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What's at Stake: Colby political analysts provide perspective on the 2004 presidential election, ranging from foreign policy to the economy to the environment

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What's at Stake: Colby political analysts provide perspective on the 2004 presidential election, ranging from foreign policy to the economy to the environment

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When American voters go to the polls in November, they will be faced with some choices. Bush or Kerry—or Nader? Republican or Democrat? Unilateral foreign policy or more traditional diplomacy? Iraq war—yes or no? A more conservative Supreme Court or a more liberal one? The party that pushed through a Medicare package or the party that is calling for deficit reduction?

To gain a better understanding of the issues of this election, Colby visited selected faculty members and alumni and asked one simple and open-ended question: "What is at stake in this election?"

Then we sat back and listened, as political scientists, Washington analysts, economists and historians offered observations about the election and the direction it might take the country and the world. Every interview raised intriguing questions and perceptive answers.

Is foreign intervention a liberal tendency or a conservative one? How are social issues driving this election? If the next president appoints three new Supreme Court justices, will it really change life as we know it? Are there history lessons that must be relearned with each generation?

Is this election about John Kerry or is it actually about Hillary Rodham Clinton? Will issues like poverty and the environment even be considered? If Bush is reelected, what to do in Iraq? If Kerry is elected, how will he answer the same question? Who would have thought a half-trillion dollar deficit could be a non-issue?

What follows is a Colby faculty/alumni take on the election, unrehearsed, spoken in their own words. Read on to gain a better understanding of what one faculty member summed up as “a very instructive election.”
The Election

G. Calvin Mackenzie
Goldfarb Family Distinguished Professor of American Government

“There are a couple of distinguishing characteristics of this presidential election. One is the front-loading of the nomination process so that it is a longer Republican-versus-Democrat election than we have ever had before. And I don’t know what that means. I know that it is interesting to me, and I am going to watch it and see what it means.

We have an incumbent president who is out there swinging at the opponent much earlier than has ever been before. I don’t think President Clinton named Bob Dole until October of 1996; his name never showed up in his speeches. Does that work? How much tolerance do voters have in an election campaign that goes on this long?

We have a whole new set of finance rules for this election and people are trying to figure it out. One of the things we have seen is already we have these two independent groups, The Media Fund and moveOn.org, that are constantly compensating for John Kerry’s shortfall in funding by raising money independent of the campaign rules and spending it themselves. Is this legal? What kind of an effect does it have? Have we just closed one window and opened a hundred others?

Then it is always interesting to see how an incumbent president runs for re-election, because no two incumbents do it the same. Jerry Ford hung around the Rose Garden; they didn’t want him out on the campaign trail because he kept falling out of airplanes. Jimmy Carter refused to campaign because of the hostages in Iran. And Franklin Roosevelt, during World War II, paid no attention to the campaign.

And another sort of quasi-process question that is interesting to me is about second-term presidents. Since the 22nd Amendment was passed we’ve had four presidents elected to a second term. Nixon didn’t serve much of his second term, so the models we have had are Eisenhower, Reagan and Clinton. And the first two of those were, of course, quite old men in their second terms. I don’t know whether that should write them off for that reason. But none of their second terms were anywhere near as successful—accomplishing things, building support for policy, or even having ideas—as their first terms were.

And what if we re-elect President Bush? What is his second term going to look like? You’ve got a second-term president who is probably going to have some policy ideas, but we should expect a wholesale turnover in this administration. And that’s going to take most of 2005 to accomplish, the way things work these days. Because that process has slowed down, as the presidential election process has, those two things are going to crash into each other earlier than they used to. So if it takes you the better part of your second term to get up and running again, what is all of that going to mean?

And it certainly is—I’m not sure pivotal is the right word—but a very instructive election substantively. If John Kerry had voted against the Iraq resolution it would be a very different campaign because that would be the central issue with him. He would make that the issue, that he had voted against it. [The war] is clearly a bad idea but he voted for it, and it really takes away his legs. He’s got some blood on his hands and it will be interesting strategically how he wrestles with it.

So I think that the stakes on that issue are very high. You know if we re-elect the president he will certainly take that as mandate to continue in Iraq. And if he is defeated then what happens? Do we withdraw? I’m sure we don’t pull everybody home that night but I think we find a graceful way to pull out of Iraq.

