

TECHNICIAN

RED
WHITE
& BLUE

YOUR VOICE

You cannot vote straight party for every office up for grabs in North Carolina. You must vote separately for the presidential candidates, then make your choice to vote straight party or not. Judicial races are nonpartisan, so you won't see an "R" or a "D" beside the candidates' name. Inform yourself on the judicial candidates so you know where they stand.

President of the United States

Choose the candidate you want to vote for. You have to vote for this office separately.

Straight party or not?

There are three choices for voting straight party:

- 1- Vote a straight party ticket by choosing the line beside the party you wish to vote for.
- 2- Vote on each race separately and leave the straight party voting options blank.
- 3- Vote for one party in the straight party section, but break away from the party on individual races. For example, if you vote for the Jeffersonian Republican party, but wanted to vote Aaron Burr in for Secretary of Duels and Gunslinging, fill the line beside his name in that particular race.

It is recommended that if you do vote straight party, that you vote on each race separately, instead of choosing one party, to make sure you are voting for the candidates you want.

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

All judicial races are non-partisan. That means there is no party affiliation beside each candidate's name. You must vote for the judge's races separately, so now who you are voting for.

TURN THE BALLOT OVER!

The judicial races, soil and water conservation commissioners and the amendments to the state constitution are on the back side of the ballot.

At the polling station

As per election law, no campaigning can take place within 50 feet of a polling site. But that doesn't mean you cannot express yourself. You can wear stickers, T-shirts and buttons proclaiming a particular candidate, but you cannot start talking to your line buddy about a candidate. That could be considered campaigning and could get you in trouble.

At the polling site, you may be asked for identification. Proper forms of ID are student photo ID, driver's license, current utility bill, bank statement or paycheck showing name and address or any government document with your name and address.

Convicted felon? No Problem!

If you are a convicted felon and have paid your debt to society -- this includes jail sentences, fines and probation periods -- you are eligible to vote, provided you registered on time. Those guilty of misdemeanors do not have voting rights taken away.

Provisional ballots

If you are not registered to vote, or if you have moved and not informed the Board of Elections of your new address, you may cast a provisional ballot. Election officials can help you fill out the information you need at the polling site for the provisional ballot. You will receive a personal ID number when you cast your ballot, so you can check the status of your ballot. The downside: you won't know if your ballot was counted until the following Monday. You can check the status of your ballot through your local board of elections or the State Board of Elections at www.sboe.state.nc.us.

Remember: You can only vote once! If you vote absentee, whether at an early voting site or by mail, you cannot vote again on Nov. 2.

NOW GO VOTE!

SOURCE: Technician research, Wake County Board of Elections

the ballot

42

OFFICIAL BALLOT FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION
WAKE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
NOVEMBER 2, 2004

To vote, complete the arrow pointing to your choice, including write-ins, like this **READ ALL OTHER INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY BEFORE VOTING!!!**

PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
 Read instructions posted in voting booth. Absentee voters--read enclosed instruction sheet.

FOR PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
 (You may vote for ONE party)

DEMOCRATIC John F. Kerry
 John Edwards

REPUBLICAN George W. Bush
 Dick Cheney

LIBERTARIAN Michael Badnarik
 Richard Campagna

FOR GOVERNOR
 (You may vote for ONE)

Mike Easley DEM
 Patrick J. Ballantine REP
 Barbara Howe LIB

FOR LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
 (You may vote for ONE)

Beverly Eaves Perdue DEM
 Jim Snyder REP
 Christopher Cole LIB

FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL
 (You may vote for ONE)

Roy Cooper DEM
 Joe Knott REP

FOR AUDITOR
 (You may vote for ONE)

Ralph Campbell DEM
 Leslie Merritt REP

FOR COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE
 (You may vote for ONE)

Britt Cobb DEM
 Steve Troxler REP

FOR COMMISSIONER OF INSURANCE
 (You may vote for ONE)

Jim Long DEM
 C. Robert Brawley REP

FOR COMMISSIONER OF LABOR
 (You may vote for ONE)

Wayne Goodwin DEM
 Cherrie Berry REP

FOR SECRETARY OF STATE
 (You may vote for ONE)

Elaine F. Marshall DEM
 Jay Rao REP

FOR SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
 (You may vote for ONE)

June S. Atkinson DEM
 Bill Fletcher REP

FOR TREASURER
 (You may vote for ONE)

FOR NC HOUSE DISTRICT 38
 (You may vote for ONE)

Deborah K. Ross DEM
 Phil Jeffreys REP

FOR COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 4
 (You may vote for ONE)

Yvonne Brannon DEM
 Kenn Gardner REP
 Susan Hogarth LIB

FOR COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 5
 (You may vote for ONE)

Harold Webb DEM
 Venita Peyton REP
 Bobby Yates Emory LIB

FOR COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 6
 (You may vote for ONE)

Betty Lou Ward DEM
 Chris Malone REP

FOR REGISTER OF DEEDS
 (You may vote for ONE)

Nick Sikorski DEM
 Laura M. Riddick REP

END OF STRAIGHT PARTY TICKET

NON-PARTISAN INSTRUCTIONS:

- To vote for a candidate whose name is printed on the ballot, complete the arrow at the right of the candidate for whom you wish to vote.
- If you tear or deface or wrongly mark this ballot, return it and get another.
- Use only the pen or pencil provided.

FOR ASSOCIATE JUSTICE, SUPREME COURT
 (You may vote for ONE)

Sarah Parker
 John M. Tyson

FOR ASSOCIATE JUSTICE, SUPREME COURT
 (You may vote for ONE)

Ronnie Ansley
 Rachel Lea Hunter
 Howard E. Manning, Jr.
 Betsy McCrodden

PLEASE NOTE:
 THE ABOVE CANDIDATES ARE EXCLUDED FROM THE STRAIGHT PARTY TICKET. THEY MUST BE VOTED UPON SEPARATELY.

STRAIGHT PARTY TICKET
 Read instructions posted in voting booth. Absentee voters--read enclosed instruction sheet.

FOR STRAIGHT PARTY TICKET
 (You may vote for ONE)

DEMOCRATIC DEM
 REPUBLICAN REP
 LIBERTARIAN LIB

FOR UNITED STATES SENATE
 (You may vote for ONE)

Erskine Bowles DEM
 Richard Burr REP
 Tom Bailey LIB

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Red



COVER President George W. Bush and Sen. John Kerry have
 fought a long battle on the campaign trail; now it's up to voters
 to decide who won.

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 Tough fight 4

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© 2004 Technician / NCSU SMA
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 Raleigh NC, 27695
 technicianonline.com/RED

TOUGH FIGHT

BY MATT MIDDLETON

Gov. Mike Easley will spend Tuesday greeting pollsters around Raleigh, then relaxing in the afternoon, writing a speech for a downtown Democratic gathering later that evening.

Republican challenger Patrick Ballantine has different plans.

Ballantine said he will work the polls all day in his hometown of Wilmington – all the way until closing time. Those measures will come on the heels of a weekend RV tour through the eastern part of the state, the culmination of his 100-county tour, during which he has visited every county in the state in an effort to swing voters.

He has to.



GOV. MIKE EASLEY - DEMOCRAT



PATRICK BALLANTINE - REPUBLICAN

The election-night plans for both candidates serve as a microcosm for their campaigning styles in the race for governor: Ballantine: out and about, aggressive; Easley: relaxed, relying on his four-year gubernatorial term as a statement to voters.

The more widely known Easley, running on a platform of a balanced state budget and four years of fighting for education, enjoys a comfortable lead in the latest polls, meaning Ballantine has ample ground to make up before Tuesday. A WRAL-TV poll conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research released late last week showed Easley with a gaping 20-point lead over the former minority leader of the N.C. House. The poll also had Easley leading every region of the state.

No matter, Ballantine says.

"We're hard-charging - hard work pays off," he said.

And the Easley campaign isn't preparing the victory speech or the ticker-tape celebration just yet.

"The only poll that really counts is the one on election night," Easley spokesman Jay Reiff said Tuesday. "We're optimistic given that we've seen the governor's record that he will be re-elected."

CANDIDATES AGREE ON SOME POLICIES

In another life, Easley and Ballantine might have been brothers, separated by 15 years, a few wrinkles and stances on a couple of key issues.

Other than that, these two politicians with roots planted Down East certainly seem to have enough in common.

Ballantine, from New Hanover County, wears his full head of hair parted on the left side of his scalp. Just like Easley, he loves to talk with his hands, an action that helps articulate their views, spoken in mirroring thick country draws with shining blue eyes.

Easley, his silvered hair cleanly cut and styled similar to his opponent, grew up on a farm in Nash County. Both of the biggest wins of their political career came over Charlotte-based Republican Richard Vinroot - Easley in the 2000 Governor election, Ballantine in the 2004 Republican primary run-off, from which Vinroot withdrew.

Further, they both obtained undergraduate degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and started their political careers relatively young.

They agree on issues ranging from establishing toll roads to not granting same-sex partner benefits to not establishing a moratorium on capital punishment to Medicaid reform.

"In North Carolina, you have to agree on a lot of things," NCSU College Democrats President Matt Spence said. "They aren't that far apart of some major issues."

But what will ultimately decide this race is exactly whom the voters believe.

