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editor's note

When we selected this issue's theme in November, the topics on all our minds were the election and ensuing political issues. We found ourselves so passionately talking about certain topics that we felt we had no other choice than to publish these controversial topics in Klipsun. Some people on the Klipsun staff expressed concerns about publishing a political issue so long after the election. We decided, however, that just because the election was over didn't mean we had forgotten the issues.

Politics are personal. They affect our everyday lives, from paying taxes to checking out library books, and they affect our futures, from having the right to choose to traveling the world. For this issue, we tried to ensure each story was as objective as possible and covered a wide range of issues that affect each U.S. citizen personally.

We hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as we did and that it sparks a passion in you to get involved and stand up for your beliefs. If you have any questions, comments or story ideas, please call 360.650.3737 or e-mail at klipsunwwu@hotmail.com.

*The Klipsun staff is not taking any political stance by publishing these stories.*

Best wishes.

Jeanna Barrett, Editor-in-Chief
Annalisa Leonard is a journalism student in the public relations sequence who hopes to graduate at the end of next year. This winter, she will study abroad in London, where she plans to visit Buckingham Palace, drink tea and acquire a British accent.

Gil Ventura would like to express his deepest appreciation to everyone who helped with the story. May freedom, liberty and equality ring true in America. He would like to say to Mom, Dad, Cienna and Glenn, "I love you more than words could express. Thank you for being my rock(s) and supporting me every time I needed you. I am forever indebted to your love and kindness."

Jack Carr is a senior journalism major in the public relations sequence. He would like to thank all the people involved with this article for their honesty and cooperation. He also would like to thank his good friends, Rhiannon "Rhi Do" Andreini and Jeffrey "Mr. Bojangles" Christopher, for instilling in him a passion for politics that he never knew he had.

Connor Clark-Lindh is an environmental journalism senior. His article is about... well — sex. Personally a fan of sex, he believes people should discuss it more often. He hopes his article will encourage people to talk about their feelings regarding sex and realize many different ways to tango exist. He wants everyone to believe in his or her choices, get checked and use protection.
Illustrating political commentary can often stir controversy and criticism, but retaining a sense of humor to encourage public dialogue has its benefits. Kathryn Barcom profiles a local political cartoonist who has caused a ripple in the tide of community opinion and has enjoyed every moment of it. Photos by Kathryn Barcom and illustrations by Allen Peterson.

"Editorial cartoons ought to be controversial, but they also need to present intelligent viewpoints. Allen Peterson merely serves up simplistic vitriol and his cartoons are an embarrassment to The Herald and the Bellingham community. I appreciate his graphic arts talent, but his editorial page contributions are a combination of shallow thought coupled with an astonishing amount of viciousness."
— George Mustoe, Bellingham.

The above excerpt, published in The Bellingham Herald, is one example of the critical responses graphic artist Allen Peterson regularly received while creating political cartoons for The Bellingham Herald.

The Herald hired Peterson as a graphic artist in 1987 and allowed him to draw political cartoons from time to time. The newspaper published most of his political cartoons between 2000 and 2003.

Peterson, who received a variety feedback on his cartoons, says he enjoys both positive and negative critique. Whether the targeted audience is Republican or Democrat, he says the challenge for a cartoonist is to successfully portray an entire political issue in a single cartoon. Peterson considers both information and entertainment to be the heart of political cartooning.
“If you can take the information from several articles and humorously convey an accurate message in one drawing, you’ve created a great cartoon,” Peterson says over the busy office sounds of clicking keyboards and shuffling paper.

Peterson’s section of The Bellingham Herald office is distinctly his own. The space is not lit by typical fluorescent ceiling lights. Instead, a large golden living room lamp sits above his computer monitor, slightly hanging over the front edge. The lamp, heavy enough to belong on an end table, provides a soft glow to Peterson’s work area. The dim, warm light creates a comfortable feeling to Peterson’s corner of the office, separating him from the mechanical drone of the fast-paced Herald workers.

A large, wooden drawing board faces a back wall next to a set of drawers filled to the brim with cartoons, comics and drawings. Peterson rummages through the wooden drawers, finding examples of his cartoons — some political, some not. One by one, he pulls out a caricature drawing of his parents; cartoons of an evil demon holding the world in its claws and Santa Claus losing his beard, and a comic book where one of his cartoons was published.

Peterson retrieves a giant, multi-paneled cartoon called “Jack-o-Land,” spoofing Michael Jackson’s Neverland Valley Ranch. Each panel shows Jackson holding his baby over the edge of a different theme park ride.

“The difficulty in cartooning is coming up with something no one else has come up with and, at the same time, choosing a topic everyone is familiar with,” Peterson says. “I mean, how many ways can you draw Michael Jackson holding his baby over the edge of a building? But it’s still funny, and it’s fun to see ways that other cartoonists portray some of the same issues.”

Peterson took several art classes before he graduated from Western in 1987. He taught a cartooning class at Western a few years ago for a professor on leave. Peterson says drawing has been a huge part of his life, and he would eventually like to teach it regularly.

He loves to draw faces because he says they are easy. Some of his profiles start out as realistic portraits but slowly evolve into cartoons.

“The best things to draw are facial irregularities,” Peterson says. “You can start with a detailed face and then draw the nose slightly larger or the eyes a little more squinty.”

He grabs a clean, white sheet of paper.

“(Sen. John) Kerry has a great face,” Peterson says. “He has a big nose and kind of saggy eyes.”

Peterson begins to sketch Kerry’s nose and smiles.

“(President George W.) Bush has a pleasant face, but people tend to draw him with big ears,” he says. “Somehow it works.”

Completing Kerry’s face, Peterson moves on to draw Bush. He says Bush is harder to draw because he has fewer facial irregularities. Peterson’s hand quickly glides over the paper, sketching and shading until the picture is finished. The drawing takes only a minute to complete.

Though the process of political cartooning varies, Peterson takes roughly six hours to create a cartoon for publication.

He begins by determining the content of the cartoon and deciding whether it should be single or multi-paneled. He then lightly sketches stick figures and places word bubbles.
“One of the most common mistakes is not leaving enough room for the word bubbles,” he says.

If Peterson has drawn the subject before, he looks at his previous cartoons for ideas. If the character is new, he searches online and in books and magazines for images.

Peterson sketches the scenario multiple times until the cartoon makes sense. Once he likes the way it looks, he draws it again on Bristol Board, which is thicker than paper but thinner than cardboard.

“Other than the rush that happens when you first get a good idea, inking is the most rewarding part of cartooning,” Peterson says.

The final process varies depending on what tools the artist uses, he explains.

“A lot of artists use India Ink and a crow-quill pen,” he says, picking up his red crow-quill pen.

The pen does not have a feather but has an old-fashioned metal tip. “You can press down on the paper like this,” he says, gently pushing on the pen. “That way, you can change the thickness of the line as you draw.”

Peterson says cartoonists commonly use paintbrushes to vary the weight of the line. He prefers using a brush to finish his cartoons, while other artists use a variety of pens, brushes and ink.

Peterson enjoys creating artwork but says understanding the political issues behind the cartoons is equally important.

“A political cartoon is a political opinion,” Peterson says. He explains that opinions, especially those in news settings, should be embraced instead of rejected, and for a cartoon to come across as politically biased or slanted is not wrong.

“That’s why political cartoons are on the opinion page,” he says with a little laugh.

In 2002, The Bellingham Herald published one of Peterson’s controversial cartoons with “How Gay Extremists View the World” printed underneath a picture of two bathroom sinks. A sink labeled “straight” and another labeled “gay” played off the idea of racial segregation in the 1950s. Peterson says left-wing community members took offense to the cartoon, deeming it wrong to make light of the comparison between racism and discrimination against homosexuality.

“I actually have some gay friends who thought it was funny,” says Peterson, smoothing his dark goatee and mustache with his hand. “They didn’t get why other people in the community were so upset.”

But Peterson says a certain element of debate is healthy for the community to provoke political awareness. He says that by glancing at a cartoon, a reader should immediately get a sense of the artist’s opinion and the issue at hand.

Though many community members view Peterson as a hard-core conservative, he does not completely identify with any particular political party. Peterson, who considers himself to fall somewhere between moderate...
and conservative, is not a registered Republican or Democrat. Instead, he says he is more philosophy-driven than partisan.