And then this terrorism and this war have distracted the attention from various significant issues. I mean the budget deficit—half a trillion dollars. Can you imagine having a campaign with that hidden in the closet?

This administration started off before September 11 with some pretty bold education initiatives—wrong headed in my view, but bold—and faith-based undertakings to deal with providing welfare services. Very significant efforts at government reform. Will these be part of this election? It is probably unlikely that much of that will matter much.

The Great Divide

L. Sandy Maisel
William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Government

“The reason that I think this election is so important is because we are still defining what the first President Bush called the ‘New World Order.’ And quite frankly the first President Bush did not define it, and Clinton started to define it but did not come to any conclusion. [President] George W. Bush—there is no question about his ‘vision thing.’ He has a very clear view that in a world where we are the dominating power, we should dominate. And I think that the Democrats have a very clear view that is different, which is that we are more likely to be successful, to maintain our safety, to maintain our prominence, if we do not try to dominate. I think that is the distinction.

On domestic policy, there is a very clear distinction, not so much in economic policies as social policies. There is a divide in this country on social issues not necessarily reflective of partisan ties.

The divide is something like this: President Bush, and particularly more social conservative parts of his coalition to whom he is giving a great deal of attention, believe that we should have a traditional social order and [that] changes from that traditional social order threaten basic American values. I think you see this most prominently today in the discussions about gay marriage; I think you see it also in discussions about abortion, about the role of women generally, of things about Title IX and affirmative action.

Senator Kerry, while no raving liberal on these matters (some of the liberals don’t think he goes far enough), has a very different view—that these are things for individuals to define, the government shouldn’t be involved.

What is striking about that is that view was a Republican view in the past. The interventionist view, which is what the Bush administration is following, is traditionally a Democratic view. And I think what it reflects is what the specific issues are and the outcome [lawmakers] want to see.

Also, analysis shows there is very little competition in Congressional elections. Look at the House of Representatives; of the 435 seats that are up every two years, in this election it will be very likely that fewer than 40 of those will be hotly contested. . . . And what that means to me is that the real battles then become the primaries in these safe districts, particularly when the seats become open.

And the irrefutable conclusion from looking at this from the last three or four election cycles is that the people who win these primaries tend to be extremists. So that you have very liberal Democrats in some of these districts and very conservative Republicans in others. And what they have to do to stay in office is not lose their extremist base because those people vote in primaries.
So if that’s the case you are going to continue to have the case where the Congress is bitterly divided and closely divided and yet they are not talking to each other, and that’s a very difficult situation for trying to solve problems.

In the Senate this time, the Republicans hold a one-seat [advantage] and the Democrats need to pick up two seats to be in control. But it is going to be very difficult for them to do that. Five of the Democrats’ seats that are up this time are Southern seats. A number of those Southern senators have announced their retirement. It is going to be very difficult for the Democrats simply to hold their base. But even if they don’t, what we are finding in the Senate is bitter acrimony, fighting over ideological choices being offered by the president, with the Democrats opposing them and having enough votes to threaten a filibuster.

The other result that you are going to see from this election is a closely divided House probably still controlled by the Republicans, a closely divided Senate probably still controlled by the Republicans. But whoever controls doesn’t matter because the other side is going to have enough power to fight any kind of change. A lot of fighting and a lot of acrimony. And I think that is a very difficult situation for any president, a Democrat or a Republican, to work in, and for the country.”

The Direction of Foreign Policy

Kenneth Rodman

William R. Cotter Distinguished Teaching
Professor of Government

“One of the things that is striking about the Bush approach to using force is that we are not just using force to restrain threats but to spread certain values abroad that we see as central, not only to our world view, but to creating a more stable Middle East, a more stable world. I think that the Kerry approach will be more circumspect, so I wouldn’t expect the same kinds of regime-change interventions that are designed to overthrow rogue regimes and replace them with democratic institutions.

I think that there would be more of a focus on traditional diplomacy and attempting to deal with threats multilaterally, similar to the Clinton approach in dealing with North Korea. The Bush administration is adopting more of a diplomatic approach there but there are clearly elements in the Bush administration that look at ‘rogue’ regimes and argue that our policy should not be to negotiate diplomatic deals with them but rather to maximize pressures on them until they change or disintegrate. . . .

