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The Portland Spectator serves the student body by providing fact-based and well-researched arguments alongside in-depth news coverage of issues important to the student community. We encourage and co-facilitate a diverse marketplace of ideas filled with thought-provoking discussions.

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Letter from the Editor

Historically, the Portland Spectator was never known for its kind words and political correctness. The magazine established for itself a reputation of being hard-hitting and ultra-conservative, which succeeded in filling a tiny niche on the Portland State campus, but nothing more. The Spectator became a publication tailored specifically to the few diehard conservative students on an otherwise liberal campus.

Things have changed since then. The Spectator expanded its range of content and started featuring stories on campus-wide and even city-wide issues—things that every PSU student cares about, regardless of political affiliation. This created a second audience for the magazine, one composed of students who want in-depth news and investigative stories, as opposed to a collection of political rants.

We want to tailor the magazine towards that larger second audience, but we cannot successfully fill two completely different roles; thus, we have decided to remove the conservative label entirely. We, the Spectator staff, feel that having to cater to such a small and specific audience has held us back from achieving greater things with the magazine, so we decided it would be best to part ways with our past and head towards a new, brighter future.

The new focus of the magazine is going to be, first and foremost, to provide the student body with high-quality, in-depth stories on issues and events that PSU students care about. Now, if you are disappointed by our change in direction, fear not—the fact that we are no longer a conservative magazine does not imply that future political pieces will be written from a liberal standpoint. In fact, when it comes to political and economic issues, we will attempt to provide alternate, pragmatic viewpoints that do not coincide with either side of popular debates. Without a label to tie us down, we can show you how pure, genuine creativity solves problems.

I am very excited for the new future of this magazine, and I hope you share my excitement. As always, your feedback is very much appreciated. Thank you for reading the Portland Spectator.

Sasha Chedygov
Editor-in-Chief

P.S.: The new website is now online! Check it out at www.portlandspectator.org.
Jesse Hansen

Each month, the Spectator will be highlighting and grading ASPSU’s actions, culminating in a final grade at the end of the academic year. After all, we are in an institution of higher learning, and there isn’t a pass/no pass option for ASPSU.

Staff Retention: A-

Even at the end of fall term, when workloads are high and finals are near, the ASPSU staff has done an uncharacteristically good job of sticking through to the end. In past years, staffing has suffered attrition as the end of the term nears, but not this time. While many of the staff members work full time in the office, all while balancing the rigors of college life, ASPSU has boasted 100% retention of executive staff. In the senate, not only has no member jumped ship, they have actually filled four seats, bringing the total to 23 of the 25 available positions. Though no members have left, an ominous cloud looms on the horizon: with Adam Rahmlow’s recent legal trouble this term, a Facebook group has sprung up, gaining momentum, calling for his resignation. Former ASPSU vice president Ethan Allen Smith has also publicly asked Rahmlow to leave office. While it’s not likely that Rahmlow will willingly step down, the scandal may raise concerns for staff members potentially opposed to his mandate.

Student Outreach: B+

Though tabling in the park blocks has begun to wind down, and student outreach has seemed to slump into a temporary lull, the ASPSU office is preparing to take on events on a larger scale. On February 21, ASPSU is planning a rally in the Park Blocks to raise awareness of issues like mounting student debt and ever increasing tuition. “We’re hoping for at least 10,000 students,” said Vice President Pearce Whitehead, “but we’re expecting at least 5,000.” ASPSU has also made it a goal of maintaining 30 consistent volunteers to help in outreach; Whitehead added that during the term volunteers have been taking an active role in the office. Three new interns have also been added to the staff roster to aid in outreach as well. During the PSU student walkout and rally, Rahmlow and Whitehead participated in an unofficial capacity, making their presence known while speaking to students.

Campaign Goals: A-

Currently, ASPSU is hard at work establishing a Multicultural Advisory Committee comprised of students to help in the decision making process of the PSU Multicultural Center, in line with Rahmlow’s promise of more student involvement in administrative decisions. This month also held a town hall meeting in order to rally students for the February 21 awareness rally; the monthly town hall meetings are something that last year’s mandate had continually attempted to plan, but never implemented. This year, ASPSU has already successfully completed several of the meetings. In a measure to increase the Senate’s accountability to their constituencies, something Rahmlow promised during the election period, senators are now required to produce constituency reports, outlining how they have maintained relationships and aided their respective constituencies in order to increase senator accountability. According to Whitehead, who runs the senate as vice president, this is something that hasn’t been done in recent years.