Ballantine alleges that the state continues to lose jobs to other states and has the highest tax rate in the

South. In fact, he said Tuesday that the state lost 5,700 jobs last month, statements the Easley campaign say are false.

"That's just not true," Reiff said. "North Carolina is among leading states in job creation right now. Ballantine's not being straight with the voters here. He likes to cherry-pick statistics."

Ballantine, vowing to stand up for N.C. taxpayers, also likes to paint a picture of Easley as a tax-hiking governor that raided trust funds and local governments.

"We need to lower taxes in North Carolina if we want to create jobs and compete in a global economy," Ballantine said, invoking political ideologies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

The Easley campaign responded by saying the tax hikes were necessary because of the need for a balanced budget, a budget, they say, which was blown up and ignored thanks in part to conservative state senators like Ballantine.

"It's hard to balance a budget when people like Patrick have gone in there and blown a hole in it to the tune of \$2.5 billion," Easley said, adding he inherited the state's worst fiscal crisis since the Great Depression.

Ballantine advertisements attack Easley for raising all sorts of taxes - "even the candy bar tax," Ballantine said in the last debate hosted by WRAL-TV that he would never think about raising taxes.

His plans for higher education include establishing a tuition freeze that would guarantee students the same tuition for four years. He is also opposed to a new higher education bond, saying the state's faculty needs to improve more so than its facilities.

Easley counters by saying he will continue to fight for students.

"Even in tough times, the governor protected education funding in totality when states like Virginia, for example, were cutting higher education," Reiff said. "Our university system needs to be affordable. The increasing jobs of tomorrow demand lifelong education. That's why it's important that this system remains strong."

STUDENT DEM LEADER: TV ADS BOOST EASLEY'S STANDING

Easley started a vigorous television ad campaign to coincide with the Olympics in mid-August after Ballantine emerged from a competitive six-person field in the Republican primary.

Easley, a two-term attorney general before winning the governor's post in 2000, had to spend little to overwhelmingly win his primary.

The advertisements attack Ballantine's views on education and the role he played in ballooning the state budget during his time as senator.

"People say they don't want to hear negative ads, but they work - his ads were very influential," Spence

said, adding that the effective ads are the likely reason Easley maintains such a large perceived lead.

Ballantine said the ads hit hard at his home.

"My little girl has to cover her ears every time his commercials come on because they're so vitriolic and hateful," he said.

Further frustration for Ballantine ensued when the Democratically controlled Board of Elections blocked a negative Easley ad from airing and imposed a large fine to the campaign.

Despite the attack ads and aggressive campaign style, Spence said Ballantine - running on a platform of new leadership and fresh ideas in his first statewide election - still has not produced substantial reasoning for voters to elect him.

"People know more about the governor and respect the tough decisions he's had to make - Ballantine's not offering any real solutions," Spence said.

100-COUNTY TOUR WILL DEFINE TRAILING BALLANTINE

Ballantine said Tuesday he pays little attention to polls, which have him trailing by a hefty margin.

Up by 20 points in the latest poll, is Tuesday night going to be anything to worry about for the incumbent?

"Not at all...it's probably the state's most open-and-shut race," Spence said.

Some NCSU College Republicans, whom Ballantine visited Tuesday night in a Brickyard Bash, dismissed that attitude as nothing more than arrogance.

"Easley people are taking this race for granted," College Republicans President Hal Lusk said. "Do you see Mike Easley anywhere? Patrick Ballantine has been out, Easley has been invisible."

Ballantine boasts he's visited every one of the state's 100 counties, saying Tuesday that it's rare for a politician to do that if their destination isn't a huge fund-raising event.

Lusk added that Ballantine has been to his home region of Yancey County several times this year, which is a rarity, he says, for a politician, most of which would be quick to ask "How much money can I get from there?"

That western region of the state has been a point of disagreement for this race. Easley declined the opportunity to hold a debate in the mountain region of the state, prompting a Ballantine endorsement from the largest mountain-area publication, The Asheville Citizen-Times.

Ballantine, the only one of the three conservative B's - Richard Burr, Ballantine, Bush - trailing by such a large gap, says coming from behind is nothing new to him. He also trailed in the days preceding his victorious Republican primary, which led to this election - one he is quick to underscore the importance of.

"This is the biggest election I've ever been in," Ballantine said.

The more widely known Easley, running on a platform of a balanced state budget and four years of fighting for education, enjoys a comfortable lead in the latest polls, meaning Ballantine has ample ground to make up before Tuesday. A WRAL-TV poll conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research released late last week showed Easley with a gaping 20-point lead over the former minority leader of the N.C. House. The poll also had Easley leading every region of the state.

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RICHARD BURR - REPUBLICAN



ERSKINE BOWLES - DEMOCRAT

CONTENDING FOR EDWARDS' empty seat

The era of strong conservative senators from North Carolina ended when Jesse Helms retired from the U.S. Senate in 2003. Erskine Bowles of Charlotte, fresh from serving as White House chief of staff, decided to make a run for Jesse's seat, but Elizabeth Dole of Salisbury beat him out.

Now Bowles is back again — but this time he faces a long-time serving Republican in Congress: Richard Burr.

BY BEN MCNEELY

These two men, vying for the seat vacated by John Edwards, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, are running very close in the polls heading up to Nov. 2. Throughout the campaign, Bowles has had a comfortable 10-point lead over Burr in the polls, but according to the latest WRAL poll, the two candidates are running neck and neck, with each garnering 45 percent, with 10 percent undecided.

Much like the presidential race, it could go either way for either candidate.

The main issues in this campaign have been health care coverage, medical malpractice reform and national security: three issues that both candidates have plans for.

And both don't want to raise taxes.

Whoever wins the race, the next senator from North Carolina faces major challenges in Washington and at home as well. The recently approved tobacco buyout has shut down many family farms and thousands have been laid off due to textile mills closing down. They will also have to vote on national security issues and the direction this country will take in the war on terror.

These two North Carolinians have a strong history of public service to The Old North State and to the nation. This race will come down to who will be better for North Carolina.

CLEAR AND CONSISTENT

Richard Burr, a native of Winston-salem, grew up the son of a Presbyterian minister. Graduating from Wake Forest University in 1978, Burr worked for Carswell Distributing, working his way up to national sales manager, until he ran for the House of Representatives in 1994, a part of the "Republican Revolution" that brought control of Congress back to the right side of aisle. He is in his fifth term as 5th District representative and has served on the House Select Committee on Intelligence, which he plays up every chance he gets.

"I lived 9/11 up close and personal. I can remember, the next day, as the committee scattered all over Capitol Hill, trying to answer three questions: what happened, who did it and why," Burr said at a College Republican meeting in late August.

"We have only one choice: that's to hunt them down, to prosecute them or to kill them. That is the only choice we have in this country."

Burr supports the war in Iraq and feels that the "job in Iraq is not done."

"It would be irresponsible to pull American troops out until Iraqis are able to provide for their own security," Burr said, in a candidate issue message for WRAL.

Another main girder in Burr's platform is taxes. Burr has voted against tax increases as well as co-sponsored and voted for a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, which failed in the Senate by one vote. He also co-sponsored a bill that would abolish the federal income tax and signed the "Taxpayer Protection Pledge." But as much as he is for cutting taxes, Burr is for military spending and says that the current budget deficit due to increase military and national security spending is justified. He also wants to make tax cuts put forth by President George W. Bush permanent.

On health care, Burr is against creating a universal health care system, saying that "other countries that have universal care have long waiting lines to see a doctor and less access to important surgeries."

Burr believes that the issues surrounding this election "are of the magnitude that if we get it wrong, we have given you [the younger generation] an absolute mess to deal with."

Supporters see Burr as being "clear and consistent" in his message and in his record, while opponents

claim he works for special interests, namely big business and less for the common North Carolinian.

I AM MY OWN MAN

Growing up in Charlotte, Erskine Bowles lost his father and sister to ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. He also has two sons that suffered from juvenile onset diabetes. His personal struggles got him into public service. An investment banker by trade, Bowles' community contribution caught the eye of President Bill Clinton, who appointed him head of the Small Business Administration in 1993. In 1994, he was named deputy chief of staff and oversaw government response to the Oklahoma City Bombings. As Clinton's chief of staff during his second term, Bowles negotiated a balanced budget in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky scandal that consumed the White House, the media and the nation. When he left Washington, he conducted an unsuccessful senatorial campaign, defeated by Elizabeth Dole, in 2002.

Back in the race in 2004, Bowles is an experienced campaigner and has a plan, this time around.

Bowles has laid out a 10-point plan to encourage job growth in North Carolina and has openly supported college students in his campaign.

"I want to make sure that when you get out of here, you have good jobs to go to that use your skills," Bowles said at a rally in Caldwell Lounge in August.

Part of his plan includes offering tax incentives to

SPECIAL INTERESTS & THE CLINTON CONNECTION

Erskine Bowles enjoyed a healthy lead over Richard Burr in the polls, despite Burr's name recognition and long-time service in the House. But the negative ads began running on televisions across the state, each firing salvo after salvo, trashing each other on the issues.

