

## Political candidates must show citizenship



Connor Stangler

Something incredibly heroic (incompetent) happened this past week. It's these kinds of stories — stories of courage (incompetence), honor (incompetence), boldness (incompetence) and intrepid defiance (stupidity) — that really lend credence to the legitimacy (complete and utter incompetence) of local American politics.

Kirkville City Clerk Vickie Brumbaugh recently disqualified candidates David Mountain and Kevin Alm from the 2010 City Council election for not paying their 2009 taxes in total, according to an article in the Jan. 28 issue of

the Index. When I first heard about this story, my cynicism got the best of me. I was convinced that nothing other than the purest and most refined form of brainlessness was the culprit. But as I reflected, I considered the possibility that maybe something else was behind this. I wanted to believe my country and its public officials adhered to a higher standard of principles and that America demanded a more advanced type of citizenship. Therefore, I looked past what easily could be interpreted as capital ineptitude and searched for some ulterior values.

Perhaps Mountain and Alm courageously invoked the gutsy theory of one of the greatest American philosophers: Henry David Thoreau. What I mistook for incompetence was really an act of civil disobedience. Mountain and Alm, in a classic act of protest, nobly declined to give money to a government that would use the revenue for something unjust. In the words of Thoreau, "I think

that we should be men first and subjects afterward." In the words of Alm, "I'm just like everybody else, being underpaid and trying to catch up with a lot of bills. It should be none of the city's business. It shouldn't matter who you are or what you are."

Maybe they aren't modern-day Thoreaus, but there could be some heroism behind this yet.

Perhaps Mountain and Alm are emulating the politicians of old. They are hearkening back to a time when it didn't "matter who you are or what you are." Those were the days: when you could duel and kill someone, and nobody would think twice when your name came up on the ballot. David Mountain is the Andrew Jackson of Kirkville. Yes, that's it!

But will the people really celebrate his name? Is David Mountain one of us, the commoners? Surprisingly, tax abstinence doesn't have quite the effect on a politician's image as do tales of rugged individuality.

Not as surprisingly, after much optimism, I have concluded that no higher principle could ever explain the rationale behind their actions.

Mountain did not pay his taxes because, according to him, the candidacy statement he signed that is supposed to be a written testament to his legitimacy as a candidate and citizen was too confusing. He also said he didn't pay his December taxes because he was financially unable. In these cruel economic times, I understand that it might be difficult to muster enough money for taxes, but until a citizen has his finances in order, according to law, he should not be able to preside over a town attempting to do the same thing.

Kevin Alm meant for his "who you are or what you are" excuse to be an appeal to age-old democratic values. He instead ended up sounding like a proponent for zero accountability for government officials. If you are going to represent an entire community

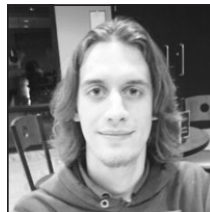
and express the people's grievances, hopes and ideas, then you should be an outstanding citizen. It certainly does matter who you are or what you do. If you were a scofflaw outside City Hall, what's stopping you from being one inside?

As students of a university, we are not removed from the community surrounding us. How we help and how we react will influence events for decades after we are gone. Vickie Brumbaugh and the rest of the city government did an excellent job in calling out Mountain and Alm. Those in power in Kirkville care for the well-being of this community and all who are a part of it. Even as temporary inhabitants, students have the right and the responsibility to be the whistle-blower. Government, no matter how provincial, is about accountability.

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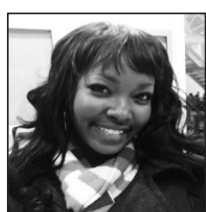
### AROUND THE QUAD

#### Why will you watch the Super Bowl?



"I probably won't watch."

Aric Pearson  
freshman



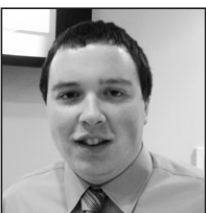
"I want to see Reggie Bush."

Jasmine Spruill  
sophomore



"The Budweiser commercials."

Kati Sherman  
sophomore



"The commercials."

