than other cities in that it has such a widespread layout. Thus, understandably, a very high number of people have cars and use them as a primary means to get to school or work. However, did you know that at UHD every one out of six students has a UPass? And that number is steadily rising each semester. That’s right; over 2,000 students out of 12,000 have a UPass! This is good for many reasons: it is better for air quality, the environment, and it gives passengers the chance to read a book or talk to someone rather than fighting with traffic for an hour. It is also a much more cost-effective solution for transportation than owning a car and paying for fuel, insurance, maintenance, and other fees. These are the very reasons that the number of public transportation riders with a UPass at UHD is increasing.

Now Metro is taking away the UPass. Metro is happy to say that they are withdrawing the UPass from UHD and all other schools city-wide in favor of a simpler system. What’s the problem? The problem is that the process of them “simplifying” the system is going to cost students at least three to nine times more than the UPass does now. What kind of “simplifying” are they doing? First, they are implementing more technology by issuing access card picture IDs that you must pass in front of a card reader in order to pay your fare. Second, they are eliminating the touted “65 ways to pay” by doing away with all discounts. Thirdly, they are removing all lower non rush-hour fares and making you pay the higher price all of the time. Fourth, they are making you manage yet another account as you have to add money to your fare account online, at a Metro RideStore, or at other participating locations. Fifth, they are making you go to Metro to acquire a picture ID pass, which may cost money to replace or acquire in the future. And finally, they are eliminating all period passes and switching over to this new card for everyone. Students will get a 50% discount on fares. Sounds good, until you actually see that this will mean a more than three to nine time increase in price for you to get between school, work, and home everyday.

Why is Metro taking away the UPass? Is it so they can implement a new fare technology? Is it to better serve the students? Is it because they care about their customers? None of these are straight answers to my question. Simply put, is Metro trying to make more money? It seems like Metro is having such a hard time getting new customers that they are now trying to squeeze out as much revenue as possible from the customers that depend on Metro’s services every day. It is terrible to see Metro get all of these students and customers switched over and used to using the bus and MetroRail with the UPass and other methods and then pull the proverbial rug out from under thousands of loyal customers’ feet.

Why can’t Metro keep the UPass structure and just charge a larger, fairer amount? Don’t make students and other bus riders pay three to nine times more than they currently do with money that they don’t have for technology they don’t care about. I challenge you to ask someone without a car – someone who depends on the bus to get to school and work – if they are excited about getting charged three to nine times more just to get to school because of new wireless ID cards to pay bus fare. I would bet that the person does not care the slightest about a flashy new gadget versus more reliable bus schedules. Also, does Metro not know that we are future customers of Metro- and that we might choose to use or not use Metro based on this blatant disregard for its customers? I personally am not too excited to use a transit company that isn’t very caring towards its patrons, especially students who will soon enter the professional workplace.

On Thursday, October 27th, I went to the Metro Board of Directors meeting at the Metro building at 1900 Main Street along with other SGA members and concerned UHD students. I spoke to the board and presented my ideas right up to my allotted three-minute time slot. I even got to say a few extra comments to some of the board members. At the end, I handed over my speech and a petition that amounted up to over 450 signatures from UHD students. My speech was followed by a student from UTMB who also spoke about the UPass issue and presented over 1600 student signatures. I am very glad for the support that we had and that we were able to effectively voice our opinions.

At the meeting, I got to hear one of the Metro board members comment about how we are apparently in some sort of unspoken competition with other cities to become “world-class,” despite the fact that Houstonians are happy with the way things are now, without having a “world-class” rail or a “world-class” central park. I also had the opportunity to hear the Chairman of the Metro Board of Directors, David Wolff, mentioned to us that students will pay for a three-dollar cup of coffee from Starbucks without complaining to them, yet when Metro claims to raise ticket prices by ten cents, we come complaining to them. As you may guess, I don’t think that the students that are opposing this tenfold price increase (certainly not ten cents) are the same ones buying multiple cups of coffee from Starbucks every day, and you could see every student shaking their head in disagreement with this off-color comment.