Overall Grade: A-
Political unity and cheap alcohol

A COSTCO-LEAD INITIATIVE SUCCESSFULLY PRIVATIZED THE DISTRIBUTION OF ALCOHOL IN WASHINGTON, AND THE CORPORATION MAY MAKE ITS NEXT MOVE ON THE STATE OF OREGON.

Elliott Daggett

Unbeknownst to most Oregonians, the past few months have played host to a political struggle of unusually high magnitude in the Pacific Northwest. The participants? Our typically docile neighbors to the north in Washington. The topic? Initiative 1183. The stake? The price and availability of sweet, nourishing alcohol.

Now the sphere of state ballot initiatives is rarely a site of much excitement. With the exception of a recent proposal to shut down Evergreen College, and another to strip transponders onto the legs of sex offenders, Washington state initiatives generally address only the most mundane of issues. Initiative 1183 was different. It aimed to privatize Washington’s state-owned system of alcohol distribution. Dissatisfaction with the state monopoly had been simmering for years. The stores were widely known for their inflated prices, scarce numbers and spotty customer service. The flight ratcheted up until it became the most expensive ballot fight in Washington state history.

On November 8, 2011, Washington voted overwhelmingly to pass Initiative 1183. Its passage meant that the state’s network of 328 store-fronts will be disbanded, some to be sold intact and others liquefied entirely. All in all, a small army of 900 public employees will be laid off over the next year.

In exchange, the State of Washington expects to bring in an extra $43 million a year in new liquor taxes. Adding in additional revenue at the local level, the bill will bring in $480 million in revenue over the next six years. These findings came in the wake of the first budget deficit in state history ($90 million). And all of this, paired with Costco’s promise of lower prices for the consumer, makes for a deal that’s not all that bad.

But why now? What force awakened the hydra of the Washington citizenry and drove it to topple a system that had been patiently tolerated here at the fixture of Washington bureaucracy. But let’s take a step back. None of us here at the Spectator will pretend that we care about what is or isn’t happening in Washington. Since the 1996 WTO protests, the whole state has been an enormous bore. That being said, politics in the northwest have a way of migrating across state borders, not to mention that Costco and friends are locked out of the hard alcohol business in our fine state as well. One has to wonder, will Oregon find itself awash in Costco’s political spending come next November?

A series of phone calls to Costco’s CEO’s office were not returned. My advice to the OLCC: give those crazy bastards at Costco what they want sooner rather than later. We might not be so lucky when Costco turns its sights on Oregon. Instead of advertisements running up and down our highways, it might be tanks.

In short, yes, but not without a great deal of corporate influence. While the bill’s benefits seem obvious, in 2010, voters moved resoundingly against a similar bill. The bill backers, a Costco lead alliance of grocers, had been hungrily eyeing the state’s liquor market, and spent $4.5 million to push public opinion their way. But the people were not convinced. Fearing an explosion of liquor stores and underage drinking, Initiative 1183 was voted down by a margin of 51-46.

Not to be deterred, Costco and it allies regrouped, following the time honored college wisdom that “No means yes.” They amassed a dramatically larger war chest for the 2011 election, to the tune of $22.7 million (mostly coming from Costco). From Vancouver to Bellingham, billboards rose above highways, hoisting their corporate message above the rows of bleary eyed commuters. Sure enough, when the results of this year’s election came in, nearly 60% of voters had lined up to support what was being commonly referred to as the “Costco Initiative.” A dramatic 24 point swing in public opinion who ever said that money can’t buy an election?

Costco’s decision to flood the election with cash is alarming, but at least they were good enough to take aim at a particularly irritating fixture of Washington bureaucracy. But let’s take a step back. None of us here at the Spectator will pretend that we care about what is or isn’t happening in Washington. Since the 1996 WTO protests, the whole state has been an enormous bore. That being said, politics in the northwest have a way of migrating across state borders, not to mention that Costco and friends are locked out of the hard alcohol business in our fine state as well. One has to wonder, will Oregon find itself awash in Costco’s political spending come next November?