Back in September, Burr began a major political offensive against Bowles, citing that "skin will rip and blood will flow." Burr's campaign ads have featured Bowles standing alongside former President Clinton, with a Chinese flag in the background. Bowles was the key negotiator for Clinton's China Free Trade deal that gave China "most favored" trade status and opened the doors to massive Chinese imports into America. Burr claims this took jobs away from North Carolinians and hurt the state's economy.

But Bowles has answered back with negative ads of his own, calling Burr out on all the special interest money he and his campaign have received over the decade Burr has been in office.

In his ads, Bowles has contended that Burr voted on issues in favor of special interests and industry leaders that have given him money. In one ad, Burr voted against a bill would stop nursing homes from throwing out patients on Medicare and then says that Burr received \$46,000 in donations from nursing homes and \$84,000 from political action committees that represent the hospital and nursing home industry.

Who will decide the victor:
more than likely the eastern counties,
where tobacco farms have been bought out,
where the unemployment rate is highest and
where the economy is precarious.

DOWN TO THE WIRE

Throughout the campaign, Bowles had a 10 point lead over Richard Burr. Now they are tied up, with 45 percent going to each. Both men helped to secure the \$9 billion tobacco buyout, with Bowles fighting for the Senate plan and Burr sitting on the conference committee that hashe out the details between the two plans. The tobacco buyout gave Burr a boost in the polls, and brought to a close his 10-year effort to pass the quota buyout.

Both men have spent equal amounts of money in their campaigns: around \$8 million each.

While Burr has collected money from corporations and political action committees, Bowles has gotten most of his financial support from individual donors.

Both candidates are concerting their final campaigning efforts down east, past Interstate 95, where the potential for a swing vote is the greatest.

What was once a sure thing for Bowles, now has turned into a race too close to call. Most of the Bowles vote will come from the Triangle and from Mecklenburg County, whereas Burr's biggest votes will come from Forsyth County, his home, and from the rural counties.

Who will decide the victor: more than likely the eastern counties, where tobacco farms have been bought out, where the unemployment rate is highest and the economy is precarious.

In any case, the race will be close.

more than a matter of red & blue

BY T.S. AMARASIRIWARDENA

It's a race that practically started the day the final gavel was beat in the halls of the Supreme Court; closing the door to a recount in Florida, all but killing Vice President Al Gore's hope for the presidency. The days, weeks, months and years after that decision were divisive. Republicans pushed their platform hard, saying that President George W. Bush had a mandate via the Electoral College; they pushed it even further when the nation rallied around the President after 9/11. Democrats vowed to take back the office, reminding the nation Gore handily won the popular vote and that the nation is a far cry from the Clinton era.

And the times, they are still a divisive.

George W. Bush vs. John Kerry

Republicans vs. Democrats

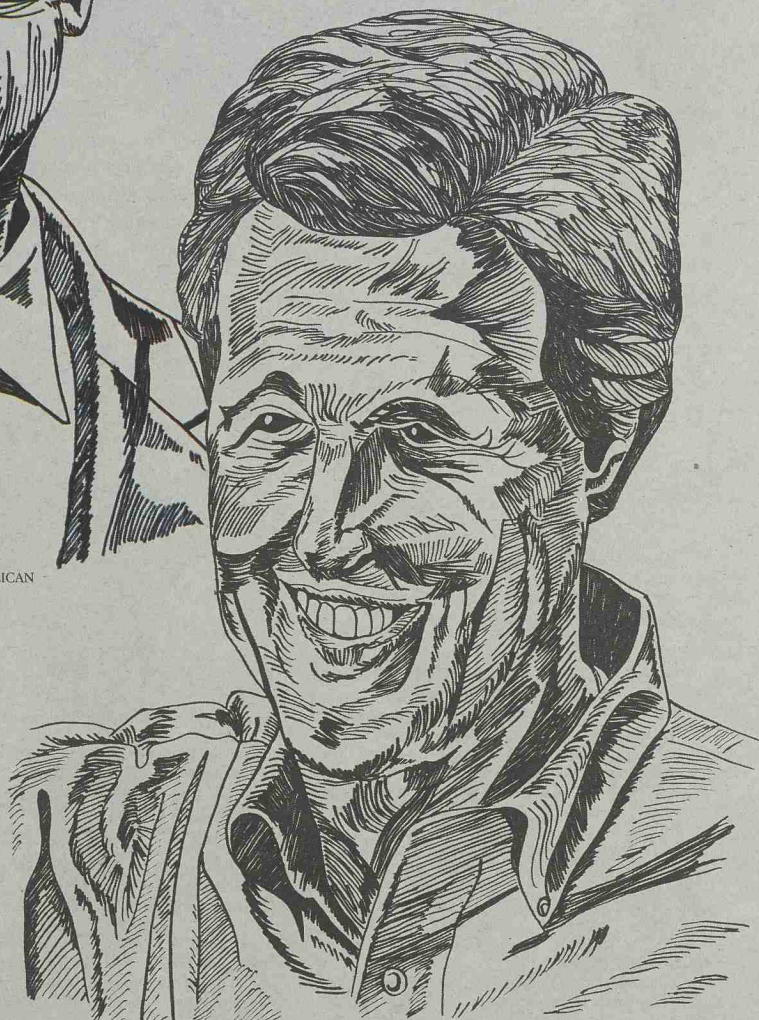
Red states vs. Blue states.

Or so it goes.

And somewhere in between are the voters.



GEORGE W. BUSH - REPUBLICAN



JOHN KERRY - DEMOCRAT

A span of 1461 days exist between Nov. 2, 2000 and Nov. 2, 2004. And sharply dividing that is another day, September 11th.

Before lay a nation with an economy, though trending slightly downward, still showed signs of the booming times of the 90s; the coffers were full, Americans had jobs and they felt safe.

Life was good.

Beyond that day, a different nation lies. The terrorist attacks left the nation's people and its economy shuddering. Americans began to question if they were indeed safe. Corporations faltered over mismanagement. New threats against the nation were outlined, and two wars commenced. Oil prices rocketed.

Life certainly isn't the same.

The two candidates at hand offer wildly different futures, and it will be these claims that voters will be making decisions on.

ABROAD

Bush likes to call himself a "War President," that may be as an apt a description as any. Pushing an agenda surrounded by the notion that to keep America safe it must take an offensive stance abroad and domestically. Bush announced in 2002 an "Axis of Evil" — three nations, outlining Iraq as a key threat.

"The war on terror is really trumping all the other issues," Hal Lusk, president of the College Republicans said. "That is the biggest role of government is to protect us — more so than social programs," the senior in statistics said.

Depending on which side the of the aisle they came from, some say starting the war was necessary, others say the war was preemptive.

Lusk and other Republicans say that taking an offensive stance on terror is the only way to succeed.

He said voters and students he has talked to are fairly split on how the war is being handled. But, "When we went into Iraq, most people approved of it," and "ultimately, most people still think that it was a good thing."

Over the debates and campaign trail, Bush hammered that America was a safer place with him at the helm.

The war in Iraq has not diverted America's position in the war on terror, but strengthened it, Bush has said.

"In Iraq, we saw a threat, and we realized that after 9/11, we must take threats seriously, before they fully materialize. Saddam Hussein now sits in a prison cell. America and the world are safer for it," he said.

With steady regularity, Bush paints Kerry as indecisive and quick to side with the political winds, and that he has stayed resolute as president.

Democrats disagree.

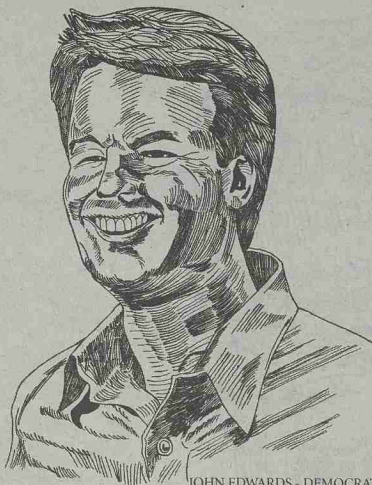
"We're creating terrorists by our actions in Iraq," Matt Spence, president of the College Democrats said. "For every terrorist we kill, five more show up. You win the War on Terror by changing people's hearts and minds by — not the actions we are taking."

Kerry proposes a multi-lateral plan in Iraq that is ready to admit that changes and outside help is needed to stabilize Iraq. "America is safest and strongest when we are leading the world and we are leading strong alliances," he said.

During the debates he called the war in Iraq is a "colossal error," finding fault with Bush's "go-at-it-alone" strategy. Recently, he has taken the offensive over missing weapon stockpiles, saying that the Bush administration poorly planned the takeover of Iraq.

DOMESTIC

As strong as issues regarding national security might be on voters minds, it may be something closer that will make the ultimate decision — their wallets.



JOHN EDWARDS - DEMOCRAT

"Historically their turn out is so piss poor that it doesn't even matter. Interest is higher, so they are more likely to turn out this time. For the first in decades if ever, college students have the opportunity to turn one candidate one way or another." — Michael Cobb



DICK CHENEY - REPUBLICAN

For student voters, readying to enter the work force, this is of particular concern.

"[Student voters] don't want to see the past four years again," Mellisa Price of the College Democrats said. "They have seen a lot of negativity; tuition increases, cuts in financial aid. A lot of students are leaving college and saying, 'Oh my — I'm not going to find a job.'"

This concern, she says, coupled with plans for tuition breaks, universal health care and retaining jobs domestically will translate into votes for the Democrats.