One week later, on November 2nd, I returned to the Metro building for a special meeting that Metro had called for students to come and express their ideas and comments about the upcoming changes. About 50 students were present and we were able to talk for about 75 minutes one-on-one with none other than the Chairman of the Metro Board or Directors, Mr. David Wolff, the same person who showed his compassion for students by making the off-color Starbucks comment only a week earlier. Just about every feeling and idea was expressed in this time period, and this allowed students to further explain and expand on their issues outside of a three-minute time limit. I am glad that Metro called for this second meeting, as it shows their receptiveness to students and it was something that Metro had never done.

I thanked Metro for hearing us out, even while the other Metro Board members that were present were acting tactless and unprofessional with their body language. Certain board members would grimace or wave their hand with indifference when they thought nobody was looking. I actually left the meeting that day with a dirty feeling. I am sickened by the idea that the majority of board members that are working for a public transit company for a living could have such a seemingly detached sense of reality and openly rude attitude toward their customers. But such is the way of the modern world of big corporations: the absence of community, and a general lack of compassion. So, the UPass is being taken away. Does the fact that Metro is going through the motions bring me down? Not at all. I will continue to publicize our issue and let Metro know that we do not agree with their decisions. Will we have to use the new system? Yes, since Metro is doing away with the magnetic card readers on all buses. So if you plan to ride the bus or MetroRail, you will either pay full-fare in cash or get a Q-Card for transfers and an account balance and get a 50% student “discount” (which amounts to three to nine times more than we currently pay). There is a very small chance that we are going to come to a common solution, possibly a flat-rate, but the solution as Metro sees it now is not going to stand well with over 2,100 students at UHD and thousands of other students and customers across the city.

The UHD SGA was hard at work on this issue and I see our efforts as a great success. While nobody could sway Metro into not using this new system, we did what we could to make sure that Metro heard our voices. And I would say that 75 minutes of students talking to the Chairman of the Board was a success. I wrote the supporting arguments, I spoke at Metro’s Board Meeting, and I followed up to the Metro student meeting. Your SGA members helped promote the idea, helped contact other schools, and performed a multitude of other tasks in a very short period of time. Hundreds of students were passionate about the whole issue; very few students actually contacted the media or went to the Metro Board Meetings, and I am grateful for and thank those students that did show their support. What can you do to voice your opinion or to help? Contact Metro’s offices at 713-739-4000 and tell them what you think. Or contact your local city councilperson and speak to him or her about this issue. As of right now, you will see the new system go into effect in late December.

I will conclude with a tidbit from the Metro website (http://www.ridemetro.org): “Q: How much money does METRO expect to make each year from these changes? […] A: We expect an additional $10 million in revenue in FY07.” Yet more funds for Metro to misappropriate and mismanage. I know that Metro is a business and not a charity, but a minimum three to nine time increase in fare for students is ridiculous. Thanks, Metro, for providing a disincentive to your loyal students and loyal customers.■
University of Houston-Downtown Publications Committee is accepting applications for the Editor in Chief and Business Manager of the Dateline: Downtown for the 2006 Spring Semester.

Qualifications for the Editor and Business Manager:

- Enrolled in UHD at least one semester prior to effective date of appointment
- Junior or Senior classification
- No probation of any kind
- Minimum 2.50 GPA overall required

Direct inquiries to dateline@gator.uhd.edu and Chiaviello@uhd.edu

The Student Publications Committee interviews on a student by student basis. If needed, contact Disability Services in room S409 or call (713) 226-5227
By Monica Maza
Assistant Editor

Metro is discontinuing our UPass and replacing it with the Student Smart Card Program beginning in the spring semester. The new Smart Card will work as a debit-type card that students can add money to via Metro’s website, Metro’s RideStore, and at various retailers that sell Metro passes. With the UHD-ID card, students will have to go to a Metro location in order to obtain one of these cards, because the Smart Card is set to be a photo ID as well. However, the Smart Card will offer us a 50% discount on each trip that we take through Metro. My question is: What is so smart about this “Smart” Card?

First, the fact that the Cashier’s office will not carry these is going to be a big inconvenience to us and I wouldn’t be surprised if this actually deterred some students. Some students are fortunate enough to own cars, but for others, like me, who do not have a car, taking a Metro bus (or the Rail) to and from school is an everyday necessity. I’m already carrying these is going to be a big inconvenience to us and I think they should seriously re-evaluate what they are offering to us students, because so far this “Smart” Card is only offering big inconvenience and an even bigger expense.