Kyle McComas  
sophomore

## Relief support should be studied



Tyler Retherford

Of all the stories I've heard and read regarding the recent disaster in Haiti, one in particular stood out as unusual. Science Insider, an online publication by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, published a short article two weeks ago about several scientists arguing in favor of semi-random food drops of individual rations and four-ounce water packs by plane rather than the current method of delivering food by truck, which is causing rioting. Merits of the plan aside, I was struck by how unusual an article this was. Indeed, I couldn't think of a single other news story I'd seen or heard that addressed the question of how humanitarian aid is delivered. The way we as a society discuss disasters and our responses to them suddenly seems horrifically inadequate.

When terrible events occur, it seems like the average response is to send money and to pray for the victims (or some sentimental equivalent). Prayer is, while a nice sentiment, frankly entirely unhelpful. No amount of prayer is going to help people facing a situation like the earthquake in Haiti or the refugees dealing with the harsh conditions of Darfur. Money is more helpful because most aid, be it medicine, food or reconstruction, is very costly. However, people usually speak of disaster relief donations as "giving to Haiti" or "donating to the disaster relief effort," which oversimplifies the matter. Disasters aren't some charity drive where once you reach your donation goal everything is better, and we move on. We should keep in mind that we're donating to organizations, not the problem itself.

It's important to make sure that any sort of relief effort in the wake of a disaster is not only well-meaning but also is helpful and effective. Donations, after all, are only

as helpful as what they are being spent on. With some organizations, like Doctors Without Borders, the object of the donations are very apparent and, in that particular case, immediately beneficial. With some, however, the aid organization is so big that most people have no idea what they're actually doing on the ground. The American Red Cross, for example, is one of the most well respected emergency response organizations, but I don't think I've ever heard anyone discuss if the way they go about delivering help is the best way to do so.

That's not to say we shouldn't be supporting any organization that doesn't actively publicize how efficient the work they're doing is. It's better to do something that could be better than to do nothing at all. I simply mean we should be working to better the way we help.

It shouldn't be these aid organizations that have to do the work of figuring out what the best system of aid is. They have enough work to do simply trying to address the problems with the current approach.

However, I think a scientific approach to analyzing the way governments and emergency response organizations go about assisting people and the effects of their efforts should be a central part of the way we as a society look at disaster situations. Ideally, every disaster should teach us something useful to make responding to the next one easier and more effective.

The way people mentally deal with loss and disaster is something deeply personal and something religion and compassion are the best tools to help with. Material loss and physical suffering, however, are best handled with a clear scientific approach. Throwing money at a problem might make us feel better about ourselves and provide some degree of assistance to those suffering, but if we really want to do the best we can to make the world a better place then we should be studying our efforts in an attempt to constantly refine them and respond in the best possible way.

*Tyler Retherford is a junior anthropology major from Springfield, Mo.*

## Celebrities give up privacy for fame



Brenna McDermott

In June 2007, former Sen. John Edwards won the "Father of the Year" award from the Father's Day/Mother's Day Council. In his acceptance speech he said, "It is true, your children learn not only from what you say, but from what you do. Whenever they do anything that you're proud of in your life, you'll be able to look back on the things that you taught them both through your words and through your deeds."

Unfortunately, it seems Edwards' children have learned to be unfaithful spouses and liars. Perhaps they should look to Edwards' wife Elizabeth to learn how to act instead.

In a world where members of the paparazzi skulk around celebrity homes, where reporting isn't reserved simply for journalists but made easy for citizens with updates in technology like cameras and voice recorders on phones, it's safe to say secrets no longer stay secrets for very long.

When living in the public eye like Edwards, it's hard to believe

celebrities and politicians think they can get away with sex scandals, gratuitous drug use and shoplifting. If the Tiger Woods scandal has taught us anything, it's that nothing can stay hidden forever. Woods had affairs with so many women — I guess he never thought any of them would exploit his fame to make headlines.

Living in the public eye means you've made a choice to let viewers, constituents or simply nosy people into your life. This means, unfortunately, sometimes millions of people will get a whiff of your dirty laundry. Why do public figures think they can get away with embezzlement, fraud and the like? It's a big trade-off for celebrities and politicians. They relinquish their privacy to become a beloved individual or an important figure in history.

When the entire world is watching, can we really expect those in the spotlight to think they won't get caught? And because of the sacrifice of privacy for the greater good or a spot in the limelight, I have no pity for celebrities who make bad choices about how to live their lives. We all have flaws, but when you sell your soul to America for 15 minutes of fame, you're expected to act in a manner that is acceptable to the American people. There isn't any room for mistakes.