Lusk defers, saying "The extent of the government growing into our lives has increased. The idea of free national health care is coming up again. It sounds incredibly wonderful, but it's not true, we will be paying for it."

Further tax cuts, he says, will spurn the economy. He said he also finds fault with the notion that tax cuts are exclusively for the rich.

"Another word for rich is producers — they will invest," Lusk said.

THE SECOND IN COMMAND

Though during a presidential term, vice presidents often are merely figureheads-in-waiting, on the campaign trail, they are the presidential candidates faithful companion; the attack dog.

Over the past four years, partisan vitriol heightened at the Capitol and candidates. Sen. John Edwards and Vice President Dick Cheney have voiced some of the strongest words for the opposition.

Native son and a 1974 NCSU graduate in textiles, Edwards brought youthful energy to the democratic ticket while countering Kerry's label as "Massachusetts Liberal."

A trial lawyer by trade, his toughest case yet may have been on the campaign trail as he built a case for a Kerry presidency.

At a town-hall style event downtown in September, Edwards was quick to throw barbs. Lambasting the Bush administration, he called "Iraq a mess."

"[The Bush administration] didn't have enough troops to secure the country. They also didn't have a plan to win the peace. They also didn't put the alliances together to make this successful. We need a fresh start," he said at the vice presidential debates.

Cheney, a Washington veteran, portrays Edwards, a one-term senator, as a political newbie that floats with the political winds. Hounding his opponent at the debates, he would recall certain bills and then say "you probably weren't there to vote for that," a knock on Edward's label as "Senator Gone" by The News & Observer.

He also drove after Edward's positions on the campaign trail during the primaries, saying that he changed his position from being for the war in Iraq to against it because of the then surging Howard Dean.

"He can't stand up to Howard Dean," the vice president said, "How can he stand up to al Qaeda?"

Though the Kerry/Edwards ticket by current polls is lagging in North Carolina, Edward's addition to the ticket may be noticeable in other ways.

"If there was an effect — it was probably early on," political science Professor Michael Cobb said. Edwards may have built up interest and excitement in the Democratic party state-wide, he said.

But when it comes to the election day it will be the name on the top of the ticket in voters minds, he said. "Presidential elections are about the presidential candidates, not the VPs — the choice is between Kerry and Bush," he said.

MAKING THAT FINAL CHECK MARK

Every four years, the nation decides — to stay the course, or head in a different direction.

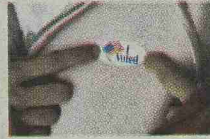
"It's a referendum on the incumbent," Cobb said.

According to Cobb, who studies polling techniques, a number of critical polls that he has looked at point to a Kerry surge, leaving the race a dead heat in battleground states. While it will be up to the parties to bring out their bases, ultimately it will be the independents and undecideds in swing states that will have the biggest say. "Undecideds tend to break for the challenger," Cobb said.

And for college students, they may have a sizable impact on the outcome of the race.

"Historically, their turn out is so piss poor that it doesn't even matter. Interest is higher, so they are more likely to turn out this time. For the first in decades if ever, college students have the opportunity to turn one candidate one way or another," Cobb said.

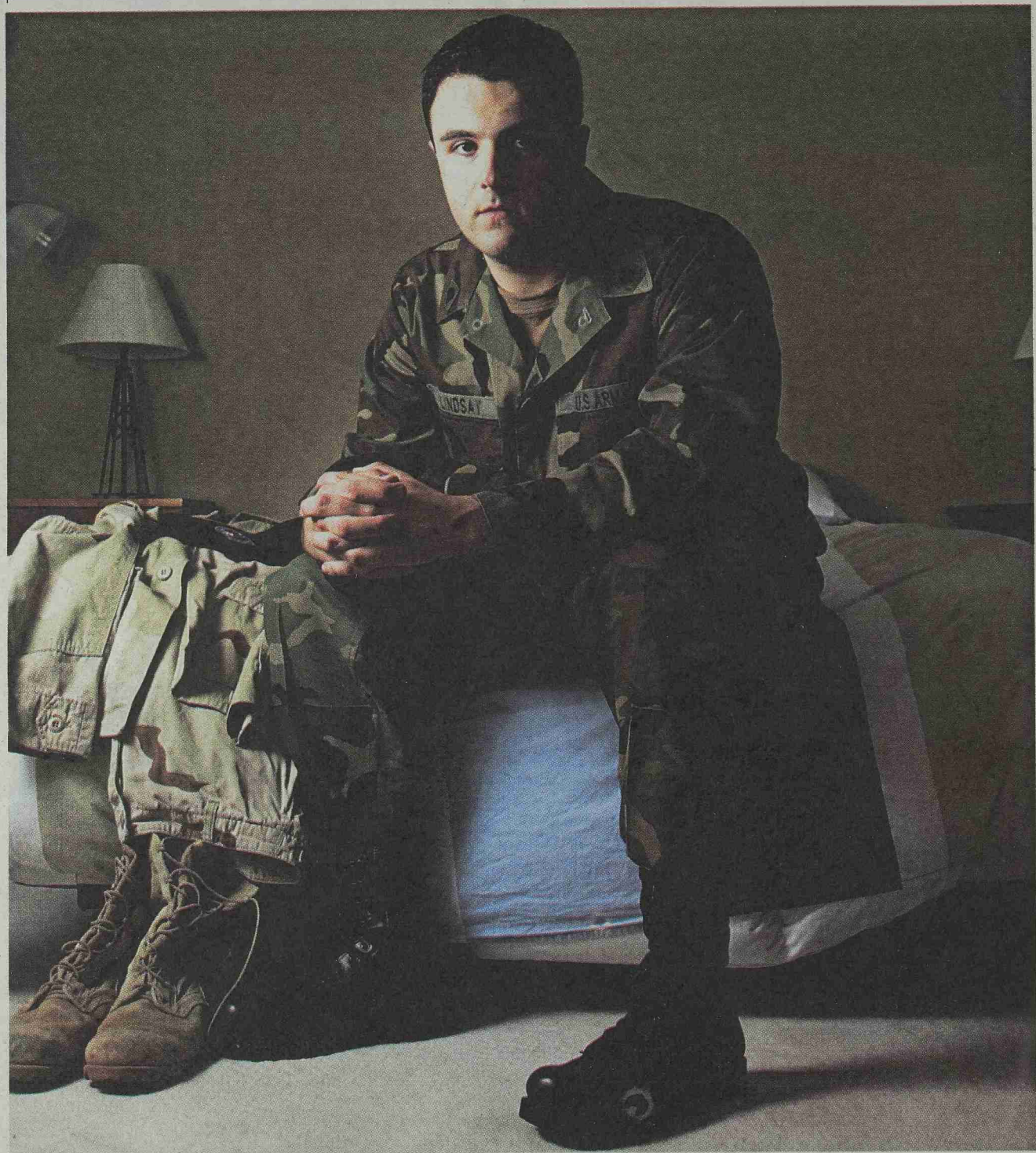
portraits of an electorate



In what is being billed as one of the nation's most divisive elections in its 228-year history, the outcome of the tallied votes will have an impact on a wide range of issues. Which direction will the War on Terror go? Is the Republican party truly one of open doors? How will the tobacco buyout effect North Carolinian farmers? What position has the same-sex marriage debate put gays and lesbians in? And, where is the place for religion in politics?

the issues hit hard, and they hit close to home

PHOTOS BY TIM LYTVINENKO
STORIES BY ERIN WELCH, ASHLEY HINK, BEN McNEELY & T.S. AMARASIRIWARDENA



the soldier

JASON LINDSAY

A hero's goodbye. Local residents crowded the streets with signs, yellow flags and patriotic music as the 846 Transportation Company from Salisbury left for its destiny — deployment.

The second time Jason Lindsay would encounter such a crowd would occur only months later. But this time, instead of band music and waving flags, starving children would surround his vehicle shouting "Food!" and, if they could not speak English, simply rubbing their stomachs.

Jason and other soldiers instinctively ripped open their MREs or, meals ready to eat, throwing food to the desperate children, sacrificing one of their three issued meals a day.

Yet after volunteering his service to the U.S. Army, Jason returned home after Iraq not to be surrounded once again by proud and thankful citizens, but rather to be surrounded by bills and an increasing debt.

Jason, a junior in political science, joined the Army Reserves as a freshman at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with intentions of helping pay for his college education.

Signing before Sept. 11, Jason never anticipated going to war. "Before then it was kind of calm and Reserves hadn't been sent anywhere in 10 years, then being the first Gulf War."

But a phone call in late January of 2003 informed Jason that his unit was on deployment standby. Only a few weeks later, President Bush ordered his unit to active duty.

He then quickly moved all his possessions into storage, had a will drafted and said goodbye to family, friends and a job paying \$35,000 a year, which he worked while attending night classes. On active duty, he now would receive regular military pay in addition to hazardous duty pay and a subsistence allowance for being in Iraq — all of which would total approximately \$22,000 a year.

"It just doesn't make ends meet," Jason said. Describing a friend who almost lost his home while in Iraq because of financial problems, Jason said, "If you volunteer for Army Reserves, you shouldn't be penalized. You shouldn't potentially lose your house because you're doing your country a service."