A series of phone calls to Costco’s CEO’s office were not returned. My messages stressed the benefits of leaking corporate strategy to campus periodicals rather than through traditional news sources. Evidently they were not persuaded. Their loss.

Next on the contact list: the Oregon Liquor Control Commission. If Costco’s advance on Oregon takes place, then the OLCC will be their primary target. These are the folks that provide liquor licenses. They also make sure you don’t get into live music showings before turning 21.

I called them up. Their public affairs spokesperson, Christie Scott, was kind enough to answer my questions.

ED: So what do you think, are we going to see a replay of the ballot initiative fight in Washington this year?

CS: As far as I know, Costco doesn’t have any plans for a similar move in Oregon. You should give them a call and ask.

ED: I tried that.

CS: What did they say?

ED: They wouldn’t talk to me.

CS: Well it’s a different situation here in Oregon. Our liquor stores are privately owned and operated. There’s also a proposal in the pipeline to expand licensing to include corporate retailers like Costco and Safeway as long as they can create a separate, controlled area for liquor sales.

ED: That sounds pretty reasonable.

CS: Thank you.

ED: So are you guys still blocking underage kids from going to concerts?

CS: Actually we’ve created a new kind of permit to give venues the opportunity to have all ages events.

ED: But no booze?

CS: No, they can still serve alcohol.

ED: Why are you being so reasonable right now?

My advice to the OLCC: give those crazy bastards at Costco what they want sooner rather than later. We might not be so lucky when Costco turns its sights on Oregon. Instead of advertisements running up and down our highways, it might be tanks.

The OLCC’s 380 different kinds of alcohol can be found at oregonliquorcommission.com and delivered to your local liquor store free of charge. At least for now.
Gunther von Hagens’ Body Worlds & The Brain is the triumphant return of the history-making exhibit that opened at OMSI in 2007. At that time, the exhibit made history welcoming over 400,000 visitors during its 4-month run. “After the extraordinary community response to Body Worlds four years ago, we are excited to host a new exhibit, Body Worlds & The Brain, at OMSI. It presents an unparalleled opportunity to learn about the anatomy of the human body, with both its resilience and fragility. The exhibit also conveys important health messages that OMSI, and our partner OHSU, believe will positively impact the lifestyle choices of many who see the exhibit,” said OMSI president Nancy Stueber. The exhibit includes more than 200 actual human specimens, with an added emphasis on neuroscience, brain development and performance. The all-new exhibition invites one to take an intense look into and reflect on the power, beauty and fragility of the human body. Nothing is left to the imagination. The displays may be shocking to some viewers, but in all cases they are aesthetically pleasing and show the utmost respect for the gift to science that the donor had made. The entire exhibit is deeply moving and leaves one with a sense of the wonder that is around us and within each of us, every minute, every hour, of every day.

Born in 1945 in Alt-Skalden, Posen, Poland—then part of Germany—Gunther von Hagens’ life has been an extraordinary one. At only 5 days old, his parents placed him in a laundry basket and began a six-month journey west in a horse-drawn wagon to evade oncoming Russian occupation forces. They lived briefly in Berlin, eventually settling in Greiz, a small town where he remained until he was 19 years old. He was diagnosed with a rare blood disease at the age of 6 and spent long bouts in a hospital, which did two things for him. First, it fostered a sense of nonconformity and alienation, and made him want to become a physician. He was a very precocious child, showing an interest in science at an early age, and continuing throughout his life. He entered medical school in 1966, earning distinction as a highly regarded, imaginative, flamboyant, even unorthodox student. In 1969, he made his way across Bulgaria and Hungary, attempting to cross a Czechoslovakian border to attain freedom before being detained. He faced a two year imprisonment by East German authorities for political reasons, though his release was later paid for by the West German government. How fortunate that they did, because it paved the way for him to patent his pioneering discoveries, and become a world-renowned teacher carrying on the great tradition of Renaissance anatomists.

Plastination, Dr. Gunther von Hagens’ patented process, involves halting decomposition of the body after death, preserving it for didactic eternity. “The purpose of plastination from its very inception was a scientific one, to educate medical students,” said von Hagens. “But the interest that laypeople had in the plastinated specimens inspired me to think of creating public exhibitions, which was followed by the realization that I had to offer a heightened sense of aesthetics, to avoid shocking the public and to capture their imagination. The brain is an incredible marvel of engineering. I wanted people to recognize what is known about this amazing gem inside our heads, and be awed by its possibilities and
capacities.” The whole-body plastinates in Body Worlds are comprised of people who, in their lifetime, donated their bodies for plastination with the express purpose of educating future generations about health. “Body Worlds is collaboration, a joint quest toward enlightenment between donor, anatomist and visitor,” says von Hagens.