"Some people will argue for a particular candidate whom everyone knows is wrong just to support a particular party," Peterson says. "It's ridiculous when people are more partisan than anything else."

Peterson says he reads numerous articles and talks to several people before putting his ideas on paper. Among his favorite authors is G.K. Chesterton, who he says influences him the most. Peterson says Chesterton is socially conservative but economically liberal.

Carolyn Nielsen*, The Bellingham Herald's former opinions page editor for five years, recalls Peterson's obsession with the author.

"Allen will quote G.K. Chesterton until you are blue in the face," Nielsen laughs. "When he starts quoting Chesterton, I put my hands over my ears and run away screaming."

When she was Peterson's editor, Nielsen, 33, often disagreed with Peterson's opinions but regularly encouraged him to publish political cartoons. She says she admired his ability to take criticism, and saw him as a knowledgeable and talented asset to The Herald's opinion page. Since Nielsen left her job in September, Peterson has not been able to publish as many cartoons.

"Carolyn was such a great editor," Peterson says. "Even though we don't see eye to eye on a lot of topics, she has always supported my cartoons."

Nielsen says she had to ask Peterson to modify some of his cartoons, but she only had to reject one from the opinion page.

"(The cartoon) was of the Bellingham City Council members depicted as Nazis," Nielsen says. "I had to eliminate it because there's nothing humorous about Nazis, and I didn't think it was fair to make that connection, even as a joke."

Nielsen says the purpose of a political cartoon is to inform, using entertainment as a medium.

She says political cartoons are important because they have the potential to reach someone who might otherwise not read an entire story. Successful cartoonists possess an understanding of both political and community topics, she says.

"Anyone who has talked to Allen Peterson for five minutes knows that politics are a central part of his life," Nielsen says. "That passion is what makes him a good cartoonist."

She says Peterson has a gift for pointing out hypocrisy, "but his objective perspective and ability to make fun of himself keeps him from being too critical."

Peterson's cartoons drew a large amount of controversy because Bellingham is a fairly liberal area. Some community members would write letters, while others would visit The Bellingham Herald to complain.

"Peterson was always quick to come out from the back of the office to talk to a critic," Nielsen says.

She says he encouraged dialogue and had fun listening to what people had to say.

"I don't think he wanted to convert others so much as he wanted to explain his point of view," Nielsen says.

In cartooning, Peterson says a fine line exists between expressing a personal opinion and an opinion of the masses. Instead of merely representing those sharing similar viewpoints, Peterson says he likes to make light of any relevant or hypocritical issue through his drawings. Even when Peterson likes a particular political figure or celebrity, he will not refrain from drawing a cartoon if he thinks it would be entertaining or informational.

Though the majority of his cartoons are based on extensive research, some are based on beliefs.

"Even cartoons based on beliefs have facts to back them up," Peterson says. "If someone complains, I like to show them where I got the information."

Nielsen says Peterson would not be doing his job if everyone agreed with his cartoons.

"I think that people are surprised when they meet Allen," Nielsen says. "I think a lot of people expect to see a staunchy Republican in a suit when in reality he's a wacky, funny and interesting person."

Nielsen says Herald employees knew Peterson as the office clown. She recalls an instance when he pretended to be Ronald Reagan and another time when he came to work wearing a disco suit.

Peterson's long-time friend, David Wolfe, 53, has known Peterson for 17 years and shares his interests in scuba diving and church.

"Allen is more open-minded than most people I know," Wolfe says. "He's a very artistic person and is talented enough to combine humor with what is going on in the world."

Wolfe, who agrees with many of Peterson's political views, says they talk about politics from time to time. He says Peterson is always willing to listen and share what he is reading and thinking. Wolfe says he appreciates Peterson's patience and ability to stimulate interest in people with both similar and opposing views.

"Some people have a hard time getting past his politics," Nielsen said. "But Allen is always listening, always learning and will stop anything to help someone else."

*Carolyn Nielsen is a recent addition to the journalism department faculty. She had nothing to do the editing process of this story.
The relationship between religion and politics often can get hazy, with the issue of gay marriage caught in the middle. Janna Bronemann investigates the viewpoints of three Whatcom County residents with different stances on the issue.
On the first Tuesday of November, broadcasters announce on every main news channel that George W. Bush takes Ohio, indicating his second term of presidency. The media declare that Bush's focus on evangelical morals, such as his strong opposition to gay marriage, may have helped him win in a tight race. The conservative right-wings' faces glow with admiration and glory as they cheer for a president with similar moral beliefs. The liberal left-wings bow their heads in despair and mourn at a setback for Democrats. A straight, religious couple rejoices in their belief that pro-gay marriage activists likely will not threaten the sanctity of their marriage in the next four years. A gay couple loses hope that their relationship will ever be recognized by the state, and they grieve upon the realization that the public eye might never accept their love.

America seems torn between what rights to gays should receive. The debate is whether politics should recognize and intervene with this generally religious topic. The issue of gay marriage is an example of how the relationship between religion and politics often is hazy. While some people allow their religious beliefs to overlap with their political decisions, others say moral or religious beliefs should have a place separate from politics. For this reason, the moral debate of gay rights may be far from a compromise between liberals and conservatives.

The wrestling match over morals and human rights begins on Bellingham ground — a Whatcom County council member faces off against a Western student. A reverend enters the mat and tugs between both sides. Who will pull out a victory in this moral/political debate?

From the mind of a reverend

On a cold, fall morning, dew moistens the grass, and a crisp breeze fills the air around Garden Street's First Presbyterian Church. The stone building stands tall on a hill overlooking downtown Bellingham and Bellingham Bay. At 8 a.m. on a Thursday, the antique stained-glass windows in the church attract only natural light as the church is practically vacant. A little bit of light shines through the back door — the standard-sized door looks like an ant hole compared with the size of the towering church.

Inside the door that leads to the basement, heat circulates the room. Rev. Doug Bunnell sits at an empty desk in the center of the practically spotless, plain room, which resembles a large dance hall. Two red, oak pews are against one of the walls. Across the room is a stage about the size of a large chalkboard with two life-sized scarecrows lying against the wall. A group of bulletin boards and a piano decorate the basement, which could be confused with an elementary school classroom.

Bunnell, with a clean-shaven face, a smooth bald head and a small gold hoop dangling from his left ear, may be mistaken for a Harley rider mixed with Mr. Clean, but his soft demeanor gives away his cover.

As the senior pastor at the church, Bunnell is responsible for studying the Bible, preaching, praying and leading people in a positive spiritual direction.

Bunnell, 38, was thrilled when he discovered that he could study Jesus as a career at the church ministry and work with students, his true passion.

"I am very much a Jesus freak," Bunnell says with a smirk. "I just love talking, reading and studying about Jesus. I get very excited about who he is and who he was."

Bunnell sits relaxed in a plastic, white chair behind a metal school table and explains that his love for God revolves around his care for people.

Bunnell says people have their own means of representing the word of God and of achieving God's morals even if their intentions are not always explicit and their stances are opposing.

"There's so much hatred I hear on both (Republican and Democratic) sides," Bunnell says. "We seem a lot more divided these days than we've ever been."

Bunnell says he is neither a Republican nor a Democrat and he mostly just cares for humanity.

Regardless of the fact that many Christians may believe homosexuality is immoral and gays should not have any rights to a committed, long-term relationship, Bunnell has a different view.
"Being a bleeding heart and very justice-orientated, I am for civil rights for all no matter what sexual beliefs," Bunnell says.

Bunnell says the church should not marry homosexuals because the Bible notes that marriage is between a man and a woman. He says the church, on the other hand, should not force religious beliefs on a gay couple who want a lifelong commitment outside the church. He says the states should not regulate marriage that goes through the church and that homosexuals should be granted the right to civil unions, which is a legally recognized commitment.

Bunnell says his denomination does not allow him to perform gay marriage ceremonies, but even if he had the choice, he would not officiate a gay wedding.

"I want to be obedient to what the Bible says," Bunnell says. "Jesus Christ does play a pivotal role in marriage."