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Stoic Rancher seeks LTR
Overseas success hits American heartland

By Sean Augabright
Staff Writer

Lonely, hard-working farmer seeks wife to share bucolic lifestyle on small farm in the heartland.

No, this isn’t a personal ad from Farmersonly.com, an online dating service designed especially for rural people or those seeking the country lifestyle. It’s the plot of the latest reality TV brainchild of Fremantle Media, producers of American Idol and The Price is Right. Fremantle Media describes the show this way:

“A group of single farmers are filmed as they look for love. From a group of potential partners our farmers go on a series of dates and eventually choose two women to spend a week with, living the life of a farmer’s wife. Will they find love with one of them?”

Farmers and ranchers flocked to Lubbock, Texas over the Halloween weekend for the first of four open casting calls nationwide for the new reality TV show. Producers of the show are looking for single men 25-35 years old who live and work on a farm or ranch, preferably someone who has crops and animals. The premise of the show is to make a match between young farmers with no time to date and women who dream of living a traditional, small-town lifestyle.

Local versions of The Farmer Wants A Wife have now successfully aired in 10 territories. The show was the No.1 program in Belgium for the VTM network, in Norway on TV2 and in the Netherlands on Nederland 1.

Other casting calls will be held in Lincoln, Nebraska, Des Moines, Iowa and Springfield, Missouri. Producers are accepting applications from across the country. Casting for the show’s women will begin later.

The show will air next year on one of the major television networks, according to Billy Kemp, the head of casting for Fremantle Media. “It’s format isn’t finalized. It could be one farmer or rancher in each of as many as 13 episodes or it could be a different one each week,” Kemp said. “We don’t expect

Play Video Games on Student Budget

By Wil Chinchilla
Guest Writer

As we move along in our stressful academic careers we all have different types of stress relievers. College students all over the nation (and the world) play video games for many reasons: either to rock out on Guitar Hero, work out with Dance Dance Revolution, or to use an on-the-go portable gaming device to beat a friend at Madden. There is a factor that exploits college gamers and that is money, and lots of it. With cutting-edge, next generation technology coming in full force next month, games and systems’ prices are skyrocketing to ridiculous prices.

Not every person can buy the latest technology, or the newest games. That’s hopefully where I can help. There is free software in addition to the requisite retail hardware around the internet to help download games to the device of your choice. Mainly there is a lot of software for one’s PC, or personal computer, but it also exists for the various gaming consoles.

The hardware ranges from chips needed to be placed inside your entertainment console, to just a simple cartridge or memory card. The software is almost always 100% free, which is the money saver. There are programs on the internet called emulators. Basically, emulators are like the game console on your PC, PDA, or cell phone. All over the web you can find emulators for a lot of older systems such as Nintendo, Super Nintendo, Atari, or Sega, as well as the recent systems such as Xbox 360 or the Nintendo DS.

Now that you have an emulator installed on your PC, you can play games. The games online are called “roms,” and they are essentially the information from the games. Instead of using a cartridge or disc, the rom easily plays on your emulated equipment. The roms are strictly information and the emulators are necessary in order to play games. The hardware mainly comes from Japan and Europe, and it is quite rare to find American hardware. The hardware varies from a simple USB cable or cartridge to a very complicated method that includes tampering with your system (at your own risk). Where you go from here is up to what the gamer is looking for. Since college students are always on the go I have searched online and mainly focused on the handheld items. There are methods in which to get the goods and here are some focused topics that might help.

Nintendo DS

You will have to shell out a lot of cash to get free DS games. The roms are free, but hard to find. The hardware is essential to saving you money because ultimately you will not be spending money on the games. The best hardware out there right now for the DS is the Password 3 Bundle and the M3 Lite. This allows DS to become a multimedia piece of equipment and play roms (called NDS roms) as well as Gameboy Advance roms on the system itself (via a flashcard slot). It ranges from $110- $150 (you should not pay more than that) which is a load of savings when you take into consideration that you normally spend $30-$50 dollars on a DS game. For an example of how the Password 3 works you can check www.youtube.com/ watch?v=AFYW0XJU5eQ.