Dr. Angelina Whalley is a licensed physician, the director of the Institute for Plastination and the creative and conceptual designer of the Body Worlds exhibits. Born in Hanover, Germany in 1960, she pursued medicine in 1986 while preparing for a career in surgery as a science employee at the University of Heidelberg, where she met Dr. von Hagen. Their relationship developed as a personal and professional bond that has spanned two decades. In 1992, Whalley and von Hagens married. She assumed her role as director, and in 1995, she began the creation and conceptual process for Body Worlds. It is a monumental achievement, balancing space, exhibit planning, the installation and the presentation of the plastinated specimens to maximize themes, aesthetics and didactic value. “The brain is the one organ in the body about which new discoveries are made every day, and about which our knowledge is constantly evolving,” said Whalley. “Rather than giving only anatomical information, I wanted to present a holistic meditation on this most complex organ in an elegant way, that would be accessible to the general public.”

More than 33 million visitors in more than 60 cities across Asia, Europe and North America have viewed these exhibits since the first one debuted in Japan in 1995, and more than 12,000 donors, including over 1,200 Americans and 39 Oregonians have bequeathed their bodies to von Hagens’ Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg, Germany. For more information on Body Worlds or the plastination process, visit www.bodyworlds.com.

Body Worlds & The Brain at OMSI will be open daily between 9:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., with extended hours on Friday and Saturday evenings until 9:00 p.m. Admission includes general admission to OMSI’s permanent exhibits and is $20 for students, with discounted pricing available for school groups. Please visit www.omsi.edu or call 503-797-4486 for group, school and holiday hours, after-hour prices and more information.

...I wanted to present a holistic meditation on this most complex organ in an elegant way...
There was a time when the political parties in this country put forth respectable, intelligent and capable candidates for presidency. At least, that’s what my parents tell me. With President Obama’s first term coming to a close, we’re starting to see the Republican Party put forth its finest to battle for a position in the upcoming election. Unfortunately, the Republican Party’s “finest” candidates are more akin to MTV characters than potential presidents.

Is this really all the republicans have to offer? Who was popular last month? Oh, right: the CEO of a pizza company with four sexual harassment accusations under his belt. And who was before him? The woman who argues that this country was founded as a Christian theocracy, and should become once again—even though Thomas Jefferson, the very man who drafted our secular Declaration of Independence, was an integral supporter of the statute for religious freedom. What makes Herman Cain or Michele Bachmann presidential material? They’re loud and stupid, and it’s easy to get popular through America’s media if you’re both of those.

That’s the problem with this election: it’s just one big popularity contest. Most of the candidates would rather prove that they could be your pal and have a beer with you than prove to be an intelligent would-be leader of this country. Well, this country doesn’t need some guy I’d love to have a beer with; we already tried that with Bush, and it didn’t work out too well. This country needs a smart and capable leader.

Unfortunately, with all of the loud and stupid guys getting all the attention, if there were an intelligent candidate, he wouldn’t be heard anyway. The media will pick a loud and obnoxious candidate over a smart one any day. I’ll admit, a presidential candidate who can’t remember his own speech is a better story, but it certainly isn’t news, and something is wrong with that.

We’ve grown accustomed to this kind of thing. We’re used to waiting around while all the candidates throw egg on their faces and shoot themselves in the foot. That’s the thing about a popularity contest: it’s not a matter of who’s the better candidate; it’s just a matter of who times their moment of popularity just right. Whoever ends up being the most popular during that crucial voting period—whether it’s by being loud or an idiot, or a mixture of both—that’s the candidate who’s going to take the lead at the head of the Republican Party and face Obama. And that’s just not how it should work.

Our politics have degraded to the point where the winner is either the person who times his praise in the right period perfectly, or simply the one who lasts the longest—basically, the least worst of the batch. This is especially true for the Republican Party in recent years, and we shouldn’t settle for that as a country. The leader of this nation should be the very best, better than everyone, and the Republicans should come to grips with that.