Bunnell says the First Presbyterian Church does not have one specific view on gay marriage because it has an extremely diverse group of followers with different opinions on social issues.

"We're merely Christian," Bunnell says. "We have a broad spectrum across the board."

Bunnell says he often argues with others in his church, however, because of his stance on homosexuality and his belief that a strong call for justice toward equal rights must be made. He says that even if God defines marriage as an act between a man and a woman and that the homosexual lifestyle is not wholeness under God's eyes, God still loves everyone for who they are.

"Jesus loves homosexuals," he says genuinely. "The Bible calls us to love. How do we balance what to love and rightness and wrongness?"

Bunnell says American society battles with so many impurities, such as consumerism, gluttony, oppression of the poor and pornography, that for him to judge homosexuality is difficult.

"I wrestle with the question of what's right and what's wrong, what's legal and what's not," Bunnell says. "The Bible is not black and white."

Politician by mind, activist by heart

Down the bare, long, stark hallway at Whatcom County's courthouse lies a dull, quiet office filled with a stale smell resembling a dentist office. A wooden, swinging door separates the reception desk from a row of cubicles and offices. Barbara Brenner, a Whatcom County Council woman, sits in a cluttered, private, corner office.

Brenner sits poised next to a large desk containing endless stacks of loose papers, binders and textbooks. An accumulation of file cabinets occupy any open space against the teal walls.

Brenner, 58, joined the Whatcom County Council for her 13th year, part of her fourth term, this past year, but she says she has been actively involved in politics for 20 years. Brenner became interested in politics when she realized that the important issues affecting her community needed to be recognized.

"I was an activist before I was on the council," Brenner says. "I guess things do happen, it just goes slow."

Now, as a council member, Brenner is responsible for dealing with issues such as land zoning in the county and public complaints.

"We make laws and sit in judgment on certain cases that come before us," Brenner says. "We've got quite a bit of responsibility."

Brenner, in black winter boots, gray Stone-washed jeans and an oversized red sweatshirt may not look like a crisply dressed politician, but she speaks seriously and professionally about her concern for the nation's current debate about gay rights and marriage.

Despite what many religious groups believe, Brenner says gays should have the right to state-recognized marriages.

"I think gay people are just like everyone else, and they should have equal rights," Brenner says. "I don't support (gay marriage) or not support it. To me, it's as valid as any other marriage. Marriage is marriage. I don't see what the issue is."

Brenner says she has friends and relatives who are gay and she believes that being gay is not a choice because no one would choose to live a more difficult lifestyle over fitting into society.

Brenner sarcastically comments about an evangelical's claim that God says homosexuals are immoral.

"I'd like to know when they talk to God," Brenner jokingly says. "They have some special telephone to God! God made everybody. He made (homosexuals) the way they are. Who would choose to be gay?"

Brenner says she thinks politics should step away from intervening in a moral debate between gays and religion.

"People should just accept people the way they are," she says. "Unfortunately, politics and morality always get intertwined. It's about arrogance and people's opinions. We talk about the separation of church and state, but I don't think that is possible for some people. Everybody has some values, which they bring with them into politics."

Brenner says she believes in God, but she does not practice organized religion. As for politics, she says she falls between many of the stances affiliated with specific political parties. For example, she says she supports a woman's right to choose but is against gun control. Brenner says she is independent because she has diverse views.
"I am kind of an anomaly," she says. Regardless of Brenner's blended political views, she is sure about one thing — religion and politics should not mix when it comes to gay rights.

A theology-driven Catholic

Down a side street off Samish Way lies a pale yellow and white Victorian style house. In front of the house is a faded red, white and blue rock with a painted cross. Behind the front door is the home of seven Catholic men.

Sitting in the living room full of Catholic paraphernalia is Western senior Casey Karbowski, a devout Catholic. To the left is a bare white wall with a dangling, oversized wooden rosary. To the right is an altar with a shrine of images and models dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In the kitchen, a bumper sticker posted on the refrigerator reads, "Silence Kills Babies," in reference to pro-life morals.

Karbowski, a philosophy major, sits poised at the dining-room table in a green Nike sweatshirt and khaki shorts. With his chocolate-brown hair nicely trimmed and his face cleanly shaven, he speaks about abandoning the liberal views he had as a not-so-strict Christian and converting to Catholicism for stricter morals.

Karbowski decided that the theology he was learning about in his philosophy classes made sense to him, so he started looking to the church for guidance. He was baptized as a Catholic on June 8, 2003.

"Gradually, I examined the church's views on theological issues and came to believe that the fullness of truth is found in the church," Karbowski says. "That (liberal) viewpoint that a lot of Christians take did not make sense to me. I changed to be more conservative on social issues."

Karbowski, president of the Western For Life anti-abortion group, explains that Catholics believe that certain sins or intrinsic evils are wrong no matter what the circumstances. These evils consist of same-sex marriage, abortion, human cloning, fetal stem-cell research and euthanasia.

"It's something that is evil independent of the circumstances and can never be morally willed as a means to an end," Karbowski says.

Karbowski says that although homosexuality is an intrinsic evil, the act of practicing homosexuality, rather than the person, is immoral.

"I don't believe that there is anything immoral about homosexual disposition," Karbowski says. "They are the product of developmental and social factors."

Karbowski compares homosexuality to bestiality and incest and says he has seen studies that show a correlation between homosexuality and pedophilia.

"I think that indulging in those types of desires is wrong," Karbowski says.

Karbowski explains that even though it must be hard for a homosexual to repress his or her feelings, he knows that he or she can control those emotions. He says the gay lifestyle is freethinking and destructive. Karbowski says that as a Catholic who does not believe in using contraceptives, he has to have a lot of sexual control, but gays do not have to worry about getting pregnant from sex, so they can act more freely on their sexual desires.

"When you're gay, you don't have control over all this stuff," Karbowski says. "You can just go out and have sex, and it leads to destruction."

He says gay marriage is immoral because of the word of God, which he refers to as universal laws for all people to follow.

"It's an issue that reason can settle, not just God," Karbowski says. "We do have an important sensibility to judge actions."

Karbowski says that religion should be used as one's most powerful source for making political decisions. He says citizens should have more power in making political decisions that are associated with morals.

"I feel that the judicial branch is far too powerful in the political system we have," he says. "Moral decisions that are fundamental cannot be decided by the courts."

Karbowski says his moral beliefs largely influence his political viewpoints because his faith drives his everyday choices.

"In the end, all that really matters is heaven," Karbowski says with assurance. "Everything takes a back seat to that. Everything I do is ultimately oriented toward God and heaven. Faith without verse is dead."

And the winner is…?

The fight goes on. Whether one believes in civil unions, marriage or no relationship acknowledgment for gays at all, one thing is certain — this is not a debate that will be resolved anytime soon, and no side is giving up on its stance.

Although some argue that homosexuality is immoral, maybe the real question is whether depriving citizens of a right to marriage is moral. But who knows whether asking a politician or religious leader to step outside his or her moral beliefs to make universal decisions is reasonable?

With conservative Republicans running the majority of the House and Senate for the next term, gay activists may have little hope in the near future. So for now, this wrestling match may have to be a draw.
In a time when the Internet is rapidly expanding and becoming an integral, daily part of people’s lives, a new form of Internet communication has emerged. Blogging gives new meaning to freedom of speech and reinvents the information superhighway. Kenna Hodgson explores the history of blogging and just what it means to blog.

Matt Drudge, a little known news junkie, scooped Newsweek and broke the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal story. While Newsweek held the story to verify facts gathered by reporter Michael Isikoff, Drudge reported the controversial information. He did not publish it in another magazine or a newspaper but instead posted it on his blog. At the time, this was shocking, but today, news stories and rumors propelled by everyday citizens rapidly circulate the Internet.

America was founded on the principle of freedom of speech, but media corporations and newspapers have had a firm grasp on information for decades. Now, from basements, office cubicles, campus dorm rooms and wherever the glow of a computer screen and familiar tapping of keys may be, come the voices of the people.

"We have entered an era vibrating with the din of small voices," Drudge said to the National Press Club on June 2, 1998. "Every citizen can be a reporter, can take on the powers that be. The difference between the Internet, television and radio, magazines and newspapers is the two-way communication. The Net gives as much voice to a 13-year-old computer geek like me as to a CEO or speaker of the house. We all become equal."