Jason remained overseas for only five months, being reassigned to rear support duty at Fort Bragg after his mom became terminally ill. Throughout his experiences, Jason's debt began to accumulate and his political views drastically began to shift.

Before the war, Jason claimed to be "more of an independent," but still supported Bush. As his Commander in Chief, President Bush is Jason's ultimate boss, however, now Jason does not sup-



port him outside of that position. Before, Jason felt he needed to support Bush although he didn't agree with all of Bush's policies.

"As a soldier, you understand that decisions are going to be made that you disagree with," he said. "It's just like in a normal job. You have a boss — you can support him, you can do your job, but you don't have to agree with him and you don't have to like him."

When going off to war, Jason said he felt Bush had made the right decisions based on the right information. Yet now, he said "it's proved otherwise." Since his encounters in Iraq, Jason has become more in line with Democratic policies and values, he said.

"Bush has said in the debates, 'We're taking care of our soldiers' — he's not. I've seen too many examples," Jason said.

"If they're going to say they are going to take care of people, then they really need to do that," he said.

Jason's unit alone was sent to Iraq without body armor and in trucks that were "like a civilian vehicle" with no extra protection. Frustrated at the lack of accommodations given to soldiers in his position, Jason said he feels soldiers will reflect his same perspective in the polls.

"He [President Bush] fabricated the case and lied to the American public, and a lot of people in the military didn't like that," Jason said. "He put us on the line for something that wasn't in the best interest of the United States." Going to war for a lie and for personal objectives just wasn't worth it, Jason said.

Prior to Jason's entering the Army, his father was drafted in the Vietnam War. Jason said he still doesn't have "a good taste in his mouth" in regard to U.S. services because of being drafted. Although the draft has not been reinstated, Jason agrees with Kerry that the backdoor draft is fully in effect. "I joined the Reserves to be able to defend America, not to be sent on very dangerous missions and be deployed over and over again," he said.

Reserves are typically meant for short deployments averaging around six months. However, today reservists are being deployed up to two years and are facing multiple deployments, Jason said.

Transferring to N.C. State, Jason decided to major in political science as a result of his experiences in service. "I was so affected by the choices made by people in office that I wanted to major in political science and to work to get the right people in office."

Anticipating Election Day, Jason said he hopes for a change in office.

"For me, it's a big year," Jason said. "Kerry/Edwards can definitely put the country on the right track."

BY ERIN WELCH

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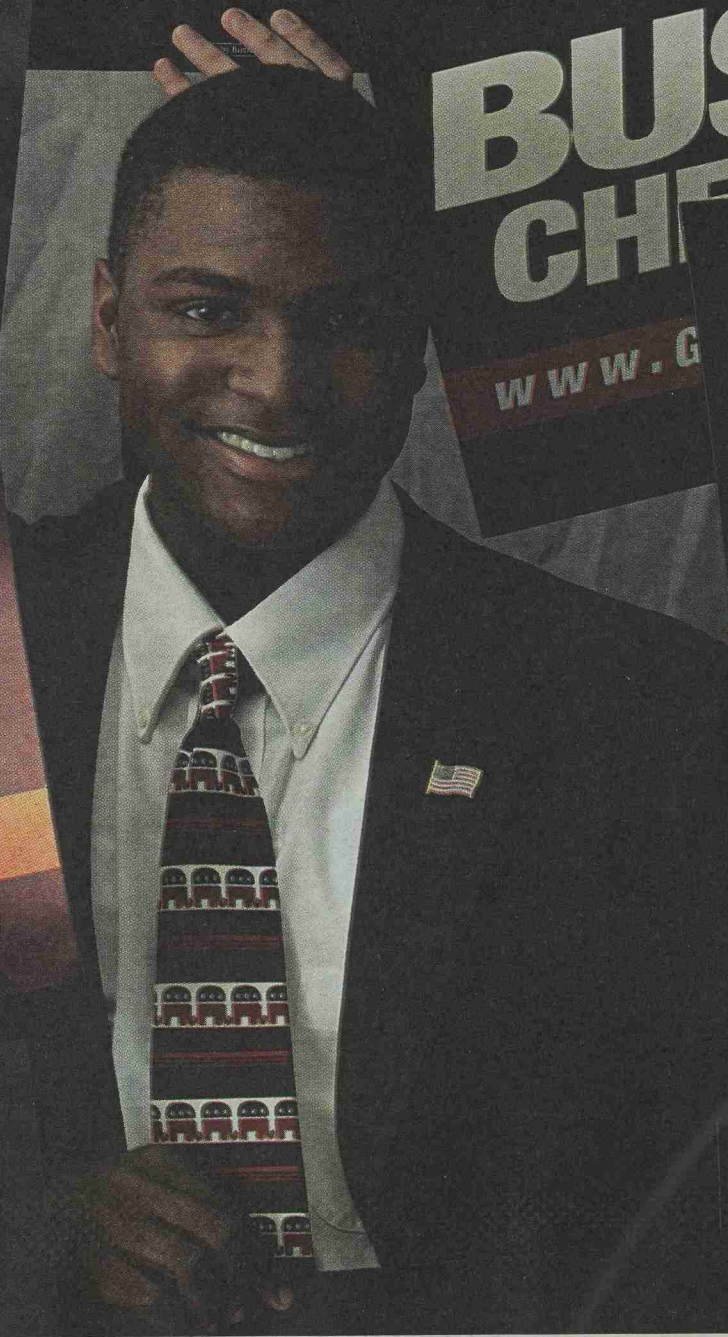
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the black conservative

DREXEL HEARD

Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Clarence Thomas, J.C. Watts, Alan Keyes. All these political leaders are black. They are also conservative.

By conventional political wisdom, they are oddities, considering the majority of African-Americans historically vote Democrat.

"In 2004, that is just untrue," said Drexel Heard, II, a freshman in political science.

Drexel, a Republican, said he is disappointed with that stereotype.

"There are other black Republicans on campus. And I am not the first one, either," Drexel said.

An intern at GOP headquarters on Hillsborough Street, Drexel has been campaigning for Republican candidates around the state, including President Bush. At a recent rally featuring former Sen. Jesse Helms, a local television reporter interviewed Drexel about how Helms' endorsement of senatorial candidate Richard Burr would affect the student vote.

"It would have an impact on what we think about the leadership coming out of North Carolina," Drexel said.

Drexel, the son of a Marine lieutenant colonel, says the military had nothing to do with his conservative beliefs.

"I know many officers who are Republican and I know many who are Democrat," Drexel said, adding that because he has lived in six different states, plus Japan, he has been able to talk with many different people with differing views.

During the 2000 presidential election, the only candidate Drexel knew about was former Vice President Al Gore.

"I had no idea about [then] Gov. Bush. Later on, I got to see what both sides stood for," Drexel said. "I formulated my opinion in the end and most of those opinions fell under the conservative tree." He describes his view as being middle-right, but that he tries to be as open-minded and progressive as possible. When people question his values and views, he explains himself to them.

"I hope they can say 'I understand.' I hope they can walk away with an understanding of where I'm coming from," Drexel said.

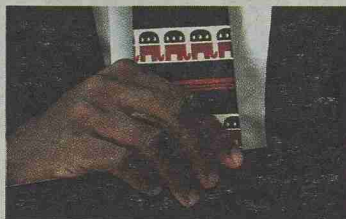
No one has ever questioned his views as a black Republican to his face, but he suspects people talk about it. But if someone did question him, he would explain his position.

"If people have a problem with it...and don't feel my answer's what they wanted to hear, then say what you say. I'll try not to take offense," Drexel said.

"I say, 'sorry, this is what I believe in and I'm not going to change my opinions to appease people.'"

Drexel agreed with the Supreme Court decision on affirmative action last year, which made racial quotas at universities illegal.

"As an African-American, I think affirmative action is a de-



grading system," Drexel said. "It says to a student, 'we'll take you, you're not quite good enough, but we'll take you anyway to feel like we have accomplished racial diversity.'" There are no quotas at NCSU, Drexel said, so every black student that is here deserves to be here.

"The reason they are here is because they are smart and were active and engaged in

high school, not because of affirmative action."

While he disagrees with affirmative action, he said he does believe equal access to education for disadvantaged student of all races.

"More often than most, people expect affirmative action just to be for African-Americans, when in theory, it's a policy that can be designed to aid those who may not have the resources that many other citizens have," Drexel said.

Drexel believes that the war in Iraq was justified and says the United Nations wouldn't enforce their own policies, so President Bush did.

"You can talk all you want, but if you are not going to follow your own policies, then someone has to act. If it takes the U.S. going in there, then that is what it's going to be," Drexel said.

He says that, then modifies his statement with his belief that Bush took a too-quick turn to Saddam Hussein from Osama bin Laden, and should have focused on both at the same time.

On domestic issues, Drexel said he believes in cutting taxes across the board is the only fair way to do it. He also believes that budget deficits can be good for government.

"The president spent a lot on the war and runs a deficit. But he has to protect the country, and, in the end, that is more important than a balanced budget," Drexel said.

An issue that he is a bit more moderate on is universal health care. Drexel said he supports it, but has questions about how to get it, how to pay for it and which countries will support us.

On his desk in his dorm room, Drexel has a license plate that reads, "Hon. Drexel D. Heard, II."