I don’t want my president to be a guy I can grab a beer and hang out with. I want my president to be a true leader, a person who can make quick and decisive decisions on the spot, a person who sees a project through to the fullest of its potential; a person who handles foreign relations with the utmost of sensitivity and knowledge, who really cares about this country, as well as the world as a whole, and not just about his own popularity and wallet. I want an intelligent leader, someone who’s much more intelligent than me. If our president is only as capable as the rest of us, then why is that person our president? If the leader is only as capable as the followers, then isn’t he just a follower as well?

Perhaps the problem is not our political and party systems, but rather those who fuel those systems: us. After all, who decides the outcome of a popularity contest? In the end, the decision lies with the masses. We are the reason that fools and idiots take all the attention in our presidential debates. We are the ones giving them the attention. If our country didn’t want people like Herman Cain and Michele Bachmann to run for presidency, then they wouldn’t be popular. But once the media starts in on them and we catch a glimpse, we come back for more, and the cycle only continues from there.

Due to this, the Republican Party has earned a bad reputation as being that party—the one with all the fools and idiots and candidates who forget their speeches. But even if part of our country wants that kind of candidate, there’s another half of us who couldn’t disagree more.

In this age of rising youth and our technology, we don’t care as much about party affiliation any longer. Obama wasn’t elected president solely because he was a Democrat; he was elected because he promised change with a clear knowledge of what that meant. He was elected because he displayed a vast intellect and a strong will for the good of this country. Now, where is the next Obama? Where is the next candidate who can show us the same kind of intellect and will? There are people in this country who still value intelligence over loudness, and this upcoming election will give the Republican Party a chance to use that. Throw out the buffoons, and show us our next leader. Give us a candidate who is truly worthy of being our president, and get rid of this disgrace and mockery that has latched onto the Republican Party. Do that, and this country will respond.

I years for a decisive, smart and charismatic leader. I don’t care about the parties anymore. I don’t care about conservatives and liberals. Right now, I just want a president who is committed to doing good in this world, rather than committing time to his own fame.

The Republicans have a chance to show the world that they are no longer fools stuck in some twisted popularity contest. Show us a true leader, Republicans, or you’ll be forced to surrender the throne to Obama once again.
Help for the homeless

HOMELESSNESS IN PORTLAND IS A LARGER PROBLEM THAN YOU MIGHT BELIEVE, AND RADIO STATION KINK 101.9 IS JUST ONE OF THE CITY’S ORGANIZATIONS WILLING TO LEND A HAND.

Fatima Jaber

On November 15, radio station KINK 101.9 hosted their annual radiothon to raise awareness of homelessness and donate money to the Portland Rescue Mission shelter. There is no government funding—there are approximately 33,000 donors in a given year. This year, 90 percent of those were individuals, with Fred Meyer being the largest sponsor. “We have a very generous community,” says Brian Merrell, who is in charge of outreach work.

The Portland Rescue Mission shelter was established in 1949 to combat homelessness, but it also has a 12-18 month addiction recovery program for those who are addicted to drugs or alcohol. “Seeing the ones that have addictions and then recovered and turned their lives around is just amazing. Their stories are unbelievable,” says Merrell.

Merrell has been working as part of the community relations and media team for over three years, focusing on making sure that the homeless individuals who are a part of the shelter are provided with meals, shelter, clothing, hygiene supplies and access to bathroom needs and facilities. “It was very moved by them, seeing people that had nothing but their name,” says Merrell.

“Addressing root causes of homelessness can help end the cycle,” says Bill Miller, the director developer in charge of fundraising. “The biggest stories that have stuck with me are stories of grown, successful men that end up going through a mid-life crisis and losing everything, which can happen to anyone,” says Miller.

Some are homeless because they do not know how to develop healthy relationships. Some have traumatizing experiences which lead them down this path. Studies show that it takes about two or three years to recover from a traumatizing experience, and in some cases, a recovery may never be made; however, anybody that is homeless will always be welcomed into the Portland Shelter where meals, bathrooms and blankets will be provided.

However, not everyone takes advantage of this opportunity for various reasons: there is not always enough room for people to go into the shelter; some don’t even feel the need to abide by the rules with regards to drugs and violence; and some even have terrible experiences in the shelters and feel safer living on the streets instead, due to claustrophobia or other reasons.