The word "blog" evolved from the term "Web log." A blog is a publicly accessible personal Web page that users frequently update. Many sites provide space for comments and links to other blogs, creating a massive online network. Anything goes on a blog — from personal daily journals, coffee obsessions, relationships and music to serious topics such as current events, politics and activism. Bloggers gather information in a variety of ways, including surfing the Web, reading other news sources and reporting on their own.

The Internet is democratizing information and engaging many people in discussion. Mainstream media moguls, politicians and activists are acknowledging the legitimate force behind computer screens throughout the country.

During the 2004 presidential election, bloggers became key media players and gained more attention than before. Throughout the heated election, stories filled the front pages of newspapers, television airwaves and blogs. From finger-pointing and name-calling to witty commentary and informed opinions, bloggers took many different approaches to election coverage.

Along with healthy commentary and legitimate stories, rumors about each candidate rapidly spread in the weeks before the election. President George W. Bush even addressed the Internet rumor about the draft reinstatement during the second presidential debate.

"I hear there's rumors on the Internet that we're going to have a draft," Bush said during the debate. "We're not going to have a draft, period."

According to a Nov. 4 Seattle Times article, some well-established bloggers received credentials to join the other more established press members at both the Democratic and Republican national conventions.

During election night, bloggers were glued to their computers, rapidly posting exit poll results and calling the election before other news sources dared. According to a Nov. 4 Washington Post article, The Drudge Report, a conservative blog, received nearly 1 million visitors, approximately 30,000 more than the online version of The New York Times, which drew 944,000 people.

Although personal blogs seem to be taking over the mainstream media's role of watchdog, criticism still surfaces.

"This is the kind of stuff we used to run in my aforementioned school newspaper, when the speculation surrounded who was going steady," former CBS news correspondent Eric Engberg wrote in a Nov. 8 cbsnews.com article. "The difference is that the bloggers aspire to being a force in our public life and claim to be at the forefront of the new political-media era."

Bellingham Herald government reporter Jon Gambrell says bloggers are not always as accurate as trained journalists. Gambrell says blogs have a place in the media; and he supports the First Amendment right to free speech, but some blog postings are outright libelous.

"It will be interesting to see what the legal ramifications, if any, will be," Gambrell says.

People are drawn to blogs, libelous or not, because the information is quickly posted in a more informal way and because they can participate. Many well-established newspapers and organizations, such as 'The Seattle Times, now have blogs on their Web sites.
On election night, The Bellingham Herald scattered reporters throughout town to blog on the night's events, and the information was then posted on its Web site.

"The Whatcom County Democrats gathered at Bellingham's Lakeway Inn, where bartenders said red wine and glasses of gin and tonic were the favorite beverages," Gambrell wrote in his post, titled "Party Supporters Drink It All In." "As Republican supporters gathered at Hampton Inn's Fox Hall, the drink of choice was Budweiser in cans, which was all gone as of 9:30 p.m."

Bremerton resident Caleb Wilson, 18, started blogging about politics two years ago. He updates his site, "Surgeon Generals Warning," three or four times a week.

"While blogging, you can be as real as you want without having to worry about appeasing anyone," Wilson says. "The Internet provides the best access to free speech, lucrative discussions and genuine opinions of real people who aren't paid to make a certain opinion look and sound pretty."

Not all blogs discuss politics. Some motivate citizens to join a cause. The Internet has drastically changed activism in the United States. Former Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean used the Internet to involve citizens in his campaign like no other candidate had before. He started a blog called "Democracy for America."

"(We) took the people seriously by engaging them and empowering them in the one place where they could meet him, the one place where the ubiquitous presence of television couldn't distort his message," Dean's campaign manager Joe Trippi writes in his book "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised."

Dean and Trippi founded "Democracy for America" to help gain support for the campaign, and after Dean dropped out of the race, the organization still remained a force for the Democratic cause.

"I'd seen for years that the ingredients were there for overthrowing a decaying political system and replacing it with something responsive and revolutionary," Trippi writes.

They created a Web site linked to Democracy for America called MeetUp.com, which organizes supporters by region. MeetUp allows supporters to gather together and discuss important issues.

Bellingham resident Dan Weekly is a member of "Democracy for America" and a MeetUp leader. Weekly sits in The Black Drop coffeehouse, surrounded by sage green walls and the smell of fresh coffee.

Weekly, 52, became involved in politics this year after listening to one of Dean's online recordings. The Internet makes it easier for people to be involved in the political process, Weekly says.

"It energizes people and brings them together to establish and maintain a politically active community," Weekly says.

Disillusionment with the current state of politics and the media is a common theme among many bloggers. It does not help that several journalists have recently been caught reporting untrue or fabricated news. Most notably, New York Times staff reporter Jayson Blair resigned in spring 2003 after committing frequent acts of journalistic fraud.

Bellingham resident John Servais, 63, started his political blog, "NorthWest Citizen.us," in 1995 before the term blog even existed.

Servais sits in Tony's Coffeehouse and passionately expresses his ideas about the Internet and politics.

"The Internet allows the power to shift down and engage people," he says.

Servais says he started his blog after local newspapers ignored important issues in the community.

"What you read and know about events is based on what corporate people, editors, publishers and reporters decide what you should know," Servais says. "They interpret what is happening, bring forward what they think is important and ignore what they don't."

With an enthusiasm for technology and limited news experience, Servais, a self-proclaimed activist, started investigating issues and voicing his concerns via the Internet. On average, Servais spends two hours for each posting, not including the research, which may include listening to experts, going to city council meetings and reading other blogs and news publications. Today, his blog receives approximately 200 to 400 visits a day.

Blogspheres, or community of blogs, have helped loosen the grip of the mainstream media, by providing a medium that reaches millions of people at a low cost with little technological experience required. Servais pays $200 a year for his Web site; automated publishing sites such as blogger.com and livejournal.com, however, now provide space to create a blog for free.

Regardless of whether the blogging revolution has widened and raised the speed limit of the information superhighway or if it just a roadblock in the way to an efficient media model, blogging is provoking change in the media system.

With the click of a mouse, the political world has changed, and it will not go back. The Internet is a medium without a hierarchy where anyone can ask questions, post comments and be engaged in political discussion.

"We can't have a democracy without dialogue," Servais says.
In 1969, Vietnam War protesters announced they were going to pour napalm on a live cat and put a match to it in Red Square at noon.

Word spread through Western's campus and into Bellingham. People began to verbally protest the act, calling it inhumane. The war protesters rebutted and asked, "You can't napalm a cat, but it's OK to napalm small children in Vietnam?"

Tension built until the day arrived, and the Vietnam protesters called it off. Their point was to provoke thought and create awareness about the innocent people dying from the napalm being dropped on their villages, recalls Bob Keller, a retired Fairhaven professor. Keller, 70, says the protesters made their point.

"I thought that was an example of a very genius, smart kind of protest," Keller says with a slight smile, raising his sharp eyebrows, which neatly frame the top of his black square-rimmed glasses.

From the Vietnam War to the current situation in Iraq, Western has participated in college protest. Two generations provide perspectives from then and now from a man who witnessed it and three girls who live it.

Protest: A formal declaration of disapproval or objection issued by a concerned person, group or organization.

During a time of war or political tension, the word "protest" is often heard throughout college campuses. Americans live in a country where the First Amendment is a basic right. Western students are allowed to protest in a peaceful manner and are monitored only if necessary. Jim Schuster, director of Viking Union Facilities, says that 30 years ago Western did not have University Police, but even today, officers rarely intervene with a protest or demonstration. When a
In these times of political division, many Americans who feel passionate about strong issues such as war and presidential candidates have chosen to voice their opinions through protest. From Vietnam to the current Iraq war, Lauren Fior recounts the history of protest on Western's campus. Photos by Lauren Fior.

situation arises in which police need to interfere, University Police call Schuster to receive approval.

At Western, Schuster says a process of approval is necessary in order to organize a protest or demonstration. Anyone can hold a sign, but if people want to have a large group demonstration in Red Square, they have to obtain approval to ensure the safety of the university, he says.

