



the ct

News

Pass, amend or kill:
university tracks
legislation · 4

Sports

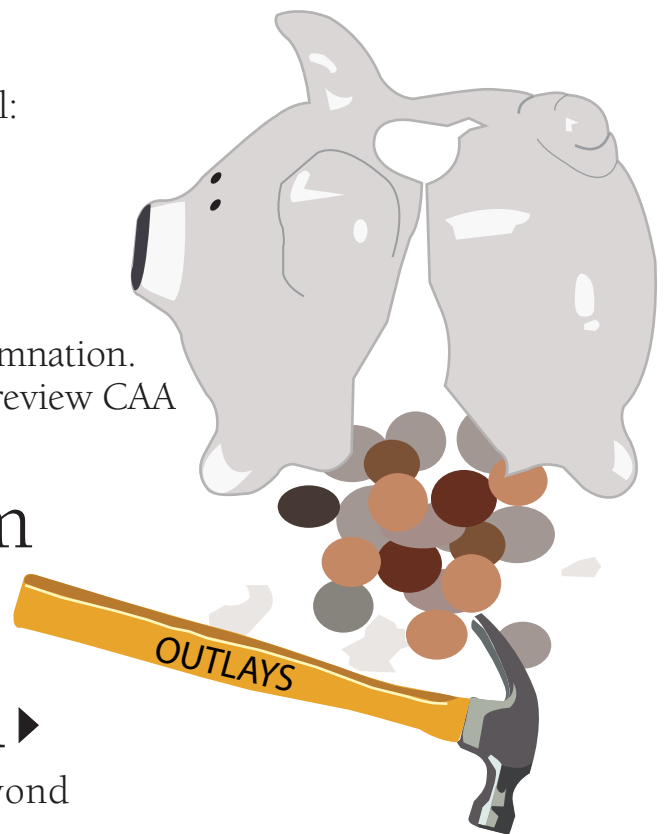
The CT and vcuramnation.
com team up to preview CAA
tournament · 6

Spectrum

Firehouse play,
crumbles · 10

Opinion ▶

Is the budget beyond
balancing? · 18



The **independent** student press of Virginia Commonwealth University

commonwealthtimes.org



**Students
rally against
controversial
church protest** —page 3

free



briefs

Local and VCU

Democrats attack Cuccinelli on climate change

Seventeen General Assembly members, all Democrats, held a news conference Tuesday in the Capitol to ask Cuccinelli, a Republican, to withdraw the challenges he made against a federal decision on global warming.

"I urge the attorney general to reconsider launching this crusade against established science," said state Sen. Ralph S. Northam, D-Norfolk.

Cuccinelli filed two legal actions last month seeking to block a federal move toward regulating gases linked to global warming.

The attorney general has no plans to withdraw the challenges, Cuccinelli spokesman Brian J. Gottstein said.

Cuccinelli believes "global warming is not settled science" and says possible EPA regulations to address warming would cost businesses and individuals far more than the expense of the challenges, Gottstein said.

Brief by the Richmond Times-Dispatch

House panel advances virtual schools bill

A measure backed by Gov. Bob McDonnell that would create a framework for approving companies that offer virtual school programming to the state's public school students made it out of the House Education Committee Wednesday morning.

The bill passed 14-2 despite concerns by some lawmakers on the panel about the socialization of students who learn at home via the Internet, rather than in a school setting with a diverse group of students.

It would be up to a school district to contract with a company that provides a full-time online curriculum. Students who live in a school district that does not offer the online courses could pay tuition to a school district that does.

Brief by the Richmond Times-Dispatch

Chesterfield police searching for man who crashed, leaving 2-year-old behind

Police are searching for a Chesterfield County man who they said abandoned his 2-year-old boy after he crashed his car Wednesday morning while fleeing officers.

Lynn Dexter Bailey Jr., 25, of the 3100 block of Fielding Road, is wanted on felony child neglect charges among other offenses.

According to police, officers responded to the 3000 block of Bluffside Drive about 6:30 a.m. to investigate a report of a suspicious vehicle. When officers approached, the driver sped off and crashed into a nearby ditch. Bailey and an unidentified woman ran from the vehicle, leaving the toddler behind, police said.

The toddler, who was not injured, was placed into the custody of Child Protective Services.

Anyone with information about Bailey's whereabouts can call Chesterfield police at 748-1251 or Crime Solvers at 748-0660.

Brief by the Richmond Times-Dispatch

National and International

Brazil rebuffs Clinton over new Iran penalties

Brazil rebuffed a U.S. appeal for new sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, vowing during a visit from U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton not to "bow down" to gathering international pressure.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva pre-empted Clinton even before she could make the case for new United Nations Security Council penalties. Silva is an outspoken opponent of sanctions, and his country currently sits on the Security Council, which will be asked to approve its toughest-ever penalties on Iran later this year.

Clinton told a news conference she respects Brazil's position but thinks if there is any possibility of negotiating with Iran, it would happen only after a new round of sanctions.

Iran has accelerated its disputed nuclear program in the face of previous U.N. penalties, but the United States and other supporters say a renewed demonstration of world resolve could finally push Iran to the bargaining table.

Brief by The Associated Press

Chile military delivers aid, but 1st helps its own

Four days after a deadly earthquake, Chile's military finally rolled out a massive humanitarian aid effort Wednesday that promised to improve an image long associated with dictatorship-era repression.

The dump trucks that soldiers spent all night helping fill with bags of food made their first deliveries in a neighborhood of military families who already had enough to eat.

After days of looting, rifle-toting troops occupied nearly every block of hard-hit Concepcion on Wednesday, enforcing a curfew that expired at noon with checkpoints throughout the city. With the streets more secure, they focused on aid.

Soldiers had worked overnight stuffing basics including flour, canned beans, cooking oil and tea into hundreds of plastic bags that volunteers loaded into dump trucks. Municipal workers then distributed the bags to survivors, many of whom had gone without fresh food or drinking water since Saturday's quake.

Brief by The Associated Press

Turkey seeks to avert genocide vote in US Congress

Turkey's foreign minister said Wednesday he hopes the Obama administration will try to prevent a U.S. congressional panel from recognizing the World War I-era killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks as genocide.

Ahmet Davutoglu told Turkish reporters during a visit to Egypt that he expects "the U.S. administration to give the necessary message" to the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, according to the state-run Anatolia news agency.

"If it passes, then the Obama administration should try to prevent it from being voted by Congress," Anatolia quoted Davutoglu as saying.

The House committee is set to consider the issue Thursday. A "yes" vote would allow the resolution to be considered by the full House. Historians estimate up to 1.5 million Armenians were victims of genocide by Ottoman Turks. Turkey denies that.

Brief by The Associated Press

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ROBERTO CURTIS, Executive Editor
editor@commonwealthtimes.com,
828-6516

CATHERINE MACDONALD,
Managing Editor
managing@commonwealthtimes.com,
828-6516

ERICATERRINI, News Editor
news@commonwealthtimes.com

TAYLOR HOWSMON, Sports Editor
ADAM STERN, Assistant Sports Editor,
sports@commonwealthtimes.com

ERIKA WILKINS,
Spectrum Editor
RAINBOW BRACEY, Assistant
Spectrum Editor
spectrum@commonwealthtimes.com

ERIC HILL, Opinion Editor
opinion@commonwealthtimes.com

JAKE CUNNINGHAM, Photography Editor
photo@commonwealthtimes.com

CAROLINE EVERTZ, Production Manager
graphics@commonwealthtimes.com,

FRANCES CORREA, Multimedia Editor
multimediaeditor@commonwealthtimes.com

MELISSA TABLANTE
& PATRICE DALESANDRO,
Production Assistants
production@commonwealthtimes.com

GREG WEATHERFORD,
Student Media Director
gowweatherfor@vcu.edu, 827-1975

LAUREN GEERDES, Business Manager
827-1642

PATRICIA RODRIGUEZ, Accounts
Manager
ctaccounts@gmail.com, 828-2544

CHRISTINA DICK,
Director of Advertising Sales
ctadvertising@gmail.com, 828-5019

JACOB MCFADDEN, Advertising
Representative,
ctadvertising@gmail.com, 828-6629

RACHEL DORRIS, Associate
Advertising Representative,
ctadvertising@gmail.com, 827-4562

MATT SCHMIDT, Creative
Design Specialist,
ctadvertising@gmail.com, 828-6629

JOHN MCWHORTER, Junior Creative
Design Specialist,
ctadvertising@gmail.com, 828-6629

BILL LEMMOND, Circulation Director

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817 W. Broad St., P.O. Box 842010
Richmond, VA 23284-2010

Thursday, March 4, 2010

news

Kyle Laferriere photos

Student-organized anti-hate rally draws crowd of 350

“ It was a beautiful showing of really incredible, diverse people coming together with messages of love in our campus community. ”

CATHERINE MACDONALD
Managing Editor

A student-organized anti-hate rally held Tuesday at the University Student Commons Plaza drew a crowd of about 350 in the name of diversity and to take a stand against discrimination and hate.

Students from Jewish Greek letter organizations Alpha Epsilon Pi and Alpha Epsilon Phi and VCU Hillel were joined by representatives from the Richmond Organization for Sexual Minority Youth, the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, Virginia State University and local spiritual leaders such as Rev. Jean Pupke, who spoke at the event.

Tim Reed, the director of student commons activities, said Jon Bridge, the president of AEPi, Melanie Phillips, a representative from AEPi, and Sarah Sonies, the president of VCU Hillel, came to him last week to organize a counter rally after they learned mem-

Thursday, March 4, 2010



‘Thank God for dead soldiers.’
A woman holds a sign during a Westboro Baptist Church protest.

bers from an anti-gay church would be protesting in several locations around the city on Tuesday.

Members from the Westboro Baptist Church, located in Topeka, Kan., protested outside of the Virginia Holocaust Museum, the Weinstein Jewish Community Center and Hermitage High School Tuesday. Other counter protests were held at those locations.

Liz Canfield, a women’s studies department instructor, attended the rally and said she heard about it from Facebook and her students.

“A while back, it came to my attention that WBC would be hitting the road again, and might stop by Richmond, and almost immediately, folks started to organize counter-protests and rallies,” Canfield stated in an e-mail.

Canfield said she was touched by remarks made by Renee Hill, a professor at Virginia State University’s Institute for the Study of Race Relations who spoke at the rally. Hill’s speech

emphasized the need to stop the spread of hatred throughout the world—even the hatred counter demonstrators might have toward Westboro Baptist Church leader Fred Phelps.

“Whatever your religious beliefs, I like the idea that everyone, even Fred Phelps, is loved and chosen,” Hill said. “You are in charge. You can choose to let someone make you hate them or you can recognize that they are loved and chosen.”

KB Levin, the Hillel of Richmond director, worked with the students to organize the rally.