Playstation Portable

The PSP has by far the easiest method to save money. Not only will you find emulators for past systems, you will find newly released roms online that are free. The PSP connection to your PC is the ticket to saving you money. The information put on your PSP goes to your Memory Stick so the only hardware necessary for the Playstation is an upgrade to at least a 1GB Memory stick (it’s worth it).

PDA

I still use a PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) and have started finding that there are methods in making your PDA a kick-ass piece of technology. The best emulator out there for the PDA is the Phoenix emulator. It lets you play Gameboy games. For the newer PDAs there is a Super Nintendo emulator, but the processor is not at its prime so game play is slow, but still fun.

Mobile Phones

More and more independent developers are making emulators out there. From what I have found there are emulators for any QWERTY phone, or any phone that runs Windows on their phones (those are called smart phones), or any phone that runs Java such as Nextel. There are mainly Gameboy and Gameboy Color roms available. There is also a Nintendo emulator that runs on Java.

With all of this information you should Google, Wikipedia, youtube, and myspace it as much as you can to gather more information. Here are some links to get you started on your money saving entertainment: freeroms.com, coolrom.com, dgemu.com (registration required), and digg.com. Game on!
Think you can read? 
Workshop with the Rock

By Jaime Ramirez 
Guest Writer

The newly named Writing/Reading Center (a.k.a. the WRC or the “Rock”) in UHD’s Academic Support Center will be hosting a reading workshop on Thursday, November 16th at noon in room S1070. Seating will be limited. Feel free to bring your lunch but some snacks will be provided.

Can you read? Obviously, if you picked up this issue of Dateline you probably can. But you should ask yourself one question: How well do I understand what I read? And although the answer to that question is subjective to what is being read, there are techniques to help a reader better comprehend what they are reading. For most of us, reading is something that is second nature. We don’t think about the skill of reading when we’re skimming through an article in a magazine or newspaper, nor do we make a mental reference to our reading ability when we read over a menu at a restaurant. Our ability to read comes to us as easily as ordering our next meal; however, the breadth of our reading skills can always be improved. Reading is, without a doubt, the most fundamental tool in the hierarchy of learning. Without literacy, basic learning would prove to be impossible (and so would ordering from a menu).

Most students here at UHD can probably say that they have been reading for a decade or more, because we usually learn to read in early elementary school. With the extended amount of experience that most of us have with reading, we should be considered experts capable of understanding all written text, but this does not seem to be the case. Many students struggle with reading comprehension. Whether it is basic understanding of passages in a textbook or understanding supplemental reading for classes, reading comprehension can prove to be difficult for the most advanced student. Often, a reader will classify the text as “boring” or an article as “not good” because they simply did not understand the main idea or the author’s purpose. There is also the all-time classic, “I just don’t like to read.” Well, not liking to read is not going to keep someone from having to do it everyday. Reading is an inevitable and essential component for UHD students, at least if they want to graduate.

Tutors in the WRC have experience with students who are struggling with writing their papers because they did not fully understand the assigned reading. Although the student has read the passage, article or book, they are unable to utilize the assigned reading in creating a strong paper. One example of reading being the foundation of the learning hierarchy. Tutors in the WRC are now pulling double duty. They will be helping with the same type of writing material as before plus assisting in tutoring sessions that will aid in reading comprehension. During the reading sessions there will be more of a focus on understanding what is written, rather than simply reading the words. There are tips and techniques that can be learned and utilized to create a better comprehension of the main idea as well as the author’s purpose and perspective. Similar to the goal of the Writing Center, which prides itself on not only improving the paper but improving the writer, the WRC’s goal is to help students build on the reading skills they already have and to help them improve their reading comprehension.

The reading workshop on November 16th at noon in S1070 will introduce some of the reading techniques that the WRC will be implementing in reading sessions. This interactive workshop will provide helpful hints in assisting readers with an excerpt of Steven Johnson’s book Everything Bad is Good for You. This highly debated book is based upon Johnson’s argument that popular culture’s continued complex evolution has made people smarter. It is a very interesting book and will make for an even more interesting reading comprehension workshop.

Students can begin signing up at the front desk of the Academic Support Center N925, beginning November 7th. For more information about the workshop, please contact Jamie Ramirez, the workshop coordinator, at valderj7@gator.uhd.edu or drop by the Writing Center N925.