College protest – Vietnam War

Sitting on a tan leather chair with his hands clasped on his left leg and his feet tucked into charcoal gray slippers, Keller explains what Western was like during the Vietnam War and the ways people used and reacted to war protest.

In 1968, Keller left Olympic Community College in Bremerton, and he traveled to Western to teach history at Fairhaven College.

“1968 was one of the most dramatic and traumatic years in American history,” Keller says. “It was one shaking thing after another.”

In 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Robert Kennedy was assassinated, Richard Nixon was elected and violent rioting took place at the Democratic Convention in Chicago.

Keller sits tall in his seat and speaks seriously. His chin rests in his left hand inches away from his neatly trimmed gray mustache. He is dressed in a light-blue turtleneck and a plaid flannel shirt. His chocolate-colored pants fall just below his calves and his ribbed gray socks stretch up to meet them.

“Some people are shaken up about George (W.) Bush being re-elected, but that seems real mild compared to things that were happening in ’68,” Keller says.
The level of anger, upset and fear about Vietnam was much more intense than what is going on today, mostly because of the draft, Keller says.

"The reality of the war would become 10 times more real if the draft were active now," Keller says.

Keller removes his chin from his hand and crosses his arms. Behind him are hundreds of books about history, the environment, philosophy and other interests. The whistling hum of the heater fills the high-peaked room, and the green carpet and heavy pine woodwork create a warm atmosphere.

From 1968 to the end of the Vietnam War, Keller says a large percentage of the men on Western's campus attended school because it deferred the draft. "If they hadn't been in college, they would be in the military or Vietnam," Keller says. "Many of them didn't want to be either place, but it was a way of staying out of Vietnam."

If their grades fell, they dropped out of school or graduated, they might have received a letter from the Selective Service officiating draft deferment. Their service in the U.S. Army would last two years, Keller says.

Keller says most Americans were in Vietnam because of the draft. He believes soldiers fighting in the war in Iraq have been hired or volunteered.

"Public sentiment really began to turn against our involvement in Vietnam," Keller says. "By 1970, more people were sympathetic about getting out of there. It makes it easier to protest when people are sympathetic."

Keller says students at Western were smart about how they protested even when people were not sympathetic toward them.

"You can certainly get people's attention by burning a flag, but I don't think it will get them to stop and think very much." Keller says. "You will get them very upset."

Keller says creating anger through protesting is counterproductive because it does not help the situation.

Keller does not recall regulation on protesting or demonstrations at Western during Vietnam. He says campus officials never tried to silence anyone, and he does not remember police at campus protests. Protest organizers often want to get a reaction from people and want to get their attention, Keller says.

"If that's how you want to do it, you can walk down Holly Street naked," he says.

He remembers a person or group raising a Viet Cong flag in Red Square and getting people "all hot and bothered."

Keller believes nonviolent protest is much more effective. He says Western and other college campuses had teach-ins where professors and returning veterans would come to campus and lecture about the war. The idea for teach-ins came from a civil rights tactic known as sit-ins.

Keller agrees that protest is acceptable, but he also thinks it can wear a person down or burn them out. He says protesters need to find something positive that makes them feel hopeful and refreshed like volunteering or donating to charity.

College protest today

My back is aching; my bra's too tight
My booty's shaking from left to right
Shout it out; it's a revolution
Shout it out; can't take it no more.

A new wave of protesting explodes from the mouths of 16 women. The Radical Cheerleaders at Western shout songs and chants of anti-war in the Performing Arts Center Plaza on a crisp, sunny day. Behind them, the blue water of Bellingham Bay glistens through a patchwork of crimson-, pumpkin- and golden-colored leaves. The mid-afternoon sun casts shadows on the cheerleaders as they begin the non-partisan anti-war protest.

"(Protesting) is a powerful way to channel energy about issues," cheerleader Cara Pierson says.

The goal of the Radical Cheerleaders is to create social change through positive protesting, Pierson, 21, says. The group re-formed in February 2004 with eight members and has since doubled.

The group focuses on women's rights, queer rights, political activism, national and global issues, anti-globalization, anti-war and nonviolence.
The war has created a political atmosphere that has allowed them to cheer at anti-war protests and demonstrations. At Western's anti-war protest on Nov. 3, the Radical Cheerleaders performed a series of cheers to get people thinking about the climate of the war.

"Our goal is not to get people mad but to make them think," cheerleader Jasmine Sheldon says. "People hear us cheering, and they'll stop and listen and make a choice." Sheldon, 20, says the group focuses on non-confrontational, non-violent protest because it feels this type of protesting is more effective than getting people mad.

"Our friends at Western are Democrats, and she laughs while saying she doesn't know many Republicans on campus.

At Western, protests are not always done in the right way. Hardcastle, who briefly attended Western anti-war protest.

Her biggest concern about the war is people not supporting the troops. She has family in Iraq and finds it demoralizing when people do not care about them.

Before the presidential election, Democratic supporters on campus threw their opinions at her while Republican supporters nicely asked if she wanted a sticker.

The Radical Cheerleaders are not an exclusive group. Pierson is open to anyone joining, but each person should have similar views.

"We don't have any card-carrying Republicans in our group," Pierson says, laughing.

The cheerleaders are a socially liberal, open-minded group.

Right of mainstream

Western is not known for its high number of Republican students, but junior Kristen Hardcastle, a Republican, is not letting that change her views about the war in Iraq.
As the most watched country in the world, America receives a high level of scrutiny. Annalisa Leonard paints the political landscape of Nepal, Japan, France and Chile through five personal accounts from overseas, and examines how each cultural lens shapes views on American sentiment. Photo courtesy of Matthew Raul.

Western junior Matthew Paul, 20, says he recalls sitting alongside a dusty, dirt road on the outskirts of a small village in Nepal when a skinny, elderly man walked by, pointed to his dreadlocks and flashed a grin, cooing, "Bob Marley."

The pervasiveness of American culture is just one of the many issues Paul discusses with his friends and family since returning from his four-month study abroad trip to Nepal — one of the poorest, most unstable countries in the world.

Five students who have lived or studied abroad in Nepal, Japan, France and Chile all describe countries that enthusiastically embrace American culture while growing increasingly apprehensive of U.S. foreign policy. Reports of America's declining reputation with the rest of the world come alive in the stories of foreign students and Americans studying abroad.

Katmandu, Nepal

Sitting forward in a chair in Western's library, Paul rests his elbows on his knees as he describes his experiences in Nepal this past year. The sporadic flow of people walking past does not distract him as his light blue eyes grow serious.

In Nepal, the outcome of a power struggle changes the entire political system, not just the leader of the country, Paul explains.

Throughout the years, many political parties have ruled Nepal. So far, each has failed to provide the citizens in rural areas with better medical care, plumbing and electricity, Paul says. People are frustrated with the constant political instability, and they consequently are not outspoken about their political beliefs, he says.

"If you really talked to someone, you could get their ideas, but it wasn't a very open subject," Paul says.

Cupping his chin in his hand, he shifts in his chair and explains that people talked to were not strongly supportive of any particular political system.

When Paul was in Nepal, a communist group called the Maoists was trying to assert its power over the country. The Maoists demonstrated their dominance by bombing evacuated buildings and announcing "bhand days," which were days that the Maoists warned people to stay in their homes or they would be considered targets. Everyone stayed home from work and school those days, Paul says.

Despite the fact that American entertainment is popular in Nepal, many people had negative attitudes toward America's interactions with foreign countries, Paul says. His host grandmother would speak disapprovingly about America's involvement in Iraq when they watched the news.

Tokorozawa, Japan

Takuya Ochi is a native of Tokorozawa, Japan, a suburb of Tokyo. Ochi, 33, left his job at a Japanese software company roughly four years ago to pursue his dream of working for an international business company. Because English is the international business language, he decided to study in America to brush up on his English. In September 2000, Ochi began taking business and English classes at Western and graduated this past fall quarter.

Ochi says many Japanese are beginning to question America's foreign policy since the war in Iraq.

Leaning forward in a blue chair, Ochi says, "Our feelings towards Americans have been gradually changing since the war (in Iraq)."

Japan is dependent upon America for military support and economic stability, Ochi says as he passionately waves his arms and his dark eyes flash. Under the Japanese constitution, which America established after World War II, Japan can only use its army for self-defense purposes. The country is forced to rely on American forces for military support, he says.

