

# EDITORIALS



## Lack of interest in politics typical of nation

**W** Rexly Penaflorida II  
Editor in Chief

During the Presidential election, it seemed to me that many people had an immense interest in and knowledge of politics. They all had their reasons for voting for their chosen candidate, but with their newfound knowledge during the campaign, many people were making choices based on what they have read about on the Internet, in the newspapers and from the candidates, not just a gut-level reaction to the candidates' personalities.

The campaign left me hopeful that Americans had begun to politicize, to become invested in the democratic process. Boy, was I wrong.

The healthcare reform debate has dashed my optimism about the public's knowledge of politics and policies. I now see that most people lack the necessary information needed to make informed decisions when it comes to politics and the various aspects that relate to the subject. From death panels to government-funded abortions to charges of socialism, much of this country reminds me of the woman Jay Leno interviews in the promo for his new prime time show.

Have you seen it? There is a segment of the show in which Leno goes out on the street and asks people about current events or popular culture. One of the questions that Leno asked was: "who lives at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue?" Now, every student in this school should know this answer, but in case some students do not know this address, let me give you a hint: it is in Washington D.C. It is a house. It lacks color. Its inhabitant does not.

## How could anyone live in this country and not know basic facts about our nation and its politics?

However, when Leno asked this question to a contestant, her response was "I have no clue."

Leno's followup question was: "who lives in a pineapple under the sea?"

The woman squealed with delight, "Spongebob!"

When I first saw this, I was shocked. How could anyone live in this country and not know basic facts about our nation and its politics? That is the whole purpose of an education. It gives us knowledge that we will use for the rest of our lives. What good is the education if we constantly forget the things we have learned? When I took health class, I watched the movie *Super Size Me*, and it took me by surprise that people knew what was in a Big Mac (two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions all on a sesame seed bun) but they did not know words to the Pledge of Allegiance.

I witnessed just how ill-informed many people are during the town hall meeting held at the Robert L. Johnson auditorium last month. During the meeting, people were not asking questions about the reform or resolutions. Instead, they were promoting party affiliation or ideology. The closest thing that actually related to the reform was when a woman asked about certain procedures that were included in the reform. Other than that, people were just screaming at each other and calling the reform a step towards socialism or communism. (I will take a wild guess that none of those people know Karl Marx from Groucho Marx.)

People just saw the meeting as an opportunity to reinforce their party loyalty (or ill-disguised antipathy toward President Barack Obama—you know, the Muslim from Kenya), rather than to discuss whether or not healthcare reform should be passed. Sure, there could have been a few in the crowd who had sufficient knowledge of the reform and politics to ask a good question, but if I had to give a percentage of the number of those people compared to the rest of the crowd, it would have to be about 10 percent. This number frightens because a good number of the people crowd were in their 20s and 30s. If their positions are so rigid at that age, what will they be like at 50?

Which begs the question: what is going to happen to our generation? Are we going to join the majority of the nation and not really care about politics or to bury our heads in the sand and only see things one way? I really hope that our generation steps up to the plate and gains the sort of knowledge that helps us make better decisions about our government instead of slouching at home and watching countless hours of TMZ.

During his recent visit, the Rev. Jesse Jackson made a good point when he said that it is up to us to make a difference. Sooner or later, our generation will be the majority in this country, and it will be up to us whether or not we want our country to thrive or to slide into apathetic ignorance.

## Laptops for all students will prove beneficial to classes



**W** Hillary Lindwall  
Managing Editor

We are the technology generation. Not only did we grow up with computers, we were the first to get iPods™, plasma televisions and an understanding of the Internet and how to use it. Changes and new advances in technology are becoming increasingly frequent, and we are the ones who must embrace these changes and create new ones for the future.

Part of this integration of technology is the addition of netbooks to District 219. Every member of next year's freshman class of 2014 will be the first class to receive Dell™ netbooks. By the outset of 2013-14 school year, every Niles West student will be equipped with a netbook. This decision is very important for the future of the district. As technology continues to advance, Niles Township schools should not be left in the dust. As the world changes, our schools should be on the vanguard of new technologies.

There are myriad benefits to this innovative district initiative. In addition to putting web browsers and other software at students' fingertips, the netbooks will reduce both the cost and environmental impact of paper, perhaps even eliminating certain textbooks, which would have the residual benefit of lightening students' ponderous backpacks.

Additionally, the netbooks would help ease the current computer shortage problem exacerbated by the elimination of the "C" computer lab this year. Currently, West has 60 computers in the computer lab and 60 netbooks available for teachers to reserve. That totals 120 computers for a school of 2700+ students. Providing each student freshman with a netbook will open 700 additional computers per year for student use. Also, rather than reserving computer labs, where there is always a chance that a lab would not be available, when teachers need computers for

their lessons, students will just pull the net books out of their backpacks.