A friend had made for him, but it fits Drexel's plan for his life, to go to law school, become a U.S. senator, and possibly have is shot at the White House.

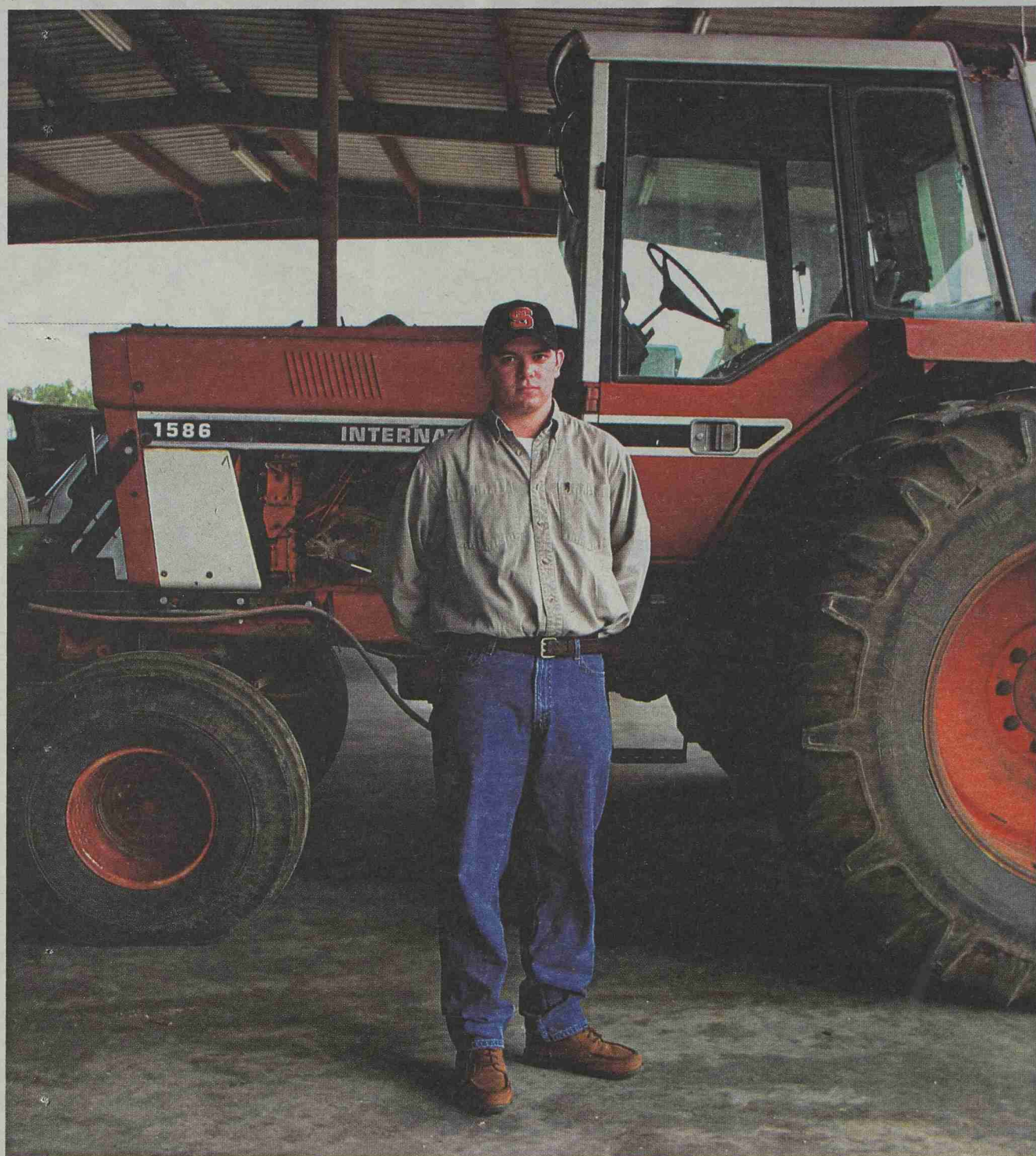
Despite being a Republican, he likes John Edwards, saying that he wasn't an ambulance chaser, as Edwards' opponents claim.

"People came to him with problems, not the other way around. He was an outstanding lawyer," Drexel said.

Even though he respects Edwards, Drexel said he probably would remain a Republican well into his adult life.

"If there is something 'major' comes up that I disagree with the party over, I'll consider leaving. But I don't foresee that happening," Drexel said.

BY BEN MCNEELY



the tobacco farmer

BRANDON BATTEN

Out where the soil becomes the sandy mix of the coastal plain. Out where they call it 'Down East.'

Out there, it's tobacco country.

Money may not grow on trees, but the broad green leaves were certainly the next best thing. Long the mainstay of North Carolina's economy, tobacco practically built the state. With the fortunes of the tobacco companies, so went the state.

But now, tobacco companies are going elsewhere.

With an onslaught of imported tobacco sold at cut-throat prices, tobacco companies are increasingly buying not from North Carolinians, but from farmers abroad, leaving the state's primary crop reeling.

For Brandon Batten, a freshman planning to get a masters in bio-engineering, his family and tobacco farmers across the state are at a crossroads. Looming over their heads, farmers will soon decide if they will take the money from the tobacco buyout and quit, or continue growing the crop in a tenuous future.

"We've definitely got a decision to make," Brandon said on his family farm.

And its not going to be a simple decision to make.

Their small farm in Johnston county, 45-minutes south-east of Raleigh, is not just a minor investment. The Battens have a stake in some 300 acres, hundreds of thousands of dollars, countless hours and something more important to them: a way of life. Three generations have tilled those soils — for Brandon, his father Doug and his grandfather Charlie, spanning nearly 70 years, this is no simple matter. The Battens and farmers across the nation's largest tobacco-producing state stand to take the largest chunk, \$3.8 billion, of a \$10.1 billion bailout of the tobacco quota buyout spread over 10 years.

Part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policy, tobacco quotas artificially propped up prices for the crop; keeping supply low via managing the amount farmers could grow. Some called it agrarian-socialism, but the effects of the quotas can't be denied. Top-quality tobacco brings profits, multiple that of soybeans, over a similar acreage, another crop the Battens grow.

Is the crop the most lucrative farmers can grow in North Carolina? "Legally, yes sir," Brandon said. "It's by far the most profitable, we just don't have the means to compete with the bread basket."

But facing increasing competition from tobacco produced abroad, local farmers have seen their quotas wither away. This year's tobacco allotment allowed the Battens to grow the crop in 39 of 100 acres that their equipment could handle. Running at a severely reduced rate, the family doesn't like to think that they are producing at a reduced capacity. "I like to think we're running at



100 percent efficiency, just with less crop," Brandon said.

Dressed in snug jeans, a comfortable plaid flannel shirt and N.C. State cap, Brandon repeatedly took an optimistic position about the future of tobacco farming, but his father, Doug, was a bit more cautious. Standing alongside his son in an expansive shed containing a small fortune

in farm equipment, the elder Batten said that while quotas give back a good return on tobacco grown, it also has essentially kept one hand tied behind his back.

"We as farmers have no control over the quota cuts," Doug Batten said.

That all changed earlier that day.

"The President signed the bill at lunch time," Brandon said. On Oct. 22, after working its way through the House and Senate, attached to a \$136 billion corporate tax bill, the tobacco quota buyout after years of discussion finally became a reality.

Paying \$7 per quota, the buyout will lift the planting restrictions but will also pull the safety net from farmers. Though farmers will be free to grow as much tobacco as they wish, prices will be dictated by market forces and are likely to go down.

"It'll be similar to, say, chickens — if you can find a buyer, you can sell it," Brandon said.

The Battens will take a wait-and-see attitude toward their future. "How much [tobacco companies] are willing to pay will help us make our decision whether or not this is justifiable for us to continue growing," Doug Batten said.

With the sweet smelling tobacco waiving in the air, held in one of the 10 nearby trailer-sized silos, part of large investment the Battens have made, quitting seems like an unlikely option.

All of this, though, could not have happened outside of an election year. Gunning for the Senate, candidates Richard Burr and Erskine Bowles have played heavy rolls in the bill's passage.

With three major seats on the ballot this year, Brandon, less than two weeks before the election, has yet to make a decision regarding for whom he will vote.

"We've never been really political — you don't see a lot of signs in our yard," he says. An undecided 18-year-old and first-time voter, he is a prime target by all campaigns.

"As far as what candidates I like, I can't say either way. I don't know who I will be voting for, but I will be taking advantage of my privilege," Brandon said.

And that vote could be the largest input he has on the future of the tobacco industry and his way of life.

"I hope that I still have a future in tobacco farming," he said. "Right now I don't know. That's what I've grown up doing, that's what I enjoy doing."

BY T.S. AMARASIRIWARDENA



the queer

ELENA EVERETT

They didn't ask for all this attention.

But now they've certainly got it.

And for Elena Everett, a senior in political science, now is as good a time as any for issues regarding same-sex marriages and gay and lesbian's places in society to arrive at the national dinner table.

"Because these issues have come out, it's allowed *us* to come out and talk about these issues," she said.