Some interpret the lessons of Vietnam as an example of the dangers of hubris in America’s belief that we can make the world over; recreate the world in our image. After all, that is much of what the U.S. was trying to do in Vietnam. And many of the people who attempted to do this were liberals.

Liberalism had this faith in the ability of the U.S. to transform these non-liberal structures. And look at how successful we were in Germany and in Japan, countries with militaristic traditions, which were in many ways transformed by America. And I think the impact of Vietnam was for many liberals to call into question the degree to which you can do this. Kerry is part of that tradition.

A good illustration of that impact was the thinking of J. William Fulbright, the senator from Arkansas, long-time chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He wrote the book The Arrogance of Power, where he looked at this view that we can intervene and transform other countries in our image as a kind of dangerous hubris.

He analogizes American foreign policy to the story of three Boy Scouts who come back to their scoutmaster and the scoutmaster says, ‘What did you do for your good deed?’ And they say, ‘Well, we helped an old lady across the street.’ And he says, ‘Oh, that’s very good. But why did it take all three of you?’ And they say, ‘Well, she didn’t want to go.’

And for Fulbright, the lessons of Vietnam were the dangers of American hubris, this sort of conceit that we can make the world over in our image. And the neo-cons, I think, argue that this kind of ideologically driven foreign policy is necessary in dealing with the kinds of threats that we are likely to face. That is part of the rationale behind engaging in this kind of ambitious experiment in Iraq.

And what’s really remarkable is that you have the Bush administration, whose initial instinct was skeptical about this kind of muscular nation building. Here we are engaging in the most ambitious nation-building strategy maybe in the history of American foreign policy.

I think Kerry’s tradition coming from the experiences of Vietnam, and the way liberalism evolved in response to the experiences of Vietnam, would lead him to be much more skeptical of that kind of intervention, and much more skeptical of the sort of more muscular approach of the neo-conservatives.

[Kerry] would have no choice but to follow it through. And he has really said so. I mean all of the responsible Democratic candidates, even those most critical of the war, recognized that the U.S. is committed even if you disagree with the war in the first place. If you pull out there is a risk the country would fall to civil war. This would not only be a moral failure, but it would be a strategic failure—instability right in the heart of one of the most strategically important parts of the world. And that would also allow Iraq to become a magnet for the kinds of terrorists that Afghanistan attracted in the 1990s.

There really is no choice and if you don’t try to create a stable constitution for the government, what are you going to do? Create a military regime, a stable military regime. Well, I’m not sure that is a feasible solution either.”

Historic Parallels

Robert Weisbrot

Christian A. Johnson Distinguished Teaching
Professor of History

“I think several things come immediately to mind and it is not because I’m a historian. It is just so salient that I think we all are pretty much aware of this. One is that in most elections where there is a major war we stand behind the president and most presidents are re-elected when they are leading a country in a war. Roosevelt won an
unprecedented third term. But I think that we have something here that is much more akin to a Vietnam in 1968, where we have the president who seems to be pulling us into a conflict no one had fully understood in a region people didn’t understand. For causes that are beyond the large labels—in that case stopping communism, and in this case, you know, deterring the use of weapons of mass destruction. When we look at it on a more concrete level, nobody fully understands why we are going into Iraq. And now they see references to Vietnam.

[In this election] there is a chance at least to reorient our foreign policy in a fundamental way. Questions of unilateralism versus multilateralism. Questions of whether preemptive rights should be a priority as opposed to an absolute last resort. Questions about the limits of American power. And in some way relearning lessons that we thought we had learned, that I thought we had learned, in the late 1960s but I guess every generation has to learn those lessons and so in that sense you see some clear historical parallels.

One of the things that Clinton did, in effect if not explicitly, was to redefine security in economic terms in this day and age in the aftermath of the Cold War. That we should view security not necessarily in terms of military spending but in the terms of the long-term economic health of the country. How are we going to get a handle on the deficit? How are we going to develop the infrastructure of the country? Are we going to adequately train people? Are we going to ensure sufficient jobs?

Those are aspects of security that were not emphasized during the Cold War. Now we have a chance to realize that there are some long-term responsibilities to not ruin our economic health.

I think getting a grip on containing the deficit was a symbol in the last administration, and it was a very important thing to do and it took a lot of work. And it is not clear to me that Clinton fully did that but he at least made an important start in that process.