"The United States went to war, and we need to obey," he says.

America is Japan's number one trading partner, so the relationship between America and Japan must remain stable for the sake of the Japanese economy, he says solemnly.

Many Americans discuss their opinions on a variety of subjects, he says. But in Japan, people avoid conflict by not talking about political and religious issues. A majority of Japanese people are not interested in politics and tend to focus on their jobs and their families, Ochi says.

Ochi says he likes the American way of discussing — or arguing — opinions because people can better understand one another.
Kumamoto, Japan

Kyoko Iwatake, 23, a recent Western alumna from rural Kumamoto, Japan, says her first impression of America was positive.

"I just fell in love with it," she says.

Americans are laid-back and forgiving, Iwatake says. In America, people get second chances and are free to say what they think and feel, while in Japan, many people feel conforming is easier, she says.

"I am very opinionated," Iwatake snorts happily.

Iwatake says America should not try to fix other countries' problems. Americans do not get a complete picture of world events because access to information is limited, she says, and because Americans don't see what is really going on, they are not sensitive to other countries. If America were located in the center of Western Europe, American people would be more concerned with events and politics in other countries and their effects, instead of focusing on domestic issues, she says. Iwatake says the size of a country and how its people solve problems are directly connected.

"Because (Japanese people) live in such a small, isolated place, our way of thinking is much more narrow and more conservative," Iwatake says.

In America, people tend to examine a wider range of possible solutions and think of issues on a much grander scale than Japanese people, she says.

"My host dad would turn to me and say, 'You're losing allies.' " — Phillip Swenson

Aix-en-Provence, France

Western junior Phillip Swenson spent this past school year studying in Aix-en-Provence, France.

He sits in a chair, his eyes glancing occasionally at the people walking by as he describes France's cold, powerful spring wind, known simply as "the Mistral." The Mistral carries sand-colored, filmy mud through the city and completely covers everything, he says.

Every night at dinner, his host family watched the news together, he says. While a majority of the news revolved around local issues, a portion was always devoted to America's involvement in Iraq.

"My host dad would turn to me and say, 'You're losing allies,' " Swenson remembers.

The people Swenson talked to in France did not agree with America's war in Iraq. His host dad repeatedly said America's invasion of Afghanistan "made sense" but the war in Iraq did not. Adults Swenson talked to were critical of America's actions. They eagerly asked what he thought of the war and America's foreign policy. They also wondered if any Americans supported the war or President George W. Bush's decisions, Swenson says.

"Walking through the streets, university students would stand out because of their brightly colored clothing and random accessories — lots of skirts with pants," she laughs.

Her long, curly hair is pulled back from her face, and her silver hoop earrings sparkle as she describes studying in Chile.

Valdivia, Chile

Western junior Janelle Martinez fiddles with a silver ring on her right hand as she sits down in a cushioned office chair. The calm, quiet atmosphere in the Communications Facility office contrasts sharply with her description of the pedestrian-friendly streets, gazebo-filled parks and the vibrant colors in Valdivia, Chile.

"My host dad would turn to me and say, 'You're losing allies.' " — Phillip Swenson

"I am very opinionated," Iwatake snorts happily.

A mountain range in Nepal.

A mountain range in Nepal.

America

America's foreign policy is creating a buzz throughout the world as citizens in other nations express their discontent with America's interactions with other countries while embracing American popular culture. While many countries are concerned with the political atmosphere and domestic issues within its own borders, citizens keep one wary eye on America's dealings with other countries.
The USA Patriot Act was created to protect America from terrorists. Gil Ventura examines the acts technicalities and how they can affect small communities. Photos by Paolo Mottola.

A 30 minute drive from Bellingham, through farmlands and pastures, lies the Deming Public Library. The facility is no larger than a home and resembles a log cabin more than a library. A collection jar, half full of donations, is perched at the library checkout desk because donations primarily fund the library. Staff members hope to expand the facility by raising $500,000. A "Roadmaster" bike, up for lottery in a $1 drawing, is strapped to the library's scaffolding in a chandelier fashion. The only clatter in an otherwise hushed room comes from a woman typing at a computer station and from the clanging of kitchen utensils as someone has lunch.

While such a setting hardly conjures controversy, on June 15, 2004, the FBI filed a subpoena against the library to reveal information about all patrons who borrowed a particular book. The FBI wanted to know who may have written a near-direct quote on the inside jacket of the biography, "Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America." The library eventually won to quash the subpoena, but if the FBI had enforced Section 215 of the USA Patriot Act, staff members would have had to divulge the information against their will and a gag order would have been imposed.

"This seems completely wrong," says Joan Airoldi, director of the Whatcom County Library System. "The book was certainly not a book to tell you how to become a terrorist."
In response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Congress passed the USA Patriot Act, which Attorney General John Ashcroft wrote as a measure to prevent future terrorist strikes. In essence, the act gives federal officials increased authority to covertly monitor any forms of communication for law enforcement and foreign intelligence purposes, and it redefines crimes, punishments and methods in an effort to halt terrorist activity.

Those against the act say its provisions are too broad and undefined, and as a result, the government may misuse it against the American public.

Among the Act's many provisions, the government can secretly search a person's home without consent, on suspicion of criminal activity. Polin lost his cousin, Chris Clarke, on the 86th floor of the South Tower of the World Trade Center in the Sept. 11 attacks. In Polin's words, he was horrified when he learned about the USA Patriot Act and is distraught that the government would use the memory of Clarke and the deaths of other loved ones to pass such legislation.

"Everything that I've served 18 years in the Navy for was disrespected and a slap in my face. They used the death of my cousin to pass this legislation."

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-Parkin formed the alliance on Sept. 11, 2002, with the intention to educate the general public and to try and pass local resolutions against the act. Polin says the alliance's mission was to join the ranks of communities nationwide that had banned provisions and to inform the community that the act violated citizen rights. Resolutions of the mission passed by the city and nationwide bans provisions of the act. Polin says that 361 cities, including New York City, have passed similar resolutions.

Polin's first resolution, which protected civil liberties in Bellingham, passed on March 24, 2003. He says the first resolution dictates that if any city employee is asked to do something that invades the constitutional rights of a Bellingham resident, that employee has the right to consult with the city attorney before the action.

This resolution also enforces that all law enforcement officials working within Bellingham must report to the city on a variety of issues pertaining to the act.

City officials must be aware of the electronic surveillance of Bellingham citizens. In addition, federal officials are required to inform...
the city of investigations regarding religious groups, along with acquiring library and customer information in bookstores.

Polin's second resolution passed on April 20, 2004, and its purpose was to resist the act's ability to undermine constitutional rights, he says. Under the resolution, Sections 213 and 216 are banned in Whatcom County. Other banned provisions were Sections 411 and 802, which enables the Secretary of State to label domestic political and religious groups as possible terrorist organizations, and Section 215, which empowered the FBI to force libraries and bookstores to disclose patron information.

Whatcom County's Hindu and Asian American populations are at risk because of the act, Polin says.

Because of the government's heightened racial profiling, citizens from countries with terrorist histories are unfairly targeted, Polin says. Immediately after Sept. 11, he says John Ashcroft and the Justice Department detained more than 1,000 minorities without reason, which the act made lawful. Polin says such actions are akin to America's World War II internment of Japanese people in the country.

According to the Electronic Privacy Information Center, Ashcroft ordered Congress to pass the act without debate or revision within one week. Patrick Leahy, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, persuaded the Justice Department to alter the act. Ashcroft, however, warned of impending terrorist acts and said that the public would blame Congress for the attacks if the act was not passed. After the act's introduction, it passed in six weeks on October 26, 2001, in the House of Representatives by a 357 to 66 vote.

On Nov. 9, 2004, Ashcroft resigned from office. Polin says the resignation meant little to him. He believes the Bush administration will continue enforcing the act.

"(It means) nothing," Polin says. "All it does is takes off the face, basically the headpiece, of the legislation."

Don Gischer, head of the American Civil Liberties Union in Whatcom County, says he believes that little will change under the Bush administration because it will not relent on the terrorism war.