The netbooks will have ecological advantages as well. More energy efficient than a desktop computer, they will also cut down on the amount of paper used by the two schools, contributing to the district's ongoing efforts to "go green."

## Another blessing in disguise is that to validate the expense of netbooks' introduction into classes, changes must be made to the core curriculum

While there are many positive aspects to the integration of the net books, they present some challenges as well. For example, when students are in class, they may stray from their assignments or lessons in order to peruse the Internet. Additionally, netbooks cannot replace a desktop or a laptop because their limited capacity does not allow for megabyte-gobbling software. They are to be used primarily for in-class collaboration via message boards and email as well as for Internet access for research, not for performing complicated operations. However, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

Another blessing in disguise is that to validate the expense of netbooks' introduction into classes, changes must be made to the core curriculum. This, however, would be beneficial to students because it would encourage teachers to integrate technology into their curricula, changes that might invest tech-savvy students who are more involved in and familiar with new technologies, which would in turn better prepare them for the modern world outside of high school.

Overall, netbooks for freshmen will help to thrust Niles West into an ever-changing technological world that will better prepare students for the future.

I almost wish I were an incoming freshman. Almost.

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*West Word* is a student-produced newspaper published monthly during the school year. Editorials represent the general view of the staff; otherwise, commentary pieces and columns reflect the views of the individual writer and not necessarily *West Word*. Replies to pieces from *West Word* are strongly encouraged as are letters to the editor reflecting the views of the school community. This correspondence can be delivered to *West Word*, located in room 3160. Letters may also be mailed to *West Word*, 5701 Oakton, Skokie, IL, 60077 or submitted to [westword219@yahoo.com](mailto:westword219@yahoo.com). Where noted, pictures courtesy of MCT Information Services are used with permission.

# WestWord

## west opinions

### New cell phone policy reflects IRC staff's flexibility



**Suhail Ansari**  
Editorials Editor

A new Information Resource Center (IRC) cell phone use policy went into effect Tuesday, Oct. 13. It is now permissible for students to text and browse the Internet with their phones before and after school, as long as the phone is on vibrate or silent; however, making or receiving calls before or after school is still not allowed.

The new policy was initiated by IRC Coordinator Penny Swartz, as the IRC staff began to discuss possible changes in the policy early this school year, an event which coincided with the publication of a Sept. 25 *West Word* editorials page column titled "Restrictive cell phone use policy illogical."

After talking with the IRC staff, Swartz took the issue to the Central North Suburban School Library Group, a consortium of high school libraries in the area which meets three times per year, to get the opinion of the group on the matter. What was discovered as a result was that about half of the high schools in the area have instituted some policy which allows cell phone use in the library

before and after school and two of those allowed cell phone use during the day.

Based in the group's input, Swartz said that when she offered the proposal to amend the policy to the IRC staff, the decision was unanimously affirmative.

### Cell phone use has become a major part of daily life at West, and the new IRC policy reflects and respects that fact

Cell phone use has become a major part of daily life at West, and the new IRC policy reflects and respects that fact. This columnist would like to thank Swartz and the IRC staff for taking such a concern in the accessibility of the IRC to the student body. This move establishes a more positive atmosphere in the IRC, and one hopes that with added freedom, more students will be inclined to take advantage of the many resources the study and research area has to offer.

### More regional stability needed before Afghanistan troop decision

#### Editorial

"[The situation in Afghanistan] could derail plans for [President Barack Obama's] presidency, just as the Vietnam War ruined the presidency of Lyndon Johnson," writes *The Nation's* William Polk.

In fact, several parallels may be drawn between the Vietnam War to the current war in Afghanistan. Both times, the presidents' advisors recommended troop surges in the face of little to no progress. Both times, American forces were pitted against guerrilla warfare that baffled and stymied the more conventional warfare waged by American troops.

Everyone knows what happened in Vietnam. As philosopher George Santayana famously wrote, "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

The current president did not create the current situation, but rather it was inherited from the previous administration. The problem emanates from limited progress towards a viable and stable Afghan nation as Taliban forces continue to hold ground, and a democratic government fails to build consensus. The last Afghani presidential election was held in late August amidst wide spread allegations of electoral fraud, intimidation and ballot stuffing, according to the *BBC*.

United Nations (U.N.) diplomat Peter Galbraith was personally fired by U.N. Secretary-General Ba Ki-moon after accusing the international electoral committee in Afghanistan of covering up electoral fraud.

Galbraith also went on to say that the head of the U.N. mission in Afghanistan, Norwegian Kai Eide, did not act upon any of the evidence of electoral fraud. It has reached a point where a run-off has been decided to take place between the "top" two candidates.

