

ALAN PHELPS

# Juicy dreams, jokes win elections

Now that both the Republican and Democratic national conventions have come and gone, the hyperbole and hysteria of Campaign '92 has really started to get off the ground.



Ridiculous accusations and word twistings have always been a part of American politics, probably because so many politicians are involved. But this year, it's all too much for me to take.

At least we had some kind of debate on national direction when No-H. Ross Perot was still in the thick of things. But he's gone, for whatever reasons.

Undoubtedly, among the factors No-H. weighed was a desire not to be the bad news candidate. The country has to face some tough choices to pay for the national debt joy ride, but voters would rather contemplate more Democratic spending or lower Republican taxes.

Nothing is left to us now but silly soundbites of Bush calling the Democrats godless or Clinton eloquently describing a Bush idea as "totally bogus." The public and the media complain regularly about the vast vacuum upon which voters are forced to make their decisions, but little changes because that same public doesn't want it to.

My own political career offers a few theories as to why America works in this mysterious way. Although I'm no Washington insider by any stretch of the imagination, I've still learned a trick or two.

I can vaguely remember running for class president in junior high school. The climax of the campaign was the assembly where the other candidate and I presented short speeches to the voters about What We Would Do.

My opponent promised the masses

juice machines in the cafeteria or some such thing. Of course, junior high class presidents have no power whatsoever, much like their counterparts at the high school and university levels. Any vows the opposition might make were as worthless as a junior high bean burrito. I scoffed at my enemy.

I was determined not to fall into the same trap. The juice machine issue seemed to go over well with the crowd, but deep down inside I knew that my would-be constituents could see through the farce my opponent was skillfully weaving like some kind of sick tapestry.

Resting my hands on the podium, I could feel the power of office rush through me. This is what it is like, I thought. This is the sensation that drove people such as Caesar, Napoleon and Tipper Gore. And that power fit my junior high fist like a glove.

After a few opening remarks to warm up the auditorium, I approached the crux of my speech. And in my best Nixon imitation, I assured everyone I was "not a crook."

Of course, even if I was a crook, it really wouldn't matter. If elected, I wouldn't be handling the school board treasury or even the Sower book section of the library. But the pure nothingness of my statement, the fluff I spun like an intoxicating cotton candy throughout my brief speech, was bound to play those kids like a piano.

It had occurred to my junior-high mind that what the people wanted was not some dry debate about issues, but entertainment.

Just read any of the latest newspaper accounts of how the presidential campaign is going. Clinton called Bush a "great fearmonger," whatever that means. He said the president practices "Elvis economics" that will send Americans to "Heartbreak Hotel." Bush's aides regularly make some off-the-wall comment about Clinton's

fidelity or compare Hillary Clinton to a wicked witch. Of course, such aides are usually denounced by Bush higher-ups, but either George welcomes these attacks or he can't control his own people.

The politicians of America caught on early to what I realized one day in a junior high school auditorium: What you say doesn't have to mean anything, as long as you look like some kind of clown. In this country, voters go for the bigger idiot.

And while Clinton's goofy act is ahead in the polls, I'm sure the Republicans will catch up by November — just look at the popularity jump Bush bounced on out of the Astrodome. The Republicans play the meaningless game well. After all, they've been polishing the idiocy trophy for three terms now.

I walked off the junior high stage confident of a victory. I had promised nothing. My speech was full of air. I had outlined no goals and I presented only a vague vision for the future.

But when I stepped away from the auditorium spotlight, the voters went ahead and picked juice machine man.

Junior high school students, rather than following the lead long established by the nation's electorate, voted in someone who stood for something — someone who was dedicated to the proposition that we needed juice.

Sure, maybe juice was out of our reach. Maybe a little O.J. at lunch was something we could only dream about. But at least we had a dream. Naysayers and skeptics spouted off about the frivolity of the juice notion, but the voters didn't care. Juice machine man had the mark of a true leader.

After that, I retired from politics. Junior high kids didn't know how to vote right. Luckily for Bill and George, junior high kids don't choose the president.

Phelps is a junior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan wire editor.

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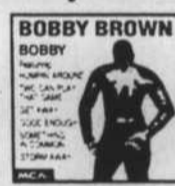
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