As late as last year, issues circling gays and lesbians were barely in the political periphery. But that quickly changed. Starting with Massachusetts' Supreme Judicial Court ruling that baring gay marriage strayed from the state's constitution making it the first state to allow same-sex marriages, coupled with San Francisco's Valentine weekend spree of same-sex marriages ordered by its mayor, the debate over gay rights quickly swung into the national spotlight.

By Feb. 24, President Bush stepped in, saying that "activist courts [have] left the people with one recourse. If we are to prevent the meaning of marriage from being changed forever, our nation must enact a constitutional amendment to protect marriage in America."

"The Republicans have put these issues on the public agenda," she said. "It's a very decisive issue to energize their Christian-right base."

With enthusiasm bigger than her five-foot frame and a catchily smile, it's hard to think that she has anything but a happy-go-lucky life.

But these issues hit close to home, and hard.

A self-described queer, Elena says she dates both men, and women. "I like people," she says. For her, it's an individual's personality that she finds immediately attractive.

Coming from a conservative Floridian town where life was based around church, being queer is a sore spot with her parents.

"They were confronted with it for the first time when I would begin bringing my gay friends home," Elena said.

Pausing for a while, her energy seems to drain and she picks up a different thread.

"These issues are very important to me; I've already lost two people close to me," Elena said.

She begins talking about her cousin, a close friend of hers.



From a conservative family, he had no one but her to turn to. "He had to come out to me," she said. "He lost a lot — he was just trying to continue on with his life."

But things just grew unbearable for him. Earlier this year he took his own life.

"His family wanted to pretend that it was a disease," Elena explained. Close members of the family to this day do not believe he

was gay." It's unfortunate that we live in a society where you can't discuss something as fundamental as who you are and who you share your relationships with."

Having lost two already, she fears she'll lose more friends to the pressures of being gay in a straight society. "Statistically, I do feel like it's going to happen again," she said.

And it could hit others too. "On campus, it is enough of an issue that they have a counselor who specifically deals with these issues," she said.

America has a culture that marginalizes gays and lesbians and the election year drive for a constitutional amendment doesn't help, she says while calling such legislation bordering on fascism. "The definition of fascism is to apply one set of rules on one group and another set of rules on another group -- the amendment does just that."

"Equal marriage rights is not something that radical," she said.

"Divorce rates are not going to go up," Elena says while rolling her eyes questioning one of the main arguments against same-sex marriage.

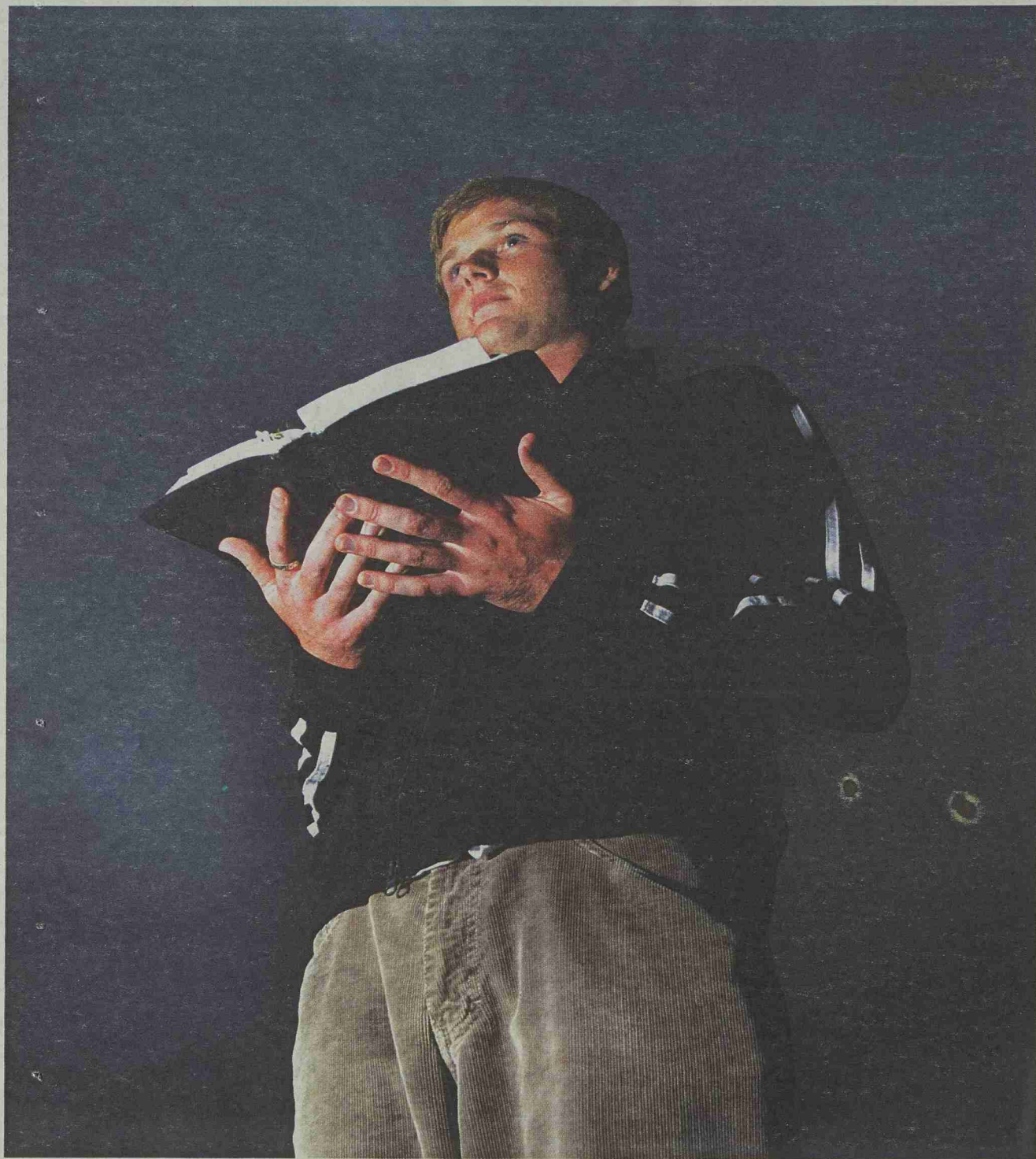
While Bush's position on the matter is quite clear, Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry's views haven't been well defined, she said.

"[Kerry is] against the amendment — that's good. But he hasn't said anything with any clarity," Elena said.

Though Kerry hales from Massachusetts, the only state with legalized same-sex marriages, she was quick to dismiss the notion that Kerry was merely trying to distance himself from the "liberal from Massachusetts" label. "I don't think it's really high on his agenda. The Democratic party as a whole hasn't shown much leadership on this issue," she said.

But gay issues should transcend party lines, Elena said, explaining that there is a sizable contingent of gays in the community. "A lot of moderate Republicans have been purged over this issue," she said. "A constitutional amendment goes against state rights."

BY T.S. AMARASIRIWARDENA



the religious

MICAH SULLIVAN

Colorful campaign signs reading now-familiar names have decorated Raleigh's sidewalks for months, letting no onlooker forget the approaching election date and the candidates at stake.

Instead of imitating the group of candidate signs across the street, the lone sign in the manicured lawn of Edenton Street Methodist Church simply posed the question: How would Jesus Vote?

This might just be the most decisive question of this election.

Accused of staying home from the polls in elections past, on Nov. 2, conservative Christians are planning to change their reputation of voter apathy – and quite possibly, the outcome of the presidential election.

Micah Sullivan, a senior in business management, said there's a "big push to get Christians out to vote on election day. Our turnout has been low in the past."

No one, however, needs to push Micah.

The soft-spoken Goldsboro native and Park Scholar grew up in a devout Christian family. Attending weekly non-denominational services and involved in Campus Crusade for Christ, Micah remains a devoted Christian. His faith is embedded in his everyday life and affects the decisions he makes, including the one he'll make on Election Day.

A Republican and Bush supporter, Micah is part of a growing voter constituency that once remained quiet on the political front, but is becoming more vocal about "issues of faith" facing the current administration and popularized by the media.

President Bush has never hidden his Christian faith and how it plays into his policy decisions. While receiving criticism for putting religious values into legislation, Christians like Micah applaud the president's stance on a multitude of policies.

"Abortion and same-sex marriage are the two issues Christians are most concerned about," Micah said.

President Bush, who successfully signed into law a ban on partial-birth abortions, as Micah says, "believes in the sanctity of life."

"Life starts at conception. Abortion is killing an innocent, unborn child and no exceptions should be made for it to happen," Micah said.

While he and many other Christians adhere to this belief, Micah acknowledges that President Bush, although pro-life, has made no attempts to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and further limit or even prohibit abortions.

For Micah though, enacting legislation isn't the issue.

"I know he [Bush] has little ability to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.



But, I know that's where stands he on the issue, and it is in line with what I believe," he said.

While abortion has remained an issue of debate since its legalization in 1973, same-sex marriage has been a fresh topic in the past four years, especially since Bush proposed a constitutional amendment that would keep marriage between only a man and woman. The attempt was unsuccessful,

leaving the decision up to individual states. Yet Micah supports Bush's national agenda.

"Marriage and family are the foundations of our society," Micah notes.

"It [marriage] effects how children are raised – for it to remain healthy, it should be reserved for a man and a woman. If same-sex marriage laws are left up to the states, only problems and confusion will result; it's an issue that needs to be decided as a nation."