In short, the recent Afghani presidential election has lost all credibility, and the government has little to no basis for staying in power for now.

This puts the U.S. in a delicate position, as it is the occupying army. Three options currently exist on the table, according to *Newsweek*: granting Obama's military advisers their request for an additional 40,000 troops, keeping the status quo or pulling out completely.

The *West Word* editorial board believes that the best plan right now is to keep the status quo.

A full pullout from Afghanistan would cause more problems than it would solve. Not only does this decision affect Afghanistan's future, but it is intimately related with the regional security, namely the deteriorating condition in Pakistan, which is virtually in a state of civil war.

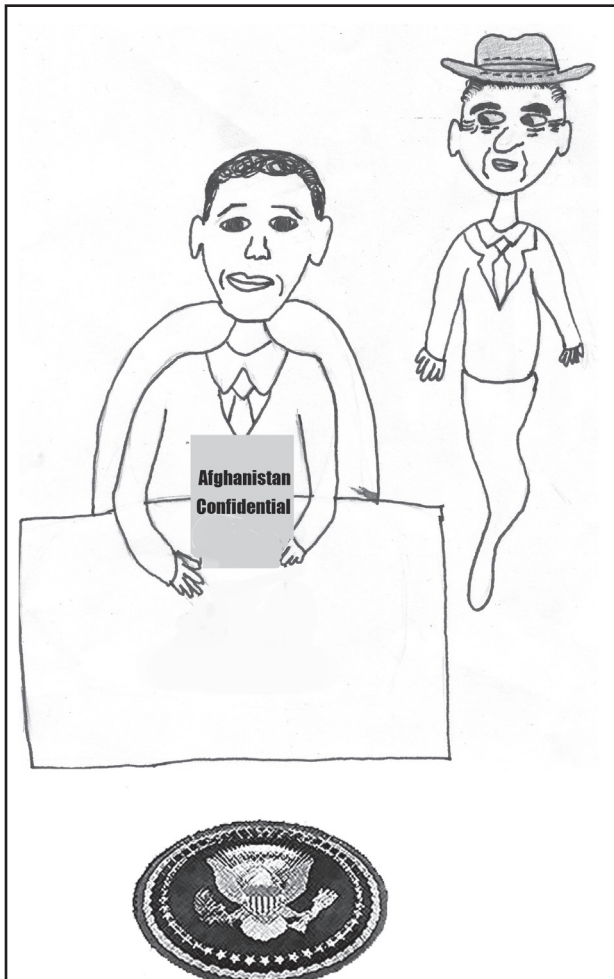
Obama recently approved a \$7.5 billion aid package to help Pakistan's future economic and social development, amidst a power struggle of America's ally army, Pakistan, against the Taliban in the Northern provinces.

According to the *BBC*, Pakistan's recent offensive against the Northern provinces has caused the Taliban to retaliate, with several key military bases being bombed and even a university near the capital Islamabad; all schools, including colleges, have been shut down all across Pakistan for an indefinite amount of time because of the violence and turmoil present.

Not only does the decision to increase troops in Afghanistan affect Afghanistan, but the whole region, so a complete U.S. withdrawal would destabilize the region.

However, it is too early to call for a troop increase in Afghanistan.

White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel said that the U.S. could not make a definite decision as to approve the troop surge or not without knowing if the new Afghan government would support U.S. goals of fair elections and government. The recent open letter authored by the now-resigned senior U.S. civilian of the Pentagon in Zabul province and former Marine Corps Captain Matthew Hoh calls for a complete withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan, according to *The Washington Post*. He is the first U.S. official to



resign over the issue, putting pressure on the current administration to act quickly on the issue. Hoh highlighted the "why" question of Afghanistan involvement, something that exemplifies why the U.S. should not increase its troop levels.

Furthermore, last week, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) opened discussions about increasing NATO's military presence in Afghanistan, which suggests that Obama's caution, for which he has faced criticism for "dragging his feet" in regard to escalation, might be well-founded. Added NATO forces might provide the necessary increase without requiring further commitment from the U.S. military.

The U.S. must maintain its troop levels in Afghanistan to finish what it started and maintain regional stability in order to provide a legitimate Afghani government the time it needs to establish itself and to afford the Pakistani army more time to carry out its operations against the Taliban.

### Should there be a U.S. troop surge in Afghanistan?

#### Staff



Helen Rifkin

No, because we are fighting a lost cause.

#### Senior



Alexis Scott

No, because it is a waste of money.

#### Junior



Hailey Lichter

No, because it is not going anywhere.

#### Sophomore



Jonah Barquez

No, because [the U.S.] should stay out of the Middle East.

#### Freshman



Aiman Zaena

[The U.S.] has no right to invade other countries.