Now we have essentially reverted to an earlier approach, that national security involves the build-up and deployment of unlimited military power, without regard to traditional allies and at any economic expense. Indeed, you have dramatic tax cuts at the same time as our expenditures are soaring. And so in some ways I think this election might provide us a chance to relearn the lessons of the immediate post-Cold War era.

We seemed to be on a different tack in the early ’90s when we seemed to have understood that long-term economic health can be a priority, not simply for itself but for promoting our security as a nation. And we got away from that in the past few years. Can we get back to it? It is not clear to me how well that issue will be crystallized during the campaign. . . .

So I think that we see some important historical parallels and see that this election is about much more than personalities. And we have some really sharp ideological differences. It will be interesting to see if those ideological differences come to the fore or if it’s personalities, which so often eclipse the ideology. Do we simply choose on the basis of do we like Bush? Do we like Kerry? I think the burden will be on Kerry to crystallize these differences.”

Inside View
Amy Walter ’91
House Editor, The Cook Political Report

“I’m looking at a playing field that is smaller than I have seen since I started doing this. And I’m seeing that there are very few [U.S. House of Representatives] races that are meaningful that are in play. Ten years ago we would look at 115 races that would be competitive at some level. And today, you know, we have something like 35.

We saw in ’92 and in ’96 there were a lot of races; ’98 dropped a little bit. In 2000 there weren’t as many races. And that’s sort of natural. You see more competitive races at the beginning of a decade, so the theory goes. The decks are shuffled up and as incumbents get more settled, naturally there should be a drop off at the end of a decade.

What really shook the ’90s up was what happened in ’94. Nobody expected that 52 House seats would be lost by the Democrats. That made the ’96 election bigger than it might normally have been because of the big ’94 switch.

So then 2002 should be volatile because that is a redistricting year.

Instead we had even fewer [competitive] seats. And part of the reason is the way that redistricting worked. We saw a lot of [state] legislatures decide to basically take what districts could be competitive and just shore them up for their incumbents.

California is a great example. There are 53 congressional districts in California. Only one of them is competitive this year. Doesn’t it seem impossible? The largest state in the union doesn’t have a competitive [House] race.

At the same time, the parties are having real trouble recruiting candidates to run. And I don’t know the answer to that problem. I think it is ridiculously expensive to run for Congress; I don’t think you can run a decent race for under a million dollars. I think two million is more realistic. And then knowing what it is like to run a congressional race? Exhausting.

And on top of that, the incumbent thing has become even more of an asset. They get re-elected more than 90 percent of the time in modern history; we have seen that. But over the course of the last three cycles, we saw re-election rates that were 98 percent. The last cycle—99 percent of incumbents were re-elected. That’s phenomenal.

So what that means is that Republicans have an incredible advantage in hanging on to the House. And even though they only have a 12-seat majority, you’d think it shouldn’t be that hard to pick up 12 little seats out of 435. But based on everything that I just said you can see how difficult it is to get even to 12. And because of polarization, you have more people who are actually voting party lines. . . .

After the 2000 election a Democratic strategist said, ‘We got killed in every district that didn’t have a Starbucks in it.’ And he was kind of joking but kind of not. The point was that this whole red-blue idea is not so much about how much money you make anymore, or what kind of job you have; it is more dependent on these social and cultural issues. You see that some of the poorest counties in the country are voting Republican and the wealthiest voted for a Democrat. People in suburban Chicago and Philadelphia were voting on guns, the envi-
environment and education. People in the rural areas were voting on the environment, guns and abortion, too.

What the Bush campaign did so well in 2000 was to recognize that. They have to start talking about education, and look. A Republican Congress just passed a bill for Medicare—not Democrats. The Democrats are the party of deficit reduction and the Republicans are the party of Medicare. What? You know, that is fascinating, just to think that in 10 or 12 years that I have been here, that that has been a major change.”

**Clinton Consequences**

*Stuart Rothenberg ’73*

**Editor, The Rothenberg Political Report**

“What’s most noteworthy about this election politically is how evenly divided the country is between Republicans and Democrats—supporters of the president and opponents of the president.

No matter who wins the White House, and indeed no matter the outcome in the fight for the House and the Senate, I think this rough parity is likely to continue in