“There are about 60 men in a small space. It’s like sleeping in a tent,” says Miller. “Their stories rip your heart out, so in the end a little bit is enough for them.”

40 percent of homeless people are females, though many of them are not as obvious since they often stay with friends. Some even form poor relationships with men in order to have a place to stay.

Shepard’s Door, a women’s shelter located in Northeast Portland that is connected to the Rescue Mission shelter, focuses on homeless women, many of which have children. “I see children that are only a year old that walk in with their mother,” says Miller.

The women that walk in with children get separated from them as they are put in state certified care, and they can even lose their children if they do not turn their lives around. This provides motivation for those who are addicted to drugs to attempt to recover even quicker. “You don’t see the deep wounds in the children but you know they are there,” says Miller.

Thirty three-year-old Kesha Slowik, who was previously a methamphetamine addict, is a member of Shepard’s Door. Slowik was neglected and abused since she was four months old, and having an alcoholic father and a mother addicted to drugs, she did not know better than to delve into that kind of lifestyle.

Slowik entered Shepard’s Door, a women’s shelter located in Northeast Portland that is connected to the Rescue Mission shelter, at the age of twelve. “I was so angry and broken, but you have to be willing to change.”

With the help of Shepard’s Door, Slowik is currently in the process of proving that she can take care of her children. She is currently looking for a job and is ready to transform her life. “I’ve improved a lot,” she says.

In March 2010, Slowik entered Shepard’s Door. Her four children were placed into foster care as she began to work on her drug addiction.

“Portland Rescue Mission saved my life, you know? I never knew about God growing up. If I did then I don’t think all of this would have happened, but I found the Lord at Shepard’s Door,” says Slowik.

Slowik never lived on the streets, but she constantly moved from couch to couch. At the age of twenty three, she became a prostitute. “I ended up working the streets. I was really broken, you know? Like nobody cared,” says Slowik.

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Slowik entered Shepard’s Door. Her four children were placed into foster care as she began to work on her drug addiction. “Portland Rescue Mission saved my life, you know? I never knew about God growing up. If I did then I don’t think all of this would have happened, but I found the Lord at Shepard’s Door,” says Slowik.

Slowik started by limited herself from others at the shelter, but soon started making friends once she realized how secure the atmosphere felt. “We’re all broken people, and there is no reason to be scared of the ones coming out of jail,” says Slowik. She graduated in October from the drug and alcohol addiction program and has been sober from meth for two years now. “I was so angry and broken, but you have to be willing to change.”

With the help of Shepard’s Door, Slowik is currently in the process of proving that she can take care of her children. She is currently looking for a job and is ready to transform her life. “I’ve improved a lot,” she says.

November 2011’s radiothon was a great success. The money donated was able to feed and take care of 24,736 homeless men, women and children.

For more information on how you can help or become a volunteer, visit the Portland Rescue Mission website: www.portlandrescuemission.org.
I sit across from Sarah Billings as she drinks her triple-tall Americano on-top white mocha with an inch of eggnog. “I’m weird,” she admits. But we all know the best musicians are the weird ones.

As the front woman of the Sarah Billings band, and a student in the PSU Jazz program, Sarah explains to me the band’s latest endeavors; a Kickstarter campaign which was successful in raising over 3,800 dollars in just thirty days. Yes, you read that right.

With all those dollar signs, the band was able to make things happen — things like a digital release of their live recordings at the Aladdin Theater from last summer. The recordings were split into two releases, the first having already come out in December, and the second coming in March.

And the Sarah Billings Band has certainly stuck with the spirit of Christmas; in an effort to give back to the world, the proceeds of their title track, “Free To Live,” will be going to Africa Response, an organization helping to bring meals to those facing famine in the Horn of Africa.

“It took some guts for us, but we did it,” Sarah says. “This is kind of our way of saying think you.”

The Sarah Billings band is a rhythm and blues outfit in Portland, increasingly getting more and more attention for their talent and soul — and Sarah’s vocals are at the front of that attention. “I started the project two years ago,” Sarah recalls. “I got asked to do something at Jefferson High School, and I called up some old friends. It all just came together from there.”

One of those old friends was Jacquelyn Miclau, pianist/keyboardist for the band. She’s a PSU student in the classical program here at PSU who will graduate in fall 2012.