As individuals we can learn

something from the trials and tribulations of the rich and the famous. Like Edwards said, our words and deeds have to match up. Those who enjoy more privacy than Britney Spears should be careful about their conduct. Whether it's a controversial Tweet or an inappropriate comment at work, behavior should resemble our expectations of others. When we persecute those who relinquish their private lives, are we following the same code of ethics we hold them to? We should be. Even though celebrities get out of cars without underwear on or drive drunk and spend one night in jail, we, as viewers of their antics repeatedly reinforce the idea that sex tapes don't corrupt — they make heiresses celebrities. That even among drug scandals, movies sell. That if politicians have sex with a hooker or embezzle money, they can still appear on "The Apprentice."

The Hollywood and Washington elite should realize that their actions won't go unnoticed. But we as viewers need to recognize those actions for what they are, not something entertaining, but something dangerous and possibly damaging to our country.

*Brenna McDermott is a junior communication major from St. Louis, Mo.*

## Supreme Court decision protects free speech



Jessica Catron

"That's not true." Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito supposedly muttered these words during President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address last week. The purpose of the Supreme Court is to be unbiased, non-partisan interpreters of the Constitution. They make decisions based on Constitutionality alone. However, their decisions are usually final, and become law.

I encourage everyone to look at the opinion of the Court and also think about the position Obama put the Justices in during his speech. The Court looked to the Constitution and took its advice in allowing free speech to U.S. citizens. If the Presi-

dent took issue with this, pointing to the justices' decision at a time when they were supposed to appear non-partisan was just plain wrong.

What's even more unfair is that the President's (and many others') opinion of the decision is all wrong. Arguments in Citizens United v. the Federal Election Commission began a little more than a year ago. The case looked at whether a corporate organization's movie bashing Hillary Clinton was electioneering because it was available on DIRECTV's Dish on Demand service during part of the 90 days leading up to the primaries. Essentially, if no one had ordered and watched this film, there would have been no breach of the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Act as penned by Senators Russell Feingold, D-Wis., and John McCain, R-Ariz.

However, people did watch it, and in addition to being an attack on personal entertainment choice, it called into question the legality of modern technology in campaigns. Because the BCFA was written in the mid-'90s, before the advent of pay-per-view, Tweets, Facebook

updates and other mass public communications, this Court case would have challenged the legality of using these platforms in the political sphere. If the Justices hadn't voted the way they did, it could be deemed electioneering if you were to make your Facebook status about a certain candidate during the time period leading up to elections. This is because the BCRA actually doesn't define a political message in any terms, and makes no allotments for TiVo or the Internet. In addition, as Joan Biskupic argued in a September piece in USA Today, the legislation is simply "too broad for modern society." Biskupic also compares the interpretation of not changing the legislation to Nazi-esque book burning, only it would fall on your TiVo and Facebook friends.

These confinements are continued in statements made by the attorney for McCain and Feingold during the litigation, when he begins to discuss possible limitations on the Internet and social media that could be added. Lawmakers cannot seek to limit and restrict what people choose to watch

on television and when they can watch it. Nor can they attempt to stop them from voicing their opinions in virtual public forums.

There are possibly some corporate consequences that come from allowing companies and private institutions to donate to campaigns in an unlimited amount. However, these repercussions are a "what-if" at best. This Court decision addresses the right of a corporation to express free speech and their opinions. This is about the First Amendment. If this case had not been decided the way it was, it would not only have forced these companies to continue funneling money to Political Action Committees behind closed doors, but it also could have also given the legislation free reign to dismantle candidate pages on Facebook, TiVod programming containing election commercials or Tweets from organizations endorsing candidates.

Although Barack Obama might think this allowance of free speech is allowing a free reign on corporations to "buy candidates," I think that, if anything, this will help consum-

ers make better choices because they will have public knowledge of companies' political views. This decision also will allow a review and the ability to modernize campaign finance laws and limits so the opened media questions will no longer be necessary. Companies donating to campaigns is not the worst threat facing Americans today. As a matter of fact, it might help to expedite the legislative process.

This decision allows the legislature to update its policies so we may Tweet and update freely. I for one love having politicians as my friends on Facebook and following issues I care about on Twitter, and I do not want to see it done away with because of an occurrence that might take place. There simply is no way to protect corporate, personal or open media's rights to free speech without tearing this legislation apart and starting anew.

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