Abortion and same-sex marriage might be the most publicized issues of faith, but other pieces of legislation also engage Micah's support too. Bush's faith-based initiatives calls for taxpayers dollars to be allotted to religious organizations that provide humanitarian and community service. While some accuse such a plan of crossing the line between church and state, Micah claims that the initiatives "are appropriate."

"If the government uses these programs, it would be a great way to reach out. Most religious groups give services in places that are needed, but aren't funded a lot."

While Micah's faith plays an important factor in his political affiliation, he claims to be a "knowledgeable voter" that finds political issues outside of faith just as important. Unlike some conservatives that believe Christian values to adhere strictly to the Republican party, he recognizes that Christians can legitimately affiliate themselves with Democrats.

"People might be pro-life amongst other things, but the sides that Democratic Party take on other issues are simply more important to them. It's a matter of personal priority, and I don't see anything wrong with that," Micah said.

What is a problem for Micah, however, is lack of voter knowledge. "There are definitely Christians that will vote simply on issues of faith and nothing else. If that's the most important issue to them, then there's no problem with that."

"But when Christians and non-Christians alike simply aren't knowledgeable about all the issues and base their votes simply on one thing, that's a problem. I think that's sad and hope that changes."

BY ASHLEY HINK

The automatic factor

TIM COFFIELD

They say it's been proven. That your deepest political convictions are produced early in life. Which offended me, at first.

My dad's a Bush guy. I tried to fight it.

So I told myself I was liberal, that I opposed wealth, death, the meat industry, the radio, big computer companies with excellent products and low prices and civilian ownership of assault rifles.

I even attempted to read a copy of *The Independent* without my stomach clenching up. Just to prove the theory wrong.

But like my mom told me years ago – after I quit JV football because it hurt and bought those sweet purple roller blades with the matching pads – in the end you'll never be what you're not.

So as the election draws near, I've decided to embrace my childhood, discover what I really believe. I'll let that guide my vote.

You should too.

Most of my happiest early memories involve my dad, myself, a picturesque pinkdusk autumnal setting and my dad's silver handgun.

We'd sit in this old wooden swing in the backyard, soaking up the melancholic splendor of turning leaves. And he'd show me how to spin his weapon, by the trigger, around my index finger, just like on television.

It was a .357 Magnum, heavy – weighed about as much as our corpulent housecat, Richard Petty – so the spinning challenged my frail 7-year-old fingers. I often dropped it in my lap, or on my foot. Sometimes I'd lose control, and the gun would sail. Sometimes it knocked my glasses off. Popped my nose on more than one occasion. More than once, it hit dad in the temple.

Being pistol-whipped without warning by their child would likely frustrate many a parent. But not my dad. He'd calmly set his boilermaker down on the grass, and tilt that cigarette out the corner off his mouth so I wouldn't get burned again. And he'd lean in and

patiently go over something new, like how to attach the silencer and aim at enemies.

So there I'd sit, and I'd look for enemies in the backyard. Sometimes

I'd pretend the prissy Funderburk children playing in their stupid sandbox next door were enemies.

And dad would scoop

his drink back up and teach his son the fundamentals of gunmanship.

I learned so much about being an American on those cool October evenings!

Like how, 200 years ago, this group of men and God realized that all citizens have the right to stockpile powerful artillery. Such as handguns, automatic rifles with bayonets, and large-capacity ammunition feeding devices that you can wrap around your shirtless torso like Carl Weathers in *Predator*.

It was the second amendment. The second most precious human entitlement. More precious even than the right to not be tortured by the government.

Because if we aren't armed, the government and our other enemies will eventually torture us. They'll dress in black and sneak into our homes at night and remove our eyeballs with spoons and then probably wonk us with large hammers and/or play multiple Nickleback songs through their bullhorns.

But we have the power – the right – to prevent that. By keeping our weapons loaded and near, such as under our pillows or in our bookbags. Ready for action. In case we encounter an enemy to shoot. Like at a football game, for instance.

Because, as Chuck Norris has repeatedly proven, a brave man with a big gun is just better for everybody.

Gun safety is important. Dad nearly always used the safety switch. He'd put his boilermaker down and show me how. It's really very easy. You just toggle it back and forth off-on-off-on-off, like that.

Of course, it's not truly safe to just own a handgun. For instance, in the event you are being descended upon by droves of enemies, it's best to have something that can spray many bullets rapidly over a large area. And when you run out of ammo, it's good to have a bayonet to slash and prod your way to freedom.

These are our rights as Americans from God.

And so I, like my dad, firmly know that every American should possess a variety of handguns and assault rifles. And that I should own twice as many of them, just in case.

Like many Americans, I'll allow one issue to determine my vote. It's that important to me. Besides, it's much easier. For instance, consider:

1. In September, Bush allowed Bill Clinton's old Semi-Automatic Assault Rifle Ban to expire. Now, for the first time in 10 years, you can exercise your God-given constitutional right to purchase Berettas and AR-15 assault rifles with flash suppressors and bayonets.

2. Kerry has voted nine times to ban semi-automatic weapons. He verbally opposes detachable magazines, silencing devices and bayonets in homes. What's more, he recently had himself photographed goose hunting in a sad attempt to win back some of the NRA crowd he'd alienated.

This is all the information I need. Because, like dad proved before the messy accident, a heavily armed man is a free man.

Because guns don't kill people. People kill people, with guns.

And if they're smart, with silencers.

In the words of Dre, As long as he's gotta Berretta, Tim's down for whatevah. Contact him at tlcoffie@ncsu.edu





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PRESIDENTIAL ISSUES

TAXES

Bush: Make middle-class tax cuts permanent, supports semi-privitizing Social Security funds into stocks, allocate federal funds to help states with their budget crises

Kerry: Opposes upper-class tax cuts, opposes privatization of Social Security, increase the child tax credit, cut tax loopholes for corporations and reduce government spending

HEALTH CARE

Bush: Supports reducing drug costs for poor patients, wants to add a Medicare drug benefit and favors a current health care system over a universal health care system, place limits on suits against HMOs

Kerry: close loopholes and do away with incentives for drug companies to keep drug costs down, focus on elderly and veteran benefits, government-funded health care through repealing tax cuts and controlled spending

FOREIGN POLICY

Bush: opposed United Nations involvement in the Iraqi war, now wants it, supports pre-emption policy, supports \$1 billion for reconstruction of Afghanistan, supported Middle East "Road Map" peace plan

Kerry: Initially supported war, now opposes it, says Bush made a mistake, get a coalition of nations to help rebuild Iraq, wants consensus of nations before deciding on waging war, opposes pre-emptive strikes

GAY RIGHTS

Bush: supports same-sex constitutional ban, opposes gay adoption, supports "don't ask, don't tell" military policy

Kerry: against gay marriage, but supports civil unions and other rights and benefits for gay couples, supports adoption rights for gay couples, supports open service for military personnel

ENVIRONMENT

Bush: supports drilling in ANWR for oil, supports funding for research into hydrogen-powered fuel cells, wants market-based standards on air-quality

Kerry: opposes oil drilling in the Arctic, supports development of other energy resources to reduce dependency on foreign oil, promote clean fuel sources, offer incentives for reduction on fossil fuels

GOVERNOR ISSUES

EDUCATION

Ballantine: Wants to implement new plan for college students that will freeze tuition costs for the four years they are in school. "It would be like a contract," Ballantine says, adding that it will also encourage students to graduate in four years.

Easley: Says he will continue to fight for college students in wake of rising tuition costs - "I was there for them for them with the bond referendum, I was there for them with tuition, and I'll remain with them." Easley said in the first of two debates between the two, "If Patrick Ballantine is a champion of education, then Saddam Hussein is a champion of civil rights." Ballantine people demanded an apology; none was granted.

N.C. LOTTERY

Ballantine: Firmly against the lottery, says the concept is "bad fiscal policy."

Easley: Strongly for a state lottery. Easley claims N.C. loses \$300 million to neighboring states with lotteries. Wants the lottery to fund education policy such as reducing class size and school construction. Says he will push for General Assembly approval if re-elected.

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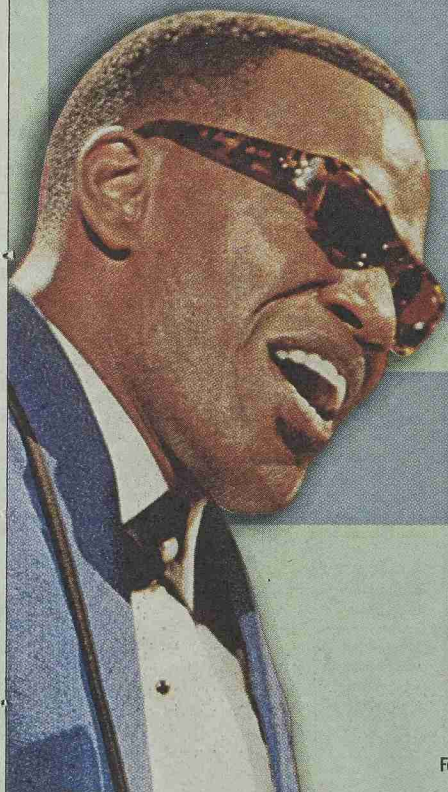
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