Jackie and I met doing a benefit for Tigard High School,” Sarah explains. “When I met her, she was just so down to Earth, and not only wanted to grow, but had the potential to. We’ve been gigging for about a year now. It’s just this little family. This is the first time a project has felt like that to me.”

“This was a huge chance for me, but it’s good,” Jaqculyn adds. “I learned a lot. I’m still learning. Everyone in our band is so different, but we all have the same kind of goals for music. We’re all in it for the same reasons.”

The perfect mixture is easily noticed when listening to their music; it’s an incredible balance of different personalities all collaborating and exploring at once.

“We’ve been mentored by lots of artists in the community through the PSU program,” Sarah says on behalf of their accomplished and polished sound. “As far as what you’ll hear on the digital [release], we play some jazz, some acoustic, some pop songs… it’s really a testimony to us exploring and putting pieces together to make a larger working piece.”

But this show at the Aladdin Theater wasn’t the only major gig by any means; the Sarah Billings Band played upwards of four shows in late December alone. “We perform weekly at the Gemini Bar and Grill in Lake Oswego, with Brian Foxworth on drums,” she explains about their other gigging habits. “I would invite people to come check us out.”

“If you don’t have a chance to pop by Lake Oswego, you could always look them up on their website, sarahbillings.com. And don’t forget to attend the second half of their next digital release show, coming this March. I’m really stoked about it,” Sarah grins. “It’s gonna be a big ol’ party.”

While researching this article, I watched Barack Obama’s Presidential victory speech on Youtube as a prompt to think about the promise of that night in 2008, so long ago now, and the reality of his presidency. The contrast between then and now is so sharp it cuts: the bitter disappointment in our once wildly popular president clashes sharply with the palpable feeling of possibility and, yes, hope, that moment represented three years ago.

You should have read the viewer comments left on the video as recently as a month ago. These folks were mad: “What a disappointment;” “He failed to live up to his promise;” and my personal favorite, “Are you better off now than you were 4 trillion dollars ago?” The consensus was summed up nicely by one of the more reasonable messages: “His major flaw is that he is NOTHING like the radical change for the better that he promised.”

In response, I feel I must ask, “Why did you expect him to be?”

If Obama’s fairly average presidency—more about Clintonian compromise than Kennedyesque vision—has taught us anything, it is that we are too old to see our political leaders as either saviors or demons. They are only flesh and blood,fallible human beings who will not fight our battles for us. It is in our hands to be the change we wish to see. Obama is not the “transformational figure” liberals like me were so excited about. Nor is he the Kenyan socialist sleeper agent for all that is evil that his most rabid detractors say he is. If you ask me, he is a talented politician and a capable leader, and a lot better than anything Republicains have put on the menu for 2012, but he is nevertheless deeply flawed. Both sides seem to want him to be some kind of superhuman character, either the Messiah or the Antichrist, but he is neither—he is just a man, and worse yet a politician.

To be fair, Obama has made good on a few of his campaign promises, such as passing health care reform and tougher regulations on Wall Street, setting in motion the end of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, and keeping his pledge (eventually) to withdraw combat troops from Iraq. He has cut taxes on middle-class households by $16 trillion, and he is not really at fault for the $4 trillion added to the national debt in the last three years; according to a report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, that debt is a hangover from the Bush-era tax cuts and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have yet to be paid for.

Obama has also screwed a few things up, however. His stimulus measure may have saved us from economic Armageddon, but he and his economic team mishandled the recession, and so waited too long to cut any job creation (i.e., jobs bill, with its emphasis on temporary public construction work, is too little, too late.) He oversaw a $351 million loan to the solar energy firm Solyndra while ignoring its dire financial condition for more than a year; it eventually went bankrupt, wasting a lot of taxpayer money.

In short, President Obama is a decidedly mixed bag who bears only a superficial resemblance to the awe-inspiring political dynamo we put our hopes on three years ago. I admit being nostalgic for a time when “Yes We Can” seemed like more than a mere campaign slogan, a time when those words sounded like a bid to actually change the world for the better, as if one man could possibly do such a thing.

We are a little wiser now. We know now that when we looked at Obama, we saw what we wanted to see: a man who would solve our problems for us, who would meet every challenge and triumph over it so we would not have to face these challenges ourselves. We saw a fairy tale we are too old to still believe in. It’s time to grow up.