“It was a beautiful showing of really incredible, diverse people coming together with messages of love in our campus community,” Levin said. “I thought the students did an incredible job and showed such maturity on their part in the way they were able to get the crowd out there, and every one of their speeches was just great.”



‘Love is our resistance.’
Maria Robins holds a sign during a student-organized anti-hate rally in the University Student Commons Plaza.

Bridge, a health and physical education major, helped contact the participating groups and said the counterdemonstration was “definitely” a success.

“The rally showed that hate won’t be accepted at VCU,” Bridge said. “VCU is a place where diversity is what makes us function.”

Phillips, a sociology major, said the rally made others aware of where VCU stands and what those at the university support.

“It was important to show the community as a whole that VCU stands together against hate, that we are a very inclusive community,” Phillips said.

Reed said rallies like Tuesday’s fit into the university’s goals to be “an open forum for differing opinions.”

“This is just a good example of students coming together, drawing a crowd and really doing what a university is about, which is educate people,” Reed said.

news • commonwealthtimes.org • CT3



On the radar Government Relations watches for blips

CATHERINE MACDONALD
Managing Editor

A House amendment to a bill that would mandate health insurance coverage for telemedicine services was agreed to by the Senate Tuesday, finalizing the legislation's passage through both bodies.

While Senate Bill 675 might seem like it has little to do with campus life at VCU, its passage is considered a success for the university.

That is because as one of the nearly 500 bills the university has been tracking this General Assembly session, telemedicine services is just one example of the myriad types of legislation VCU's Office of Government Relations works to pass, amend or kill.

Mark Smith, the assistant vice president for government relations, said VCU's interests range from student concerns on financial aid to employee and retirement issues and everything in between.

"There are many times where you'll find me sitting at a public safety subcommittee and you would think,

'Why is higher education there?' " Smith said.

"Well, we do have a police department; those employees need to know and hear what's going on with the legislation that will impact them doing their job."

Don Gehring, vice president for government relations, said bills concerning gun laws are of major interest to the university. He said when it comes to such laws, the university takes the position that it should be able to control the security of its own facilities.

"Parents expect a safe environment; they don't expect that people will be carrying guns around, other than law enforcement, in our buildings," Gehring said.

Gehring said his office reviews every piece of legislation each session, and highlighted two methods that allow the university to determine which bills to track: a system of networks outside VCU and what he and his colleagues call a "bucking" system.

The Office of Government Relations exchanges information with an extensive network that includes representatives from private companies and other types of lobbyists. For example, Gehring said representatives from universities and community colleges get together every Wednesday for a meeting they call a brown bag lunch, which is coordinated by the State Council of Higher Education.

"People just talk through the legislation—'OK have you seen this bill, are you in favor, how does this impact you, have we not thought of

something?' " Gehring said.

The bucking system is orchestrated within VCU.

"Let's say, 'We have retirement bills.' We send them down to human resources and get an evaluation from people there," he said.

After getting an initial reaction from human resources, Gehring said his office would then try to check with other components of the university.

"This is such an interesting and diverse place, so one part of the family may think it's a good bill, another part of the family might think it's bad," he said.

"We have to get everybody's thought process together to decide whether, as a university, we need to respond, and if so, what position we take."

After consulting with its outside networks as well as groups within the university, representatives from

the Office of Government Relations work with the bills' sponsors to show support or opposition or amend the legislation.

Smith said he and his colleagues try to be strategically coercive, yet, amicable when they approach bills' sponsors.

"Instead of going to a legislator and saying, 'We don't like your bill and we want to kill it,' we go to them and explain the implications and then suggest to them ways they can amend the bill to accomplish what they're trying to do without causing adverse impacts on us and the students and the employees," Smith said.

This spring is Gehring's 29th session of the General Assembly. He said usually by this point, the office has reached a resolution on most of the bills it tracks.

GOVERNMENT continued to CT6

What is telemedicine?

Telemedicine is the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications to improve patients' health status. Videoconferencing, transmission of still images, e-health including patient portals, remote monitoring of vital signs, continuing medical education and nursing call centers are all considered part of telemedicine and telehealth.

Why does it matter to VCU?

As a large, urban hospital, VCU Medical Center has set up telemedicine services across the globe. Senate Bill 675 would mandate health insurance coverage for such services, allowing clinic sites around the state to have live videoconferences with an expert doctor at VCU if questions or concerns arise in the course of a patient's treatment.

Information provided by the American Telemedicine Association and Mark Smith.

'Pothole Blitz' seeks to repair Virginia's roads



Patrice Dalesandro illustration

SAMANTHA DOWNING
Contributing Writer

A gap in the state budget is not the only hole Virginia officials are trying to fill. They're also trying to plug potholes that harsh winter weather has left on roads throughout the commonwealth.

Lydia Teffera, a junior mass communications major, said she has been living in Richmond for three years and has noticed that the pot holes have gotten worse.

"It's a nuisance and it's really bad for your car," Teffera said.

Some students say, although the potholes can be a burden, they are to be

expected because of the winter weather.

"There's not much you can do about it now because it's the winter time but that's to be expected," said Samantha Fleming, a junior business major. "It's been bad on Interstate 64. It's annoying but it's just something you have to deal."

Gov. Bob McDonnell is asking Virginians to help the Virginia Department of Transportation in a "Pothole Blitz" aimed at repairing the damage.

"Motorists traveling across Virginia know best where the worst potholes lie," McDonnell stated in a press release. "We want citizens to help us identify potholes as they form so that VDOT crews can quickly be dispatched to make repairs."

McDonnell directed VDOT to focus on the Pothole Blitz during March.

Crews already have begun work to repair potholes but have faced setbacks because of repeated snowstorms. Continuous freezing and thawing have greatly weakened roadway pavement—and potholes have been forming faster than crews can repair them.

"Potholes are a roadway hazard and a nuisance for every person driving our highways," McDonnell stated. "We are going all-out to repair these pavements and make traveling safer and more comfortable for Virginians."

As part of its battle plan, VDOT is prioritizing pothole patching depending on where the potholes are located and how severe they are. Crews are assigned routes and work their way along, filling potholes as they go. On average, crews have been able to repair potholes on high-traffic roads within four days, the press release stated.

VDOT employees remain on guard against potholes but need other people to keep a lookout, too.

"All Virginians can be a part of this Pothole Blitz so we can work together to improve everyone's safety and comfort as they travel through our great commonwealth," McDonnell stated.

Thursday, March 4, 2010



Light up or butt out, students discuss smoking benefits and burdens



Justin Lowenhagen photo
Hayden Deck, a senior English major, takes a smoke break.

JUSTIN LOWENHAGEN
Contributing Writer

Clad in a black jacket and blue jeans, Hayden Deck, a senior English major, lights up outside of James Branch Cabell Library.

Despite Virginia's recent ban inside of bars and restaurants that took effect Dec. 1, 2009, Deck still finds social benefits to smoking.

"A lot of times people will say, 'Hey can I borrow a lighter?' and that can start a conversation and it has, fairly frequently," Deck said.

According to Linda Hancock, the director and clinician for The Wellness Resource Center, socialization with others becomes a motivating factor for many non-smokers to pick up the habit.

Hancock said there are two types of smokers: smokers who pick up the habit because of feeling awkward socially and those who are social, outgoing people.

Hancock said she specializes

in helping smokers quit, and the social, outgoing people take the least time to stop smoking.

"Social people hate the new smoke-free laws that kick them out of the place they want to be, which is where the action is taking place," said Hancock.

The recent smoking ban has caused many smokers to go outside to smoke instead of lighting up indoors.

While some smokers say they might find common ground over a cigarette, others say the interaction between non-smokers and smokers is becoming more strained.

Jennifer Ferguson, a junior theater performance major, has been dating a smoker for three months. She admits there are times it becomes difficult to deal with his habit.

"I don't like to breathe smoke; I don't like secondhand smoke and that's just inevitable you're going to encounter it sometimes when you're dating a person

who smokes," Ferguson said.

While some students said smoking might strain many relationships, others say the relationships themselves can also become a catalyst for starting to smoke.

Deck said it was a breakup with a boyfriend that led him to first accepting a cigarette after a friend offered him one out of comfort. He has been smoking for two years now.

Some students say proximity to smokers can also become a challenge for non-smokers. Being around cigarette smoke can cause temptation for many non-smokers.

Jennifer Vick, a senior theater performance major, said she has dated smokers and has many friends who are smokers. She said being tempted by cigarettes, especially at parties is because of the social interaction.

"Some of the most fun people are outside and you want to be in that conversation, but you can't be, because you don't smoke," Vick said.

Hancock said students who want to try smoking should consider their own family history with smoking and to ask smoker if they would ever reconsider their decision to pick up the pack.

"By the time somebody is a half-pack-a-day smoker, they're tired of paying the man for their cigarettes and they wish they had never smoked," Hancock said.

Smoking ban effects on student health

ERICATERRINI
News Editor

Since Virginia's smoking ban went into effect Dec. 1, 2009, VCU students and health advisors have been voicing their opinions relating to the ban's impact on public health.

According to smoking cessation information provided by The Wellness Resource Center, within a half-hour people can start to feel the effects of tobacco smoke, be it a headache or nasal congestion or similar symptoms.

The Well and Student Health Services offer resources for students looking to quit the habit by providing free quit kits, which include education pamphlets, free candy and silly putty.

Students can go to Student Health and set up an appointment for smoking cessation and receive medication to help them quit.

Outside of The Well, a peer education group called the Cancer Awareness Team focuses its efforts on cancer prevention and education and offers additional smoking cessation resources on campus.

Ariel Sierra, a senior mass communications major, Well employee and co-chair for the Relay for Life student organization, said although she works at the front desk at the Well, she is equally committed to her work as the Relay for Life Chair for the CAT.

"Basically what the CAT tries to do is to promote awareness and education and advocacy about the main cancers that affect college-age students, which is lung cancer, cervical cancer, testicular cancer, breast cancer and skin cancer."

Sierra said the ban has affected her work with Relay for Life.

"Obviously ... the smoking ban has affected the way we promote information and advocacy on lung cancer," Sierra said. "The smoking ban was started Dec. 1 and as the Relay for Life Chair, I've definitely had an easier time setting up promotions in restaurants and in bars, especially with survivors."

According to Sierra, the survivors she worked with in the past have been skeptical with their involvement in the relay's promotion.

"Not a lot of survivors want to go into a restaurant to have a banquet or a meeting where there's smoking, just because they've been affected very personally or very heavily with cancer," Sierra said. "It's just an easier way for me to make things happen on a larger scale."

According to The Well's campus-wide health survey, students are healthier than people think.

Over the past three or four years, every year health educators say they have noticed the number of first-year students who smoke on a daily basis has decreased steadily. A few years ago, 13 percent of students were daily smokers and now daily smokers make up about eight percent of the student population.

However some students say while the smoking regulation is a good development, the ban is still inconvenient for some restaurant owners.

Chelsea Gilmour, a junior international studies major said her views of the ban depend on the type of establishment.

"I agree that you can't smoke in restaurants," Gilmour said. "Most people don't like smoke around them when they're eating. But for establishments that are mainly bars ... for people that are smokers it seems inconvenient." "I agree that you can't smoke in restaurants," Gilmour said. "Most people don't like smoke around them when they're eating. But for establishments that are mainly bars ... for people that are smokers it seems inconvenient."

Vegetarian Club takes action against McDonald's

DESTINY SHELTON
Contributing Writer

The Vegetarian Club presented its 1,300 student signatures requesting the Aramark food service to remove McDonald's from the MCV campus at the Food Advisory committee meeting Thursday, March 4.

The Vegetarian Club spreads the awareness of factory farming to students and motivates them to adopt a vegetarian or vegan diet, according to Megan Bolten, the vice president of the Vegetarian Club. They have worked with volunteers of peta2, which is

a part of PETA, a youth animal rights organization, to retrieve the 1,300 student signatures.

"Just (factory farming) techniques of slaughter and completely inhumane animal cruelties are what we're mostly against," Bolten said. "So until they come up with different ways we're not going to support even buying a bottle of water from there."

The petition took place last semester and was a part of an international campaign, which Peta launched in 1999, called the McCruelty Campaign.

Bolten said the Vegetarian Club's petition requested that McDonald's be removed from the MCV campus, where the medical center is located, until they agree

VEGETARIAN continued to CT6



VEGETARIAN continued from CT5

to change their harsh slaughter methods to a less cruel method such as the “controlled-atmosphere killing.”

McDonald's has spoken of lessening the abuse of their chickens and according to their Web site, their animal welfare program includes Global Animal Welfare Guiding Principles for McDonald's programs worldwide, an Animal Welfare Council to advise on humane animal handling practices, onsite audits to ensure appropriate animal handling practices in their suppliers' slaughterhouse facilities, laying-hen guidelines for their U.S. egg suppliers and other local market-specific standards.

But the problem still has yet to be resolved, according to Bolten, so the Vegetarian Club decided

to take action. Literature was passed around to students to exemplify what they were signing the petition for.

“McDonald's is a contradiction being inside a hospital,” junior Shanice Battle said.

She said she supports the Vegetarian Club's efforts only if McDonald's is in fact removed and they fight to replace it with a healthier food restaurant that uses less cruel methods in the treatment of their chicken.

Although the Vegetarian Club and other students disagree with McDonald's methods, there are still students who disagreed with the club's petition against McDonald's last year.

Some students said if McDonald's were to be

removed from campus, it would affect them in a negative way.

Daryl Goldsmith, a junior, said he is among the group of students who does not support the efforts of the Vegetarian Club and believe that presenting the signatures they have to the Food Advisory committee meeting this week will not yield results.

“I'm personally a McDonald's breakfast lover so if they remove that from campus I don't know if I would feel like going all the way down Broad Street to get breakfast food,” Goldsmith said.

The Food Advisory committee meeting will take place Thursday, March 4 at 5 p.m. in the Compass Room of the Shafer Court Dining Center and is open to all students.

GOVERNMENT continued from CT4

“People work with you,” Gehring said. “They compromise and we compromise, and usually something we can live with comes out.”

Smith and Gehring both said this year has worked

out well in terms of VCU's legislative interests.

“This year we are very fortunate,” Smith said. “There are a lot of years I can tell you that VCU and higher education as a whole find themselves

down there to the last hour and to the last minute in the General Assembly, but most of things seems to be falling in our favor this year in terms of the legislative proposals.”

Free HIV testing dates provided for students

LIZI ARBOGAST
Contributing Writer

Free HIV testing for students will be provided at the Wellness Resource Center on March 10 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The free tests take 40 minutes, are completely confidential and are co-sponsored by the Fan Free Clinic and The Well.

The clinic is a non-profit organization and has a network of about 30 free clinics throughout Virginia, according to the clinic's Web site.

The clinic offered to conduct routine testing at The Well, which began in October and is offered three times per semester.

The 40 minutes includes 20 minutes to run the test and 20 minutes for post-test counseling.

Susan Tellier, the senior prevention specialist and HIV testing coordinator for the clinic, conducts the testing.

The clinic and The Well can provide testing for about 200 hundred students on test days, but they have yet to reach that many students, said Linda Hancock, the director of The Well.

Hancock said she has been enthusiastic about the program and appreciative of the clinic but she worries that not enough students are getting tested because of the stigma associated with HIV.

“One of the reasons why I really wanted to do free HIV testing is to get rid of that sense of stigma and hiding,” Hancock said.

Hancock said the current recommendation for all adults is to get tested annually.

“The easier you make it for people to get their routine tests, the more likely they are to do it,” Hancock said.

She said she remains hopeful that monthly testing and advertisements in the Stall Seat Journal, a Well publication, will help bring more awareness to the issue.

Hancock said it is important to get tested, whether a person has many risks factors.

Although HIV is not thought of as a college disease, students should never assume that they are unaffected, Hancock said.

The Well's awareness efforts include sponsoring the student organization Project REACH (Rams Educating About College Health), which organizes student volunteer visits to The Well to provide creative sex education, such as Condom Crafts, to students while they are waiting for their tests.

Hancock says the benefits of getting tested are numerous.

“Once you get that clean bill of health, it gives you the motivation to make sure that your behaviors protect you in the future,” Hancock said. “Good news is energizing and motivating.”

Green Unity hosts e-cycling drive

ERICATERRINI
News Editor

Green Unity held an e-cycling drive Wednesday in the University Student Commons to provide a free electronic recycling service for students.

The student organization partnered with 2nd Solutions, a Richmond-based private company that recycles unwanted or outdated electronics.

Amy Watlington, an undeclared freshman and Green Unity member, said the student organization plans to hold e-cycling events every Wednesday in the Student Commons and has set up a drop-off center in the Student Government Association's office, also located in the commons.

“A lot of people have stuff at home laying around their house that is electronic that could easily be

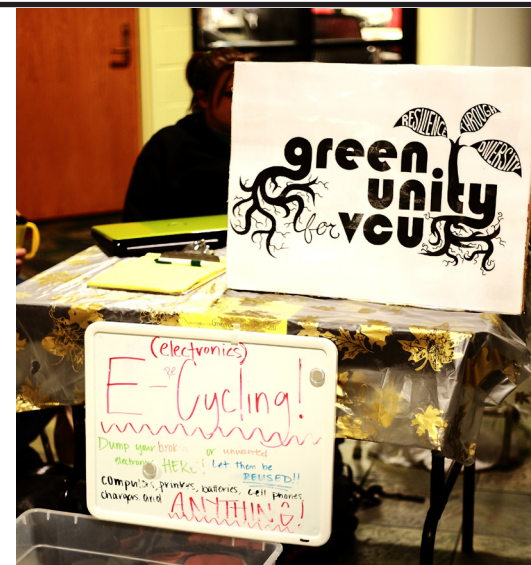
fixed up to use again or recycled to use for other electronics,” Watlington said.

Green Unity co-founder Will Isenberg said by providing e-cycling on campus, students are able to have a positive impact on the environment.

“The school allows us to work with them and considering it is a hot topic with consumption and the actual recycling process, it's important (e-waste) stays domestic and doesn't go anywhere else,” Isenberg said.

Dana Bivens, a senior history major and Green Unity member, ran the drive along with Watlington and Isenberg.

“It's great to have a presence for educational purposes,” Bivens said. “A lot of people wouldn't think to recycle these (electronics).”



Mel Koban Photo

Green Unity members set up a table and collection bin for students' unwanted electronics in the University Student Commons.

Thursday, March 4, 2010





sports

The Commonwealth Times/vcuramnation.com 2010 CAA men's basketball tournament preview

The CAA tournament kicks off at the Richmond Coliseum this weekend the conference's 12 team, will meet for an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament.

This season, the Old Dominion Monarchs won the conference regular season tournament, dethroning the VCU Rams who are the three-time defending conference regular season champions.

By winning the conference's top seed, the Monarchs clinched at least a bid to the National Invitation Tournament.

The remaining teams and their seeds are as follows:

- #1: Old Dominion (23-8, 15-3)
- #2: Northeastern (14-4, 19-11)
- #3: William & Mary (20-9, 12-6)
- #4: George Mason (17-13, 12-6)
- #5: VCU (20-8, 11-7)
- #6: Drexel (16-15, 11-7)
- #7: Hofstra (18-13, 10-8)
- #8: Towson (9-20, 6-12)
- #9: UNC Wilmington (9-21, 5-13)
- #10: Georgia State (12-19, 5-13)
- #11: James Madison (12-19, 4-14)
- #12: Delaware (7-23, 3-15)

The CT's Taylor Howsmon and vcuramnation.com's Mat Shelton hosted a preview show breaking down each of the tournament games and picking the winners. To view the entire preview show, go to commonwealthtimes.org. Here is a break down of each first and second round match up with a preview of each team.

Friday, March 5, noon: #8 Towson vs. #9 UNC Wilmington

The Tigers finished the 2010 season by winning two straight and four of their final seven. Towson is led in scoring by Josh Thornton (11.1 ppg) and Calvin Lee (10.7 ppg). The Tigers spent most of the year saddled with injury as starters Robert Nwanko, Brian Morris and Jarrell Smith all missed significant time.

The Seahawks had a rocky season but finished up as the conference's nine seed. UNCW reassigned coach Benny Moss back on Jan. 29 and since has gone 2-7 under interim replacement Brooks Lee.

Friday, March 5, 2:30 p.m.: #5 VCU vs. #12 Delaware

VCU got off to a bad start in conference play but recovered, earning the fifth seed in this season's

tournament. The three-time defending CAA regular season champ is in unusual territory, as the black and gold hasn't played in a Friday session since the 2005-2006 season.

Delaware had a nightmarish season in 2010. Monte Ross' club comes to Richmond losers of 15 of their final 17 games on the season. Jawan Carter and Alphonso Dawson, who combine for over 30 points per game, lead the Blue Hens.

Friday, March 5, 6 p.m.: #7 Hofstra vs. #10 Georgia State

Hofstra comes into the CAA tournament a red-hot team. The Pride are winners of nine out of ten and enter the tournament as a popular Cinderella. Superstar junior and player-of-the-year candidate Charles Jenkins, who goes for over 20 points a game, leads them into the tourney.

Georgia State had another somewhat disappointing season as the Rod Barnes experiment continues in Atlanta. The coach leads his talented club into Richmond as an unheralded contender; if they get hot, they are capable of making a run.

Friday, March 5, 8:30 p.m.: #6 Drexel vs. #11 James Madison

BASKETBALL continued to CT8

2009-2010 CAA post-season picks/year in review

All-CAA team predictions (announced tonight 7 p.m.)

TAYLOR HOWSMON
Sports Editor

Taylor Howsmon's All-CAA first team:

G- David Schneider (William & Mary)
G- Charles Jenkins (Hofstra)
G/F- Chaiison Allen (Northeastern)
F- Larry Sanders (VCU)
F- Gerald Lee (Old Dominion)

Taylor Howsmon's All-CAA second team:

G- Cam Long (George Mason)
G- Joey Rodriguez (VCU)
F/G- Julius Well (JMU)
F/G- Matt Janning (Northeastern)
F- Manny Adako (Northeastern)

Thursday, March 4, 2010

Player of the year: Charles Jenkins, Hofstra

Coach of the year: Tony Shaver, William & Mary

Rookie of the year: Luke Hancock, George Mason

Biggest surprise: William & Mary

Runner-up: George Mason

Biggest disappointment: James Madison

Runner up: VCU

Top three out of conference wins:

1. ODU @ then-No. 11 Georgetown (12/19/09, ODU won 61-57)

2. William & Mary @ Maryland (12/20/09, W&M won 83-77)

3. VCU vs. then-No. 17 Oklahoma (11/21/09, VCU won 82-69)





Men's basketball regular season in review

The Rams were picked third in the pre-season CAA poll voted on by media, coaches and sports information directors around the conference. With the loss of Eric Maynor, arguably the best player in school history, the pressure of three straight CAA regular season championships and a new coach to break in, VCU finished 20-8 and drew the fifth seed in the upcoming CAA tournament. The relatively young Rams will need a major run through the tournament to reach their third big dance in four years.

2009-2010 schedule and results:

Fri, Nov. 13 Bethune-Cookman	W 77-51	Tue, Jan. 12 at Hofstra	W 81-68
Wed, Nov. 18 at W. Michigan	L 67-83	Sat, Jan. 16 at Georgia St.	W 82-69
Sat, Nov. 21 Oklahoma	W 82-69	Wed, Jan. 20 William & Mary	W 81-59
Mon, Nov. 23 at Hampton	W 63-52	Sat, Jan. 23 at Northeastern	L 62-74
Fri, Nov. 27 Nevada	W 85-76	Wed, Jan. 27 Towson	W 112-53
Wed, Dec. 2 Rhode Island	W 82-80	Sat, Jan. 30 Georgia St.	W 78-62
Sat, Dec. 5 at William & Mary	L 74-75	Wed, Feb. 3 at N.C. Wilmington	W 73-60
Sat, Dec. 12 Richmond	W 65-57	Sat, Feb. 6 Old Dominion	W 70-58
Sat, Dec. 19 at Tulane	W 78-77	Tue, Feb. 9 at George Mason	L 77-82
Tue, Dec. 29 East Carolina	W 82-74	Sat, Feb. 13 at James Madison	L 71-76
Sat, Jan. 2 N.C. Wilmington	W 91-57	Tue, Feb. 16 Drexel	W 73-54
Mon, Jan. 4 Northeastern	L 57-62	Sat, Feb. 20 Akron	W 70-53
Wed, Jan. 6 at Drexel	L 72-75	Wed, Feb. 24 James Madison	W 76-62
Sat, Jan. 9 Delaware	W 77-64	Sat, Feb. 27 at Old Dominion	L 70-73

Final record: 20-8, 11-7 CAA

Final RPI: 64 (courtesy realltimerpi.com)

Best win: Richmond (RPI of 29 out of 347)

Worst loss: James Madison (RPI of 250 out of 347)

Longest winning streak: four games (three different times)

Longest losing streak: two games (twice)

Home record

15-1 Road Record: 5-7

When playing in ... Virginia:

– 16-5 Michigan – 0-1 Louisiana – 1-0 Pennsylvania
– 0-1 New York – 1-0 Georgia – 1-0 Massachusetts
– 0-1 North Carolina – 1-0

Attendance summary

Home games: 16 total attendance: 102,958

Average attendance per game: 6,435

CAA rankings for average attendance per home game: Old Dominion – 6,995 VCU – 6,435 George Mason – 6,089 JMU – 3,732 UNCW – 3,197 VCU also tied a school record with four sell-out games

This week

Upcoming events

Men's basketball

Fri.-Mon. March 5-8, CAA men's basketball tournament, Richmond Coliseum, VCU opening round game vs. Delaware 2:30 p.m.

Baseball

Fri-Sun. March 5-7, Cleveland State, The Diamond, Fri. 3 p.m, Sat. 4 p.m., Sun. 1 p.m.

Men's track and field

Fri.-Sun. Mar. 5-7, ECAC Indoor Championships. Boston, Mass.

Women's track and field

Fri.-Sun. Mar. 5-7, ECAC Indoor Championships, Boston, Mass.

Men's tennis

Sun. Mar. 7, at N.C. State, Raleigh, N.C., 11 a.m.

Women's tennis

Sat. Mar. 6, Virginia, Thalhimer Tennis Center, 2 p.m.

BASKETBALL continued from CT7

The Dragons achieved success again under coach Bruiser Flint and enter the tournament with the same seed they had in 2009 before getting upset by Towson in that first-round game. Jaime Harris leads a gritty Drexel bunch to the Coliseum as the team from Philly looks to make a run.

James Madison was, without a doubt, the CAA's most disappointing team in 2010. The Dukes, predicted fifth, only won four games in conference and finished 11th. Super-sophomore Julius Wells and transfer Denzel Bowels, two of the CAA's top players, lead Coach Matt Brady's team. The injury-laden Dukes have had a tough season, but they are talented enough to make up for it by winning some games in the tournament.

Saturday, March 6, noon: #1 Old Dominion vs. #8 Towson/#9 UNC Wilmington

The Monarchs of Old Dominion completed an impressive season with a senior-day win over VCU. The Monarchs are big athletic and talented and favored to win their first conference tournament since 2004. A confident ODU is led by potential player of the year Gerald Lee, Kent Bazemore, Ben Finney and Frank Hassell, along with a cast of talented additions. There is no question that the Monarchs are good enough to win the championship. The question is: will they?

Saturday, March 6, 2:30 p.m.: #4 George Mason vs. #5 VCU/#12 Delaware

The Patriots got off to an incredible start in conference, but struggled a bit down the stretch and ended up in the four spot. Cam Long, a sophomore capable of taking over any game, leads Mason. Mike Morrison was also a nice addition to Mason, who has played in the last three CAA finals.

Saturday, March 6, 6 p.m.: #2 Northeastern vs. #7 Hofstra/#10 Georgia State

The Huskies of Northeastern had one of the best seasons in school history and earned the number two seed in the tournament. A talented and experienced team rolls into Richmond like a black-and-red tidal wave. The only thing that says Northeastern isn't a lock for the title game is history. The Huskies, in the CAA since the 2005-2006 season, haven't been past the quarterfinals since their first season in the conference. Not to mention they were bounced in their first game in the 2009 tournament by upstart 11-seed Towson.

Saturday, March 6, 8:30 p.m.: #3 William & Mary vs. #6 Drexel/#11 James Madison

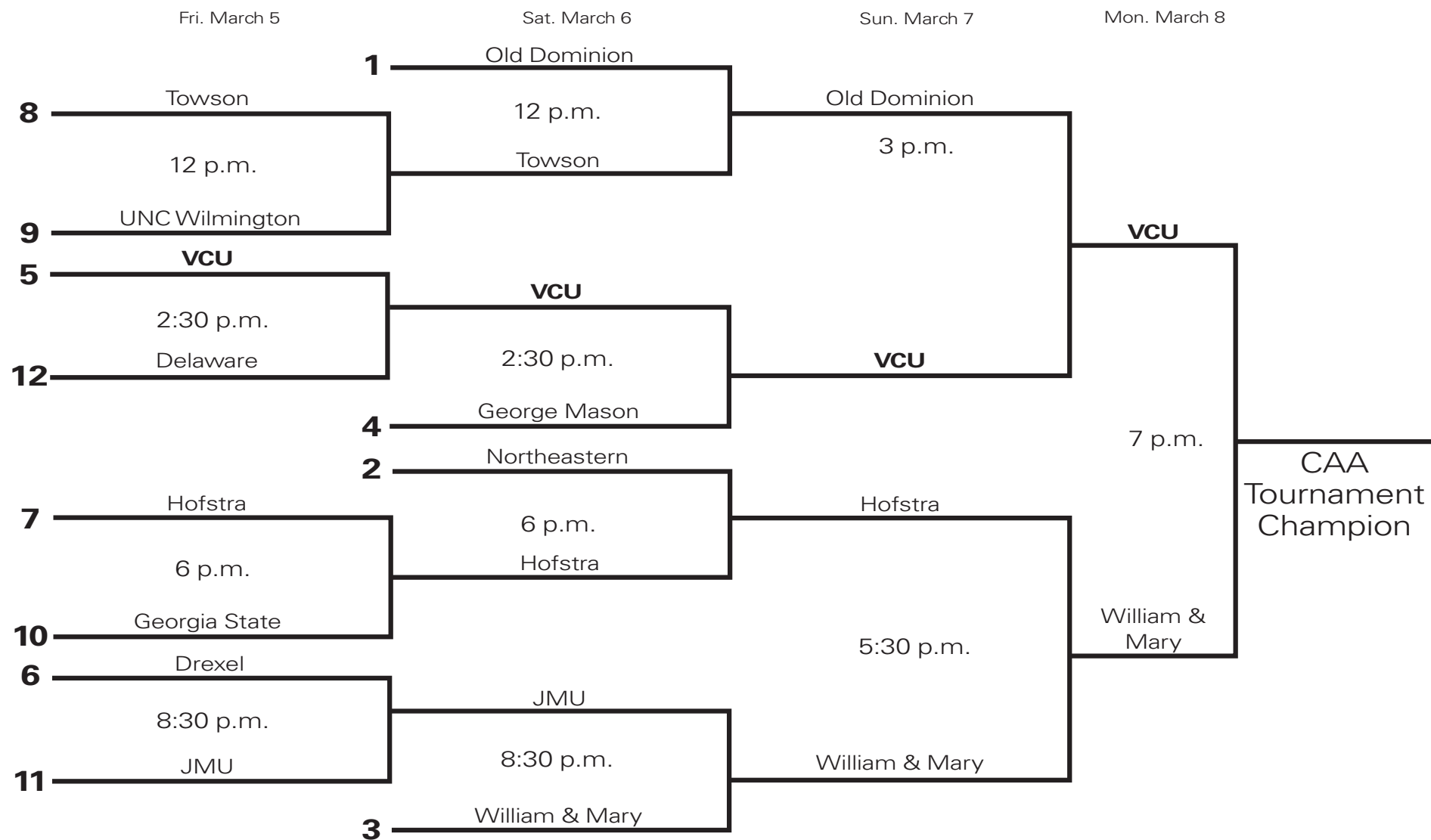
The Tribe of William & Mary were the biggest surprise in the CAA, and possibly the biggest surprise in the entire country in 2010. With major wins at Maryland, at Wake Forest and at George Mason, the Tribe is poised for big things. David Schneider and Danny Sumner lead an experienced William & Mary team into Richmond.



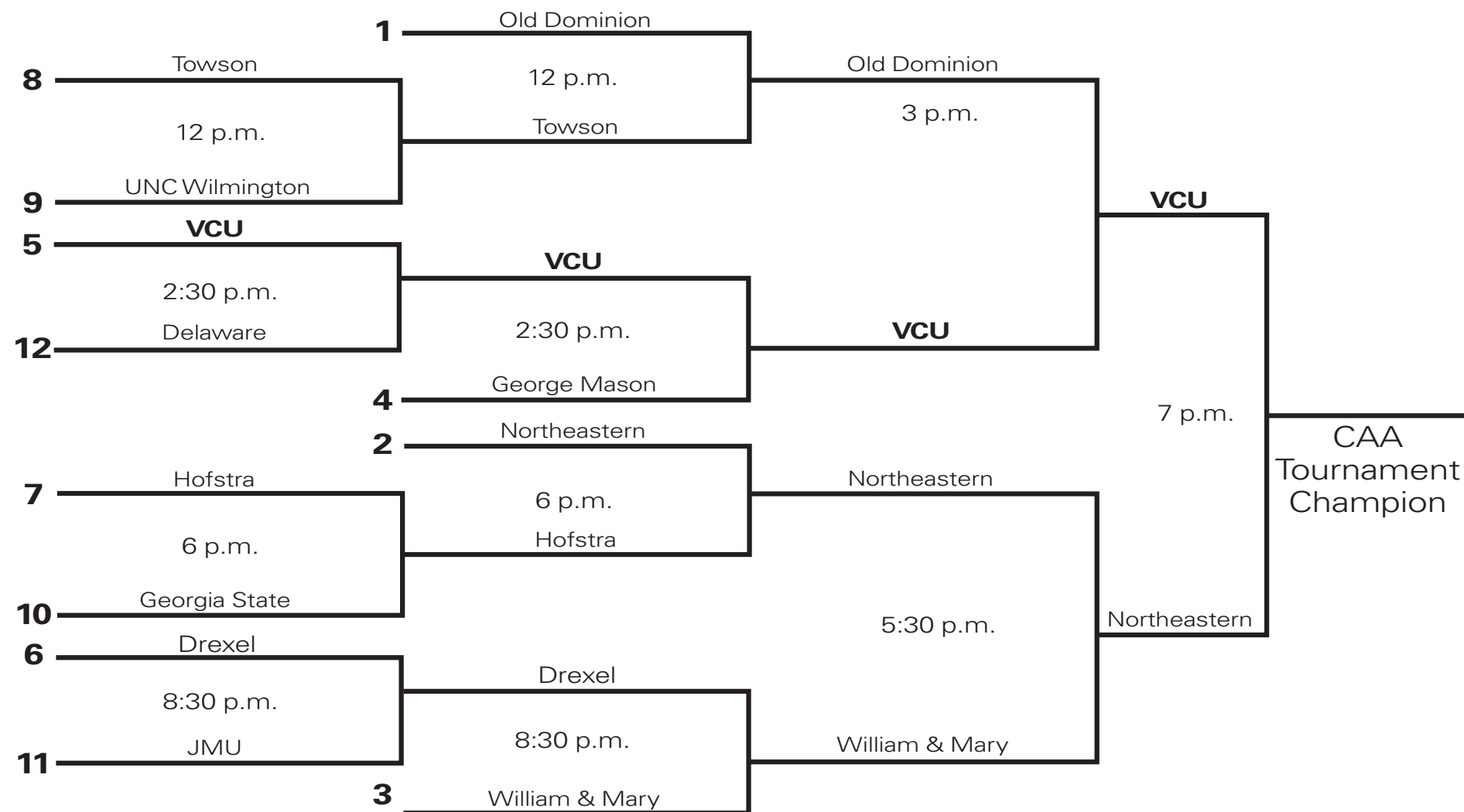


sports

Taylor Howsmon *SPORTS EDITOR*



Mat Shelton *VCURAMNATION.COM*





spectrum

theater
review

Firehouse play crumbles under weirdness

RICH GRISET
Contributing Writer

Three females, Justin Timberlake and one decrepit apartment. These are the elements of Firehouse Theatre Project's "Crumble (Lay Me Down, Justin Timberlake)." While they might seem like the ingredients to a potentially dark and quirky theater masterpiece, Sheila Callaghan's script stops short of the finish line.

"Crumble" stars Christina Billew as the awkward 11-year-old Janice and Jen Meharg as her mother.

Since the loss of their father/husband in the previous year, failed communication and unexpressed emotions have become the norm in their relationship. Janice has disappeared into her own head in an effort to keep the rest of the world at bay. Mother has become a hyperventilating, neurotic mess, that's afraid of her daughter.

Billew's believable performance as the eccentric "tween-ager" is the highlight of the show. She plays with dolls and Clorox, experiments with dangerous chemicals and would rather shake her booty at her mother than give her a straight answer to a question.

Meharg, too, does a wonderful job as the mother who – try as she might – can not connect with her daughter. Parents in the audience will identify with her as she tries to deal with the pressures of raising a child.

Mother's one support is her sister Barbara, played by Lisa Kotula. Barbara who is barren, has taken to offering her sister advice and caring for her 57 cats. Kotula does a good job as the sister trying to help, but a scene in which her cats fight each other goes on much too long and distracts from the rest of the play.

The apartment in which "Crumble" takes place looks as though it could double as a set for a movie about nuclear fallout. The wallpaper is peeling, the heat doesn't work and every once in a while, large pieces of the ceiling crash to the floor.

But the apartment has a spokesperson in Frank Creasy as ... The Apartment. Dressed in a tux with tails, Creasy's soliloquies about his



LEFT An eccentric Janice, played by Christina Billew, experiences a flashback about her departed father, played by Frank Creasy.

Jay Paul photo

PLAY continued to CT7



Varying degrees of March music madness

ERIKA WILKINS
Spectrum Editor

"Almost Alice (Music inspired by the Motion Picture) by various artists

Release Date: March 2, 2010

The "power-pop" music of "Almost Alice" certainly doesn't speak to my personal taste. The likes of Owl City and Shinedown won't be found anywhere near my iTunes account, whether they're indirectly affiliated with Johnny Depp or not. Despite my taste however, the album effectively paints the picture of a candy-coated fantasy-island insane asylum, cultivated by none other than Tim Burton. The

compilation travels full force in a distinctive direction that pays homage to its Disney roots with 30H13's "Follow Me" while creeping ominously toward Burton's image of a wonderland with Franz Ferdinand's "The Lobster Quadrille." Welcome to the Tea-Party.

Grade: A-

Download (don't steal): "Tea Party" by Kerli

ALBUMS continued to CT12



album briefs

PLAYS continued from CT6

fall from grace as an elegant mansion to his current squalor are comedic, but sometimes a bit overdone. Creaks in the floorboards are actually his flatulence, radiators are now sexual and The Apartment contemplates murdering his occupants as payback for his current disrepair. Having The Apartment as a character makes an already weird play weirder.

Of course, no play that mentions Justin Timberlake in its title can go without a few guest appearances by Mr. SexyBack himself. Almost every one of Matt Hackman's appearances as the former *NSYNC-er solicits applause. So what if Hackman's voice sounds nothing like Timberlake's—he's got enough moxie to "Rock Your Body."

The most troubled part of the play is its

ending. Just before the climax, the play loses all steam, and the resolution is extremely unsatisfying. Even an open-ended finale would have made more sense. In the end, it just seems like Callaghan was scrambling for a solution.

While the play has its moments – both humorous and dramatic – it simply lacks the charm to balance its weirdness. Firehouse should be applauded for taking on such a daring play, but it just isn't worth the payoff.

'Crumble (Lay Me Down, Justin Timberlake)' runs Thursdays through Sundays at 8 p.m. at the Firehouse Theatre until March 20. Tickets are \$10 for students and \$25 for non-students. Two "pay-what-you-will" performances are scheduled for 4 p.m. on March 7 and March 14.

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Thursday, March 4, 2010

spectrum · commonwealthtimes.org · CT11



tv review

Brilliant '30 Rock' highlights NBC's Thursday nights

SEAN COLLINS-SMITH

Staff Writer

Amidst the awful, reality-riddled programming plaguing NBC is a wonderful Thursday night comedy lineup: "Community," (8 p.m.), "Parks and Recreation," (8 p.m.) "The Office" (9 p.m.) and "30 Rock" (9 p.m.). Each has quietly amassed relatively small but dedicated fan-bases, profitable DVD sales and some of the most talented writers/actors in television.

"30 Rock" is the middle-aged show of the group; "The Office" (with head writer and actor Steve Carrell) has been around for six seasons, while "Community" and "Parks" are only on their first and second seasons, respectively. "30 Rock" is in its fourth, and it has settled in nicely with a gleefully sardonic attitude toward NBC and corporate parent GE, as well as targeting topics as varied as feminism, Republicans and product placement.

In short, they go after everyone.

It works wonderfully, as every episode possesses the manic randomness that made "Seinfeld" such an accessible comedy. Unlike most network productions, "30 Rock" is helmed by a female creator, Tina Fey—who might well be the most imaginative person in television. Fey has the experience necessary to satirize the behind-the-scenes TV landscape – she was the head writer on "Saturday Night Live" for almost eight years – and her self-deprecating nature, both on and off the show, is as winning as it is addictive. No wonder the critics love the show: its 22 Emmy nominations in 2009 were the most for a comedy show in a single year.

On top of the sharp writing is an array of hilarious cast members. Alec Baldwin, as VP of East Coast Programming Jack Donaghy, and Tracy Morgan, as the similarly named Tracy Jordan, get the majority of the publicity. While any other show would lean on the previous recognition Baldwin brings and the loud, obnoxious nature of Jordan, "30 Rock" takes it further. Baldwin's scenes are often brief but brilliant, as Fey writes a mixture of political banter and emotional issues for him to grapple with. And Jordan's erratic humor is frequently trumped by his surprising bursts of intelligence. In a recent episode in Boston, he pesters an actor portraying John Hancock by yelling, "For a dude that has the most hilarious last name I ever heard, you blow," but then later quips, "Boston was just the match that lit the powder keg, like the tragic events at Lexington and Concord!"



It is the topsy-turvy comedic timing of "30 Rock" that makes it one of the best shows on any network, not just NBC. The viewer sees a joke on the horizon, and right before it's delivered, the punch-line pulls a 180 and goes in a direction completely unexpected. Case in point: Dr. Leo Spaceman, the show's resident physician, stands in front of a set of x-rays, smoking a cigarette. He blows smoke in frustration. Common dramatic scene, no? Then comes the great line: "Damn. Where are my car keys?" Or when he advises Jack Donaghy before coming back for a procedure the next morning: "Now this is surgery, so don't eat anything before you come in." Pause. "Because I'll have a big breakfast waiting for you." These moments let the viewer have faith in comedy again, as Fey and her crack team of writers and actors demonstrate that entertaining programs don't have to use gratuitous language, ethnic slurs, annoying laugh tracks or TV clichés to make you laugh. They just need good old-fashioned creativity.

Grade: A+

"30 Rock" airs 9:30 p.m. every Thursday on NBC.

ALBUMS continued from CT11

"Sounds of Vancouver 2010: Closing Ceremony Commemorative Album" by various artists

Release date: March 1, 2010

Have you ever been cruising the highway thinking, "Man, I wish I had the sounds of the Olympics in my iPod?" If so, EMI Music Canada has got an album for you. If that particular thought has never occurred to you, this compilation won't do much to change that. Even the charismatic Michael Bublé and crowd-rousing Nickelback, can't stir this mix of elevator music. Avril Lavigne, who incidentally makes an appearance on another various artists soundtrack ("Almost Alice") doesn't offer any saving grace here either. The Olympic effort that surely went toward this project would have been better spent restraining anti-Olympic protesters.

Grade: D

Download (don't steal): "Burn It to the Ground" by Nickelback

"SOS: Saving Ourselves for Haiti" by various artists

Release Date: Feb. 11, 2010

While the international community grapples with the challenges to come in Chile, the efforts to help Haiti cope still continue. Black Entertainment Television recently held "Saving Ourselves," a star-studded evening of performances benefiting the struggling Haitian populace. In conjunction with those efforts, BET has released an album of live performances from Justin Bieber, Kirk Franklin, Keri Hilson and Haitian-native Wyclef Jean. Virginia resident Chris Brown also contributes to the album. One hundred percent of the proceeds go to the SOS Saving Ourselves for Haiti Fund. So as your one charitable act of the week, month or year, spend \$7.99 where it counts. You'll make a difference in the world and you're sure to enjoy the music as well.

Grade: A+

Download (don't steal): "One Less Lonely Girl" by Justin Bieber

"Spring Break Mixtape 2010" by various artists

Release date: March 2, 2010

While you and your besties travel to your chosen spring break destination, you'll have the popular hits of "Spring Break Mixtape 2010" to put you into party mode. Like Britney Spears and vintage Mariah Carey – there's nothing wrong with wanting some mindless good fun. So, "go lower than the grades on yo' report card" and "don't stop, get it, get it."

Grade: A-

Download (don't steal): "How Low (remix)" by Ludacris ft. Ciara and Pitbull





spectrum weekend calendar

Thursday 3/4

Art After Hours: VMFA features Gayle McGehee & Nocturnes – Eclectic Lounge Music and poetry by Tarfia Faizullah. 6:30 and 7 p.m. \$10. Virginia Museum of Fine Art. 200 N. Blvd. 340-1400.

Richmond Shakespeare: Presents the singer Othello. 8 p.m. \$26-\$38. Carpenter Theatre at Richmond CenterStage. 600 E. Grace St. 225-9000.

Aisha Tyler: Enjoy an evening of laughter. 7:30 p.m. Funny Bone Comedy Club. 11800 W. Broad St. 521-8900.

Live Music At the Triple: Rockitz Battle of the Bands. 8 p.m. Free. 3306 W. Broad St. 359-7777.

The Influence and Honor by August: 9 p.m. \$6. Capital Ale House. 623 E. Main St. 780-2537.

Symphony Orchestra: 8-9:30 p.m. \$5 general admission free with VCU ID. W.E. Singleton Center for Performing Arts. 922 Park Ave. 828-6200.

Friday 3/5

Alice in Chains: With Middle Class Rut. 9 p.m. \$36. The National. 704 E. Broad St. (757) 622-9877.

Murder Mystery Dinner: “Frankly Scarlett, You’re Dead” Enjoy dinner and a show. 7:30-10 p.m. \$41.95 adults. Crowne Plaza Hotel-Richmond West. 6531 W. Broad St. 1-888-471-4802.

Don Giovanni: Enjoy the Virginia Opera Singers 35th anniversary. 8 p.m. \$29-92. Carpenter Theatre at Richmond CenterStage. 600 E. Grace St. 225-9000.

Facing East: Delve into the story of a family’s immense loss. The Richmond Triangle Players. 8 p.m. \$20. 1300 Altamont Ave. 346-8113.

Crumble (Lay Me Down, Justin Timberlake): Enjoy the story of healing through baking and Justin Timberlake by Sheila Callaghan. 8 p.m. \$25 General \$10 with student ID. Firehouse Theatre. 1609 W. Broad St. 355-2001.

Saturday 3/6

Concert Benefit for Conner’s Heroes: Featuring Frankly Scarlett, Diggity Dudes, Houston Scott Band and many more. 6:30 p.m. \$10. The National. 704 E. Broad St. (757) 622-9877.

Steve Forbes at Richmond Forum: Hear the CEO of Forbes Inc. and Forbes magazine speak on business. 8 p.m. \$36-70. Landmark Theatre. 6 N. Laurel St. 646-

4213.

Awesome Breakfast Party with the Breakfast Club: Dance to the sounds of the ‘80s. 8 p.m. \$10. The Hat Factory. 140 Virginia St. 788-4281.

“The Grapes of Wrath” Presented by Theatre VCU and Barksdale Theatre. 8 p.m. \$10 with valid college ID. Barksdale Theatre. 1601 Willow Lawn Dr. 282-2620.

Sunday 3/7

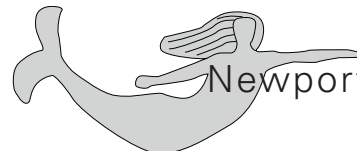
Arabia: IMAX Dome film. 9 a.m. \$8.50. Science Museum of Virginia. 2500 W. Broad St. 864-1400.

Richmond Home and Garden Show: Richmond’s largest Home and Garden Show. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. \$8. Richmond Raceway Complex. 600 E. Laburnum Ave. 228-7500.

Henry Rollins Spoken Word Tour: 8 p.m. \$20-25. The National. 704 E. Broad St. (757) 622-9877.

National Geographic’s MAPS: Tools for Adventure. 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m. \$10 Adults \$9 Children. Science Museum of Virginia. 2500 W. Broad St. 864-1400.

weekend traveler



Thursday 3/4

Building Better Ships: This exhibition tells the story of one of Newport News’ finest industries—shipbuilding. Highlighting this exhibition are the paintings of Thomas Skinner, as well as early photographs of the Newport News Shipyard (Northrop Grumman Newport News) and artifacts from the shipbuilding industry. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. \$13 for students. The Mariners’ Museum/USS Monitor Center. 100 Museum Drive, Newport News. (757) 596-2222.

Sea Glass, Pieces from the Collection: Composed of objects used at sea and inspired by maritime themes, this exhibition features a range of glass artifacts from the museum’s collection. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. \$13 for students. The Mariners’ Museum/USS Monitor Center. 100 Museum Drive, Thursday, March 4, 2010

Newport News. (757) 596-2222.

Bird Walks: The Hampton Roads Bird Club has monitored the bird population of Newport News Park since 1965. Be prepared to car pool to several areas in the park. Beginners are welcome. Binoculars and field guides are recommended. 7 a.m. Continues Saturday. Free. Newport News Park. 13560 Jefferson Ave., Newport News. (757) 886-7912.

Friday 3/5

Women of a New Tribe: A stunning national exhibition from noted award-winning photographer Jerry Taliaferro. The exhibit celebrates the physical and inner beauty of African-American women, presented in 1930s to 1940s black and white glamour photography styles. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. \$5. Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center. 2410 Wickham

Ave., Newport News. (757) 247-8950.

Jerry Seinfeld: 7 p.m. \$54.90-87.25. Chrysler Hall. 201 Brambleton Avenue, Norfolk. (757) 664-6464.

Star-gazing: Members of the Virginia Peninsula Astronomy/Stargazers (VPAS) will be on-site to share their knowledge of the evening skies. Drop by just after sunset for a glimpse of the night sky (weather permitting). Second and fourth Friday of each month. Free. Riverview Farm Park. 105 City Farm Road, Newport News. (757) 886-7912.

Jack’s Mannequin: with Vedera, Fun. 7:30 p.m. \$22. The Norva. 317 Monticello Ave. Norfolk. (757) 622-5915.

Saturday 3/6

Moscow Festival Ballet: “Swan Lake.” 2 p.m. \$22-52. CNU Freeman

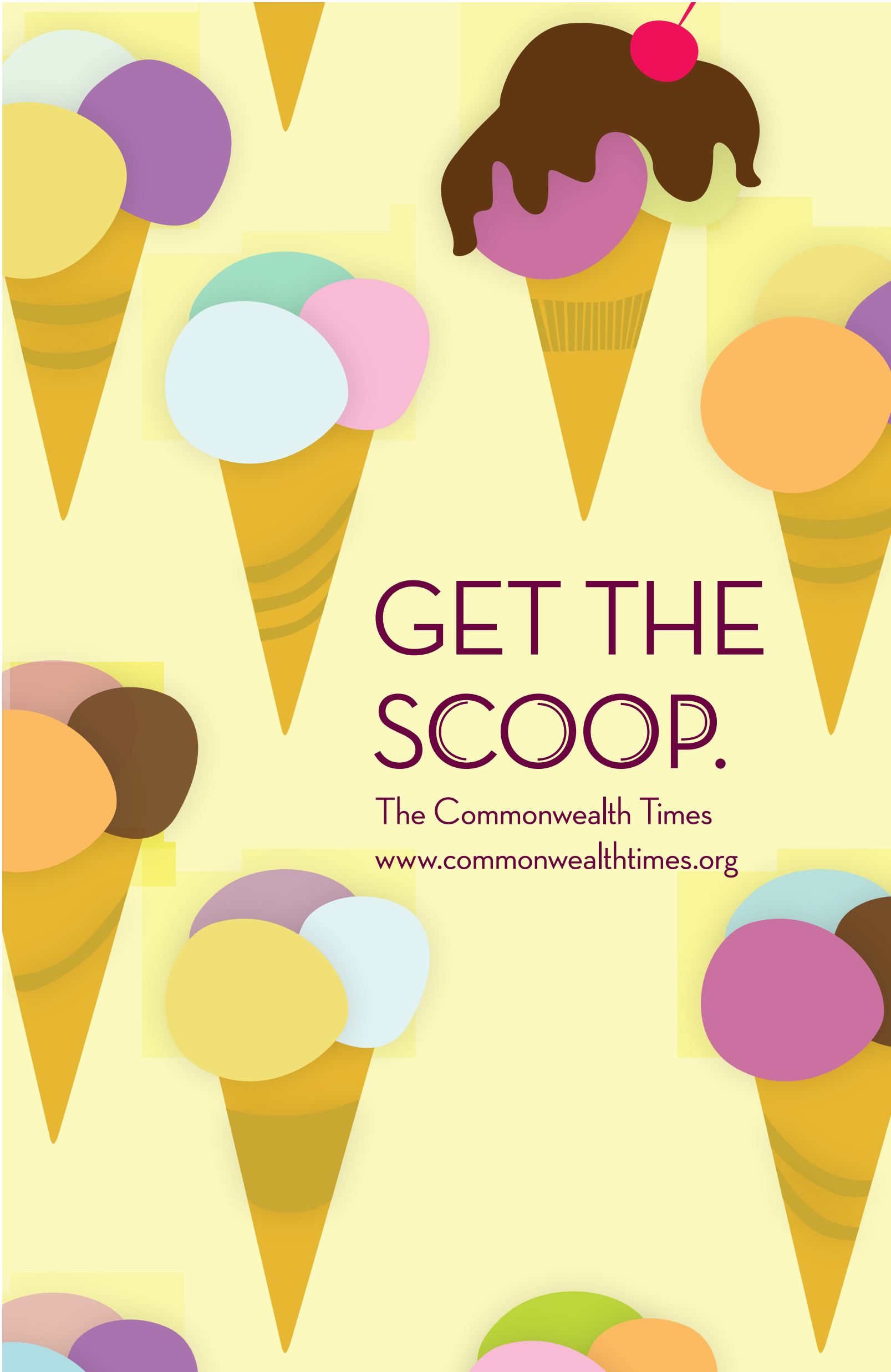
Center. 1 University Place. Newport News.

Arts Café: Enjoy a changing array of live music and activities. Light hors d’oeuvres. Included in regular admission. 8 p.m. \$7.50. Third Thursday each month. Peninsula Fine Arts Center. 101 Museum Drive. Newport News. (757) 596-8175.

Sunday 3/7

Battle of Hampton Roads Juries Art Competition: In commemoration of the 148th anniversary of the great clash of the ironclads, The Mariners’ Museum and NOAA’s Monitor National Marine Sanctuary are sponsoring a juried youth art competition. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. \$13 for students. The Mariners’ Museum/USS Monitor Center. 100 Museum Drive. Newport News. (757) 596-2222.







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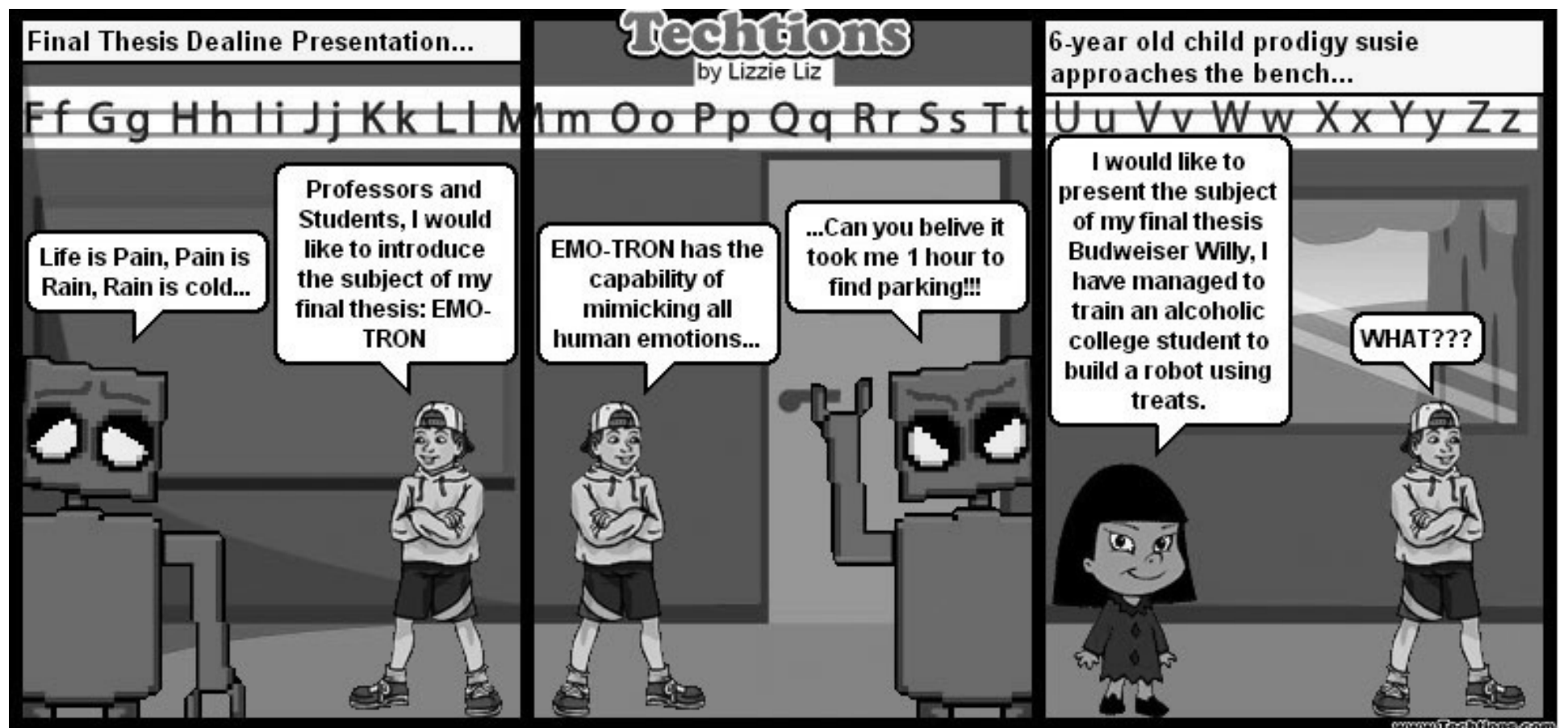
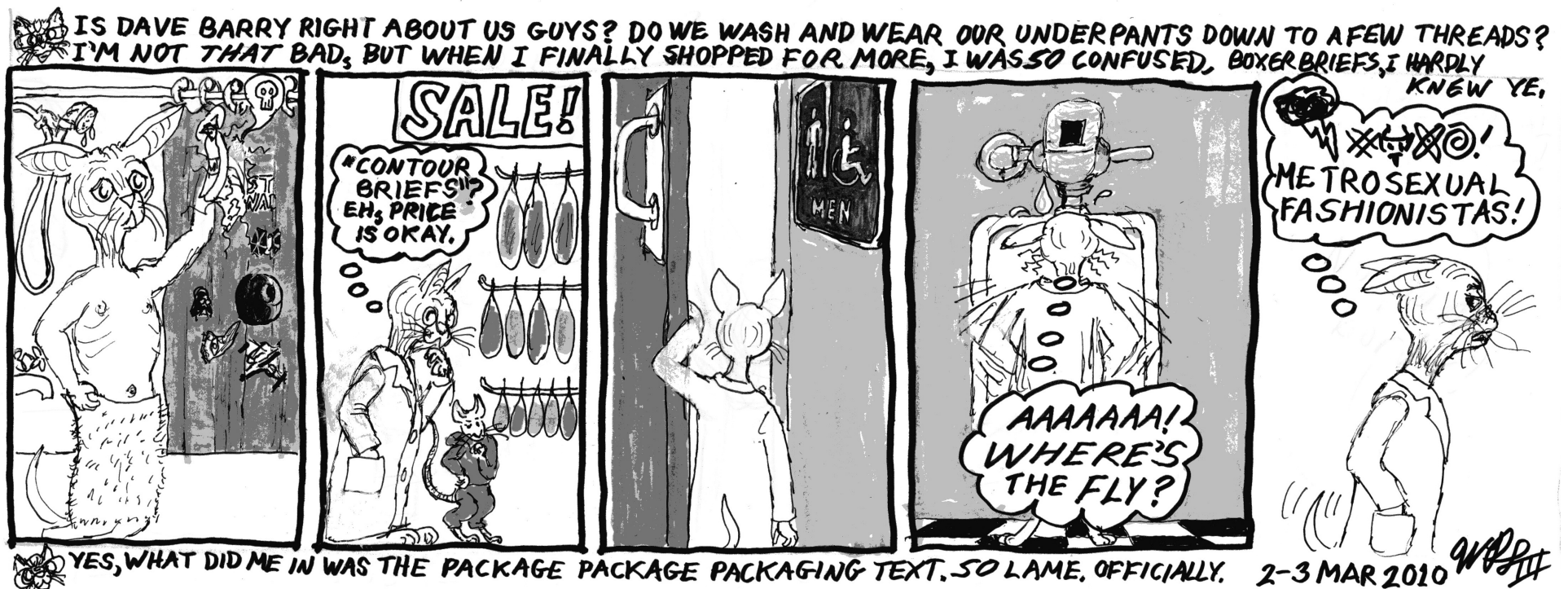
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comics

Pizza from Scratch

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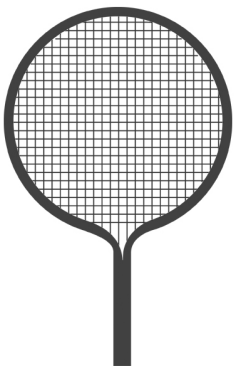




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Badminton

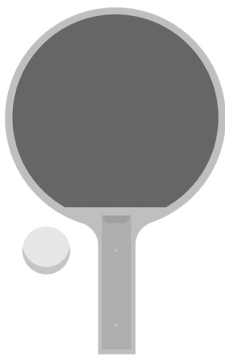
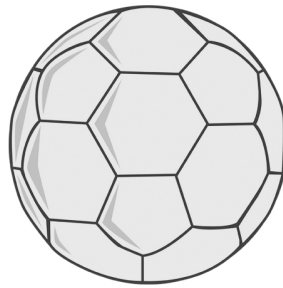
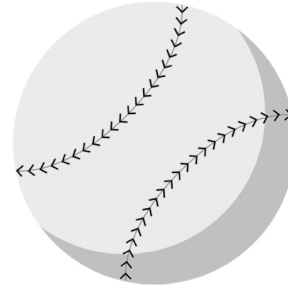


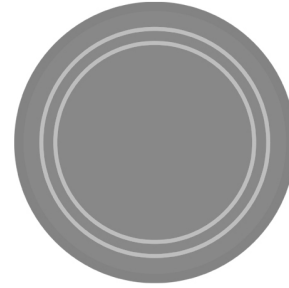
Table Tennis



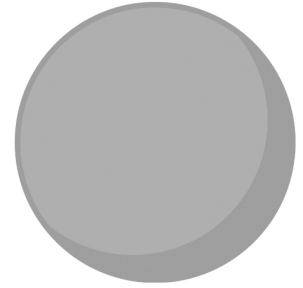
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Roberto Curtis
Executive Editor

Caroline Evertz
Production Manager

Thursday, March 4, 2010

commonwealthtimes.org · CT17



opinion

Busted budgets

COLIN HANNIFIN

Columnist

There is little question that this massive economic downturn has been more than hard on most of us. Most of the American population has suffered greatly, and us college students are feeling the heat as much as – if not more than – everyone else. While prices of some goods have dropped, tuition keeps on rising, bills are piling up, and jobs have been few and far between. College kids are especially feeling the crunch, with older, more experienced workers hitting the job market, asking for lower wages than they would've in years past—because, in this economy, any job is a keeper.

If there's one thing this economy has taught us college students, it's how to budget. Some of us figure out how to get by with minimal income, yet, we still manage to have our fun when Friday and Saturday nights roll around.

However, if there's one thing the economy teaches the government, it's apparently how to forget every basic principle of budgeting. As states struggle to balance their budgets, as they are federally mandated to do, the federal government writes check after check, funded by massive debt.

This seems especially true of the federal government under Obama. In 2008 – George W. Bush's last year – the budget deficit was \$459 billion. This is an outrageous amount, but consider it compared to 2009 numbers: a \$1.4 trillion budget deficit—three times as much.

The largest expenses laid out by the federal government are not toward economic recovery. They are mandatory outlays, which the federal government is legally required to pay regardless of the economy or any other conditions, unless there is new legislation. These mandatory outlays include Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and various other programs (like unemployment, federal retirement, and Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac). According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO),

the big three (Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid) cost the government a whopping \$1.4 trillion dollars—68% of all mandatory spending.

The scariest thing is that we are in no way near ceasing this spending. Because of the increasing elderly population and ever-increasing lifespan, the CBO projects that total mandatory spending will increase to \$3 trillion by 2020, with \$2.67 trillion (88.6 percent) being dedicated to the big three.

That's not the only problem facing the federal budget. As deficits continue to pile up, so does the debt. The government funds it largely using bonds. In years past, debt the government owed was to its own citizens. Much of it still is; but an increasing amount is now to those abroad.

This could spell trouble in the not-so-distant future. According to the Guardian, China and Japan ended 2009 sitting on \$755 billion and \$769 billion, respectively. However, China sold \$34 billion worth of US bonds in December of 2009, an indication that they are uncomfortable enough with the economic position of the United States, and feel they are powerful enough to do something about it.

So what's the proper response? Live within your limits. As a nation, we seemed to have gone away from that basic economic rule as credit card bills pile up and houses are foreclose.

One of the problems, though, is when you give something to your citizens, it's hard to take it back. Social Security, accounting for almost a third of mandatory spending itself, has become an unnecessary drain on the economy. There's always talk of privatizing Social Security. It is simply unsustainable at this point, but is that not what retirement accounts are for? Franklin Roosevelt implemented it as a way to boost spending during the Great Depression—somewhat ironic, since it didn't issue a payment until long after the start of WWII—effectively ending the Great Depression. At some point, the government will need to stop Social Security gradually and let citizens know, because many are counting on



Patrice Dalesandro Illustration

it for retirement.

Even Medicare and Medicaid seem unsustainable as more pills appear on the market. I don't mean to trivialize people's conditions, but the cost of drugs is somewhat extreme—especially when places like Wal-Mart can offer generic drugs for as cheaply as \$5 a month.

While Obama's spending freeze sounds great, as does his plan to cut spending – according to the Office of Management and Budget, they've already found a way to cut \$23 billion – there has not been enough cutting in my opinion. After all, no matter how much we 'freeze,' we'll still have to adjust costs for those departments integral to national security, like the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security. This government needs vast re-organization on a national scale. We don't just need to find ways to nickel and dime back the budget by eliminating programs, we need to find a way to eliminate entire departments. We need to vastly scale back that for which the national government is responsible. There seems to be no way to realistically balance this federal budget – barring large tax increases on everybody (political suicide essentially) – that does not drastically decrease the federal government. The only question remains is; who has the gall to do it?

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ROBERTO
CURTIS

Executive Editor

ERIC
HILL

Opinion Editor

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Letter to the editor

When reading Mr. Kramer’s letter, “Where’s the fiscal responsibility?” March 1, 2010, I was at first struck with his plausible arguments. Unfortunately, before long the political talking points started coming out; by the end, the same tired old shibboleths poured off the page. That is this series of mantras about poor business being so hampered by the very totalitarian capitalism it has created. And government being this evil menace interested only in amassing power and wealth on the backs of corporations, let alone the poor working people. It’s a set of pious platitudes we’ve been hearing for 30 years: jobs, deregulation, jobs, cut taxes, jobs—ad nauseum. Mr. Kramer and his ilk need to do several things, not least of which is to read some American history wherein he will discover that business is not really capable of policing itself. It requires rules and government monitoring to maintain that proverbial level playing field on which any American is supposed to be free to achieve. He will learn that taxes have not driven jobs overseas; rather, the lust for profits has done so. In case he hadn’t heard, the eight million jobs lost during the recent financial unpleasantness are NOT coming back. Economists of every stripe are certain of that.

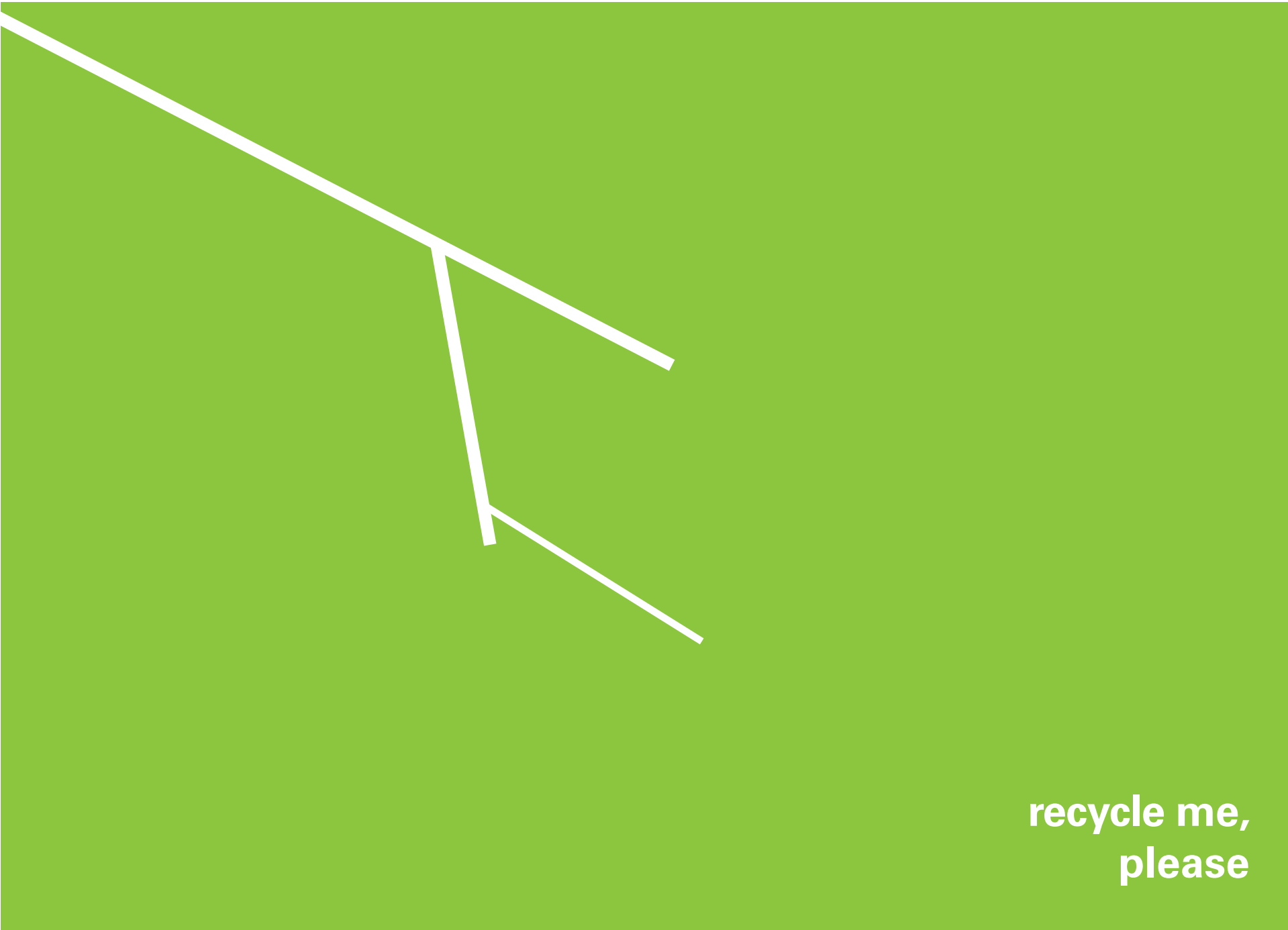
What’s to take their place? Perhaps if Americans are willing to work for \$1 per hour (like their overseas counterparts), business might surely bring some of those positions back here. One day, when we realize how foolish it is to have an economy that is 70% dependent on consumer spending, we might see that government’s role is quite necessary in altering this situation. We’ve stopped manufacturing and produce “service” instead—whatever that is supposed to mean. We also produce “financial instruments” that we sell to the rest of the world; not products, not goods, not tangible assets. It’s a mess. No, Mr. Kramer, we will NOT prosper if we let the free market run its course. We have that tee shirt already. We need to get to some deeper foundational basics than that old saw.

Eric Hill’s point is well taken (as I read it): what kind of government do we want, really and truly? Tossing around talking points is not the way to go; tossing around genuine ideas IS the way to go. We need desperately to have an honest conversation about what needs to be done to preserve this country. We do NOT need more politicians jockeying for political advantage at our expense. If we are willing to

sell our honor for phrases and catchy slogans without substance, then we will reap what we deserve. Right here in Virginia we’re hearing about tolls as “user fees” for riding on the highways. By any definition, a toll is a tax—but we’ve heard forever and a day that there will be no taxes raised in this state. If we hear it long enough, will we believe it? Will that make it true as we pay the tolls on I-95 and I-64, knowing they are not taxes, but user fees? Have we become that trapped in doublespeak to such an extent that we can’t see the truth any longer? We need to recognize that the government IS the people – it is US – and unless we are willing to speak with one another and LISTEN to one another, we’re finished. A banana republic with nukes is not what the Founders had in mind, I don’t think, but a country that grows and develops with the times is. We’ve got some changes to make and we need ideas, not talking points. And then we need the will and desire to carry them through to fruition. It is a daunting challenge.

Stan Kustesky is a professor in the English department.

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