"It's confusing what the fine line is between terrorism, going after terrorists, as opposed to using surveillance techniques in application to your own people," Gischer says.

According to a draft obtained on Jan. 9, 2003, by the Center of Public Integrity, the Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003, or more commonly, USA Patriot Act II, is proof of the Bush administration's efforts to enhance the act.

This legislation has not been presented to Congress, but some of its key provisions are powerful. Among the act's provisions are Sections 301 through 306, which would all create a DNA database on suspected terrorism groups, and Section 501, which could exile American citizens to other countries if they support a suspected terrorist organization.

Gischer believes that this legislation has special implications to Whatcom County because of its location. An increased interaction between county residents and federal agents is likely because of the county's proximity to the Canadian border, Gischer says.

Gischer says he is speaking out against the act because of the oath he recited to protect the city charter, the Whatcom County constitution and the U.S. Constitution from provisions that he feels violates the public's best interests.
During city council hearings discussing a possible Anti-Patriot Act resolution, Gischer says his experiences as a council member and a U.S. Air Force veteran for four years in Europe during the Vietnam War allowed him to provide a unique perspective to the hearings.

Two factors define the act's biggest impact on America and illustrate the differences between a pre-and post-Sept. 11th America, Gischer says. The abolishing of probable cause, reasonable grounds that an accused person may be privy to an arrest or search warrant, coupled with a lack of search warrants or other court orders in federal investigations, have changed the country, he says.

Among those most affected by the act are businesses. According to the April 20, 2004 minutes of the Whatcom County Council meeting, which passed Polin's second resolution, a businessman in the county lost more than $100,000 a year because of the act. The minutes also stated that business owners of certain ethnic backgrounds left the county because of special reporting to the government they endured because of their racial backgrounds.

Days after Village Books' grand reopening, countless bodies stream into the store's aisles while the rhythm of bebop jazz blares through loudspeakers. Bookstore co-owner Chuck Robinson is hidden away in a dimly lit room, speaking as if he is reassociating the subject matter of a book to its reader.

"Reading Julia Child doesn't make you a French Chef," Robinson says. "Just like reading the anarchist cookbook doesn't make you an anarchist."

Robinson is active with the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression in fighting Section 215 on the national level. He became a key witness in the Tattered Covered case, in which the Denver North Metro Drug Task Force sought customer information from the bookstore for a suspected drug bust. The bookstore refused, and on April 8, 2002, with Robinson's help, the Colorado Supreme Court decided the bookstore did not have to relinquish the records to the task force. Robinson is defying the nationwide trend of deleting customer information in response to the act.

He decided to keep customer information, with their permission,

"It's not the right of the government to intrude on us. What people read is their own business."
— Chuck Robinson, co-owner of Village Books

for a frequent buyer club that Village Books offers. He justifies his choice because his bookstore needs to keep certain records, such as credit card and receipt information, to operate and because deleting customer files would surrender the fight against the illegal accessing of customer records by the government.

"It's not the right of the government to intrude on us," Robinson said. "What people read is their own business."

Many who have spoken against the act come from the political right and include former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Lary Pratt, executive director of the Gun Owners of America.

Polin says Americans should take the responsibility of upholding the crux of the American way of life — freedom. He says becoming more proactive in organizations that fight to uphold civil liberties and paying more attention to elected leaders are the best way to combat the act.

"People need to stop ignoring politics like it's a distasteful pill and become involved in the political process," Polin says. "Our democracy is failing. People don't do their homework, take for gospel what our leaders say and don't hold them accountable anymore."
On an extremely liberal campus, many students who consider themselves conservative may feel they don’t fit in. Jack Carr examines the “right” side of Western — the Western College Republicans. Photos by Paolo Mottola.

The atmosphere on Western’s campus the day after the 2004 presidential election was anything but jubilant. The majority of students were somber and disappointed when Democratic candidate John Kerry called President George W. Bush to concede the presidential race. Later, when the mist finally began to burn off and the thought of four more years of Bush seeped into student’s minds, the conservative students looked as bright as the sun rays that struck through the fog.

The members of the Western College Republicans held their heads a little bit higher, smiled a little more frequently and walked with a little more bounce to their steps than the other students that afternoon. It was their time.

Meet a couple of the Western College Republicans, students who provide a conservative voice when it comes to politics at Western.

Sitting on a couch in Western’s library on the day after the 2004 elections, Christy Schaefer smiles wide and looks tickled knowing Bush will be in the White House for four more years.

“I like being the devil’s advocate,” says Schaefer, a Western senior and president of the Western College Republicans. “It’s kind of like everyone believes in one thing, and I can say, ‘Well, there’s another viewpoint here.’ I really enjoy it, and I wouldn’t give it up for anything in the world.”

Schaefer, 22, is a pro-life Christian and says her religion has a lot to do with her political views. Schaefer became interested in politics right after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

“After 9/11, I told myself that I was going to go up to college and start a ‘We Love America Club,’ figuring everyone would want to join that,” Schaefer says. “I came up to Western and found they had a different point of view up here and knew the club wasn’t going to work at all.”

Schaefer says that when she brought up the idea to a few students throughout campus, they just laughed at her and didn’t take the idea seriously.

“No one really had love for the country even though they felt bad about 9/11,” Schaefer says.

Schaefer discovered the College Republicans when she was walking through Red Square while many Western students were participating in a walk-out protest against the war in Iraq in 2003.

“I was walking through Red Square and was waving my little American flag, and I turned around and saw some people on the fountain with their flags,” Schaefer says. “It was the College Republicans. I just needed another outlet; I couldn’t talk to anyone about why I supported the war in Iraq, and it was really nice to have people to get involved with.”
Schaefer became secretary of the club that year. She was later elected president for 2004-2005.

The Western College Republicans is a rapidly growing group with approximately a little over 200 members — far less than the approximately 650 members who make up the WWU Young Democrats.

This right side presence at Western is one that the members of College Republicans feel is needed and one that WWU Young Democrats President Chiho Lai doesn’t mind having around.

“We get along with them,” Lai says. “We have organized events with (College Republicans), and we keep in touch with them regularly because, aside from our different views, we both still want voter participation and voter education.”

Emissary Richards, a Western senior and College Republicans member, says one of the main goals of College Republicans is to inform students about the issues that affect them and to educate those students about where the Republican candidates stand on the issues.

“The more people know about the candidates, the better we will be,” Richards says.

Sporting a crew cut and wearing jeans with a blue fleece vest over a long-sleeve white shirt, Richards gives off an aura of confidence and content.

“I came up to Western, and I noticed that a lot of people didn’t think for themselves (when it came to politics),” Richards says. “They would literally know nothing about what was going on.”

Richards says he believes many people are uninformed about political issues, which is destructive to the nation.

“People are convinced that there is only one way (at Western),” Richards says. “Negative people come up to me and say, ‘You’re wrong.’ And then I would talk to them about the issues and they had nothing to say except, ‘You’re wrong.’”

Lai agrees that understanding the issues is a must for any registered voter.

“I think it’s very important because the decisions you make when voting will have an effect on your life for at least two or four more years,” Lai says.

Richards, 22, is a chemistry major who became interested in politics during his senior year at O’Dea High School, a private Catholic school in Seattle, when his religion teacher showed the class a video about former President Ronald Reagan.

“The video was about how Ronald Reagan was literally evil,” Richards says. “It was really negative and stupid, and I thought, ‘What would motivate people to show negative things about Reagan when it wasn’t true?’”

After high school, Richards decided to become a Republican.

“I like the economic policies of the Republican party,” Richards says. “I like the fact that Republicans give people more control of their own money by cutting taxes.”

Richards’ parents both are Democrats and do not always agree with him about politics.

“Sometimes they ask me, ‘How can you think that way?’” Richards says. “Then I talk to them about the issues and they say, ‘Wow, I never knew that; that is a very good point.’”

Not only do a majority of Western students tend to be more Democratic, Whatcom County does, too. According to the Whatcom County Auditor’s results for the 2004 presidential election, 48,268 voters in Whatcom County voted for Democratic Presidential nominee John Kerry compared to 40,296 votes for George W. Bush.