Part of growing up is taking responsibility for what you want. The Tea Party and Occupy movements have shown the world that ordinary citizens can stand up for what they believe in and actually be heard, so what’s stopping you? You want better health care, better representation in government, less war, better schools? You had better work for it, any way you can—protest, volunteer, give to a cause, write Congress. Just do something to make your voice heard, because we know now that no one in Washington will go out of their way to listen.

To borrow one of Obama’s better lines: we can’t wait.

“The Tea Party and Occupy movements have shown the world that ordinary citizens can stand up for what they believe in and actually be heard, so what’s stopping you?”

The lesson of Obama

THE PRESIDENT ISN’T GIVING YOU WHAT YOU WANT?
WELL, GET IT YOURSELF!
Michael Munkvold
If Americans were forced to pay the costs up front for military activity overseas, how gung-ho for war would we be? Consider this one costly lesson our country is about to finish learning.

United States troop withdrawal from Iraq has commenced in accordance with President Bush’s wishes, and the decade-long war has left many Americans staring at a staggering tab, wondering who will be there to pick it up. Eight years after “mission accomplished” was declared, America is teetering on the edge of further economic collapse due to unsound monetary policy and a decade of high expenses and low revenues. After spending over $1.2 trillion in Iraq and Afghanistan, the country has little to show for its wasted efforts other than a massive deficit and a death toll of over 650,000 Americans and Iraqis.

Fox News will try to fudge numbers by suggesting that per year war costs were lower than expenses on Medicare, education, and other supplemental programs during the same period, and the New York Times will be quick to tell you all about the utilitarian uses—health care, cancer research, alternative energy research—such a great sum could have yielded. But without war, this money would never have been spent, and how largely the strength of the US has stumbled because of these costs is too massive to try to underscore.

First, people must realize that war only happens thanks to a currency system that allows congress to inflate money and frees the ruling class from the constraints of sound monetary policy. A recent CNN poll suggested that 71 percent of people blame Iraq War operations at least in part for our huge deficit, and the fact that 29 percent don’t believe so indicates how defunct the country currently is. The initial estimated cost of military activity in Iraq was $50 billion. Over $700 billion later, Iraq has ended up being a costly date that most Americans can’t wait to finish.

Second, a market economy such as ours requires peaceful cooperation. Oil costs per barrel in 2003 were $30. Oil is now over $98 per barrel, according to CNN. Attributing only $5 in extra cost per barrel adds a stunning $150 billion to the war total—an unforeseen terror that has created mayhem in the wallets of every American in some form or another. There are billions more in hidden costs where that came from.

According to the Brookings Institute, an independent think-tank, over $68 billion in approved funding for war was lost or wasted. This may not seem like much considering totals costs, but put another way, $68 billion is nearly the entire amount the US spends per year on domestic programs such as education and social services.

Nobel Prize Award-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz estimated total costs of the Iraq War at between $4 and $6 trillion after all is said and done. Because congress cut taxes in 2001 and 2003 instead of increasing them, the cost of the war was put on America’s credit card instead of being paid for outright by increased taxes. Couple this with the estimated Wall Street bailout costs of $4.6 trillion, again charged to the US deficit, and the US is looking at adding between $8 and $10 trillion in additional debt as interest costs climb and revenues remain stagnant. Guess who stands to foot the bill?

After the destined-to-fail deficit-reduction talks by congress’ bipartisan “super-committee,” an automatic $1.2 trillion in cuts—half from defense and half from federal programs—will be enacted over the next 10 years. Despite this, the US stands to likely pile on even more debt due to the elephantine costs incurred, unless the $2 trillion in capital that the financial sector is sitting on is invested in employment and the economy vastly improves. Even still, there are few methods of paying down our debt without tax increases and further cost cutting thanks to the innovation our country’s leaders have been void of for too long. How could elected officials that preach fiscal caution be so irresponsible for so long in the first place?

Other costs unseen do not appear in dollar form, but instead by way of health requirements for returning war veterans. Of the over 32,000 US troops wounded in the war effort, 20 percent return home with serious brain or spinal injuries. Another 30 percent will develop serious mental health problems within three to four months of getting home, according to Brookings. And of course, there is no estimating the cost of losing 650,000 lives in a war where there seems absolutely no benefit. Where we might have stood today as a country and a global economy without such vacuous fiscal trouble is a question to which anyone can only speculate.