One might say that supporting conservative views in a liberal town such as Bellingham is simply asking for trouble. And even though the extent of the College Republicans’ rallies and demonstrations only go as far as sign-and-flag waving, trouble still tends to find them.

“I got spit on twice at our ‘Support Our Troops’ rally,” Richards says. “I wanted to hit him, but I realized that probably wouldn’t do anything.”

Schaefer says being a Republican at Western sometimes is difficult, and Lai agrees with her.

“It’s definitely harder than being a Democrat,” Lai says. “This is a very progressive campus, so I think Republicans have a disadvantage when it comes to exposure and membership towards their party.”

Schaefer’s backpack is littered with Republican buttons and stickers, making it easy for others to notice that she is a Republican.

“It’s hard,” Schaefer says. “It’s really hard to walk through campus and to know that at any given moment someone can walk up to you and scream obscenities, and they have done that. And to walk downtown and be spit on — I’ve had that happen to me as well.”

Lai says this type of behavior is wrong and childish, and he would never endorse such actions.

“I don’t agree with the College Republicans’ opinion, but I respect it,” Lai says. “I respect that the (College Republicans) are out there working for their party just like we are.”

Lai adds that he and some of his fellow WWU Young Democrats also have been heckled.

“On this campus, you have more issues with people further to the left rather than with people further to the right,” Lai says.

Despite the verbal — and sometimes physical — abuse members of College Republicans receive from others, they will not allow it to stop them from voicing their opinions and beliefs.

“On this campus, students preach diversity and different ways of thought,” Richards says. “Yet when you have someone who doesn’t agree with them, it’s wrong. Those who preach tolerance are often the most intolerant.”

These feisty Republicans have a lot to smile about considering the right-wing advantage for the 2004 presidential, House and Senate elections.

“Politics is important,” Richards says. “But every day, you got to wake up and be a productive citizen, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican. That is what it comes down to.”
Women can receive a shot, take a pill, wear a patch, spread a cream or use a vaginal barrier. Men can wear a rubber or use the pullout method. Since May 11, 1960, the pill no longer means just an insipid or annoying person but a way to prevent pregnancy. Other preventative measures for pregnancy, such as Norplant, Depo-Provera, NuvaRing and Ortho Evra, offer an almost limitless number of ways to prevent pregnancy.

As teen pregnancy rates continue to drop, sex education teaches people to protect themselves against pregnancy, yet sexually transmitted diseases are spreading faster than before. The Bush administration’s message of abstinence is trying to stop teens from having sex to control an STD epidemic. Yet some people are worried abstinence-only education is a step into the past. A recent study by the Washington State Institute of Public Policy, however, shows both approaches may be ineffective.

Even younger women, 10 to 14 years old, also have seen drops in sexual activity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in a November 2004 Reuters article. The decrease may be because of increased abstinence and safe-sex education, according to the article.

STD infections are increasing at such a rate that the Bush administration has increased funding for abstinence-only education programs by more than $200 million in the past four years. Schools and nonprofits that accept this funding cannot teach about how to use contraceptives, only contraceptive failure rates.

Every year, 3 million, or approximately one in four, sexually active teens are infected with sexually transmitted diseases, according to a 2004 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention article, “Tracking the Epidemic.”

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“We look at abstinence as the healthiest choice and the most effective way to prevent pregnancy. But it is not a reasonable choice for everyone.” — Joanna Johnston

Christy Schaefer, president of Western College Republicans, says she has the same opinion as the Bush administration — that teaching about contraceptives makes the concept of sex too “loose.”

Schaefer, with a narrow face framed by straight blond hair with patches of bright red dye, sets down a shoebox covered in pro-Bush stickers and talks about why she supports abstinence education.

“I think (sex education) should be a little bit of both but with more of a focus on abstinence,” she says. “For me, I was really overwhelmed as a kid. My parents never talked to me about that stuff. And I understand that (contraception) is out there, but (schools) don’t need to go into as much detail as they do.”

Chiho Lai, president of WWU Young Democrats, wears a dark overcoat and a gray scarf with “Kerry for President” pins, and says he takes the opposite view. An open culture of sex is more of a benefit, he says.

“By taking it out of the shadows, (sex education) really opens up a discussion about safe sex, about sexual health and reproductive health,” Lai says. “The Bush administration is largely focused on ... ideology: abstinence — teaching kids to not have sex. This administration believes that the way we deal with (sex education) is tell people to not have sex and hope that it is going to go away.”

The prevalence of contraceptives mixed with increased sexual education likely is reducing teen pregnancy. The rate decreased from a high of 95 pregnancies out of every 1,000 15- to-19-year-old women in 1986 to 55.9 pregnancies in 2002, the most recent available data, according to the Washington State Department of Health’s Web site.
AIDS infections have continued to increase throughout the nation. In 2003, doctors diagnosed 43,171 new cases of AIDS — a 4.6 percent increase from the year before, according to a December 2004 Henry Kaiser Family Foundation report.

Mt. Baker Planned Parenthood's offices are tucked away on the second floor of a wood-trimmed building. People work here to educate the community about birth control and STDs.

"It's important for people to have accurate information to make decisions with relation to their sexuality," says Joanna Johnston, health educator for Mt. Baker Planned Parenthood.

Recent trends released by the Centers for Disease Control support Johnston's view. While the number of teens having sex remained the same for Mt. Baker Planned Parenthood, and condom use increased between 1991 and 2001, 18 percent more teens used drugs or alcohol before having sex.

"Eighty-five percent of Americans believe there should be sex education in the schools," Johnston says. "We believe in age-appropriate education from the beginning to demystify sex."

A little more than a mile away, in downtown Bellingham, the Whatcom County Pregnancy Center, with stuffed animals and toys in the entryway and scripture on the walls, supports another approach to sex education — the abstinence-only way. Tricia Huckaby, relate program coordinator at A little more than a mile away, in downtown Bellingham, the Whatcom County Pregnancy Center, with stuffed animals and toys in the entryway and scripture on the walls, supports another approach to sex education — the abstinence-only way. Tricia Huckaby, relate program coordinator at the pregnancy center, says few studies support the effectiveness of abstinence-only education, but she still feels strongly that the message of abstinence is important.

"I wasn't ready for the message I got during (sexual education)," she says. "I felt (sex) wasn't a big deal, that it was risk free ... Am I being negligent to not give (teens) a condom? I don't think so. You don't necessarily have to have intercourse to have to pass an STD."

If the organization starts talking about contraceptives halfway through the presentation, like Planned Parenthood does, Huckaby says she feels teens receive a mixed message.

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative research group, is one of the most outspoken research organizations to support abstinence-only education. An April 2002 foundation report described 10 abstinence programs that documented their effectiveness. One of the cited programs was "Not Me, Not Now."

The program involved saturation advertising and an educational campaign in Rochester, NY. The campaign reached a reported 95 percent of the population. The materials focused on communication, dangers of STDs, teen pregnancy and how to resist peer pressure. According to the foundation report, sexual activity of 15-year-olds dropped from 46.6 percent to 31.6 percent during the campaign.

Because of the unanticipated results of this study, Douglas Kirby, a senior research associate with ETR Associates, a nonprofit research organization, evaluated the findings with the assistance of the bi-partisan National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Kirby's study outlines the difficulty in evaluating many of the safe-sex and abstinence-education programs because those programs fail to accurately document results.

Kirby found several problems with the foundation's studies. The program was only used in 3 percent of the schools and used no comparison groups. Also, sexual activity rates for 17-year-olds did not change noticeably.

People on both sides of the debate agree abstinence has a place in sex education. Of the national decline in pregnancy, three-fourths came from increased contraceptive use and one-fourth from increased abstinence, according to a 2000 study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute.

"We look at abstinence as the healthiest choice and the most effective way to prevent pregnancy," Johnston says, sitting in front of a Planned Parenthood poster. "But it is not a reasonable choice for everyone."

A September 2000 study by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation found that students who received some sex education during their middle-school years say they are better equipped to deal with the pressures surrounding sex.

"By taking it out of the shadows, (sex education) really opens up a discussion about safe sex, about sexual health and reproductive health. The Bush administration is largely focused on ... ideology: abstinence — teaching kids to not have sex." — Chiho Lai
Klipsun is a Lummi word meaning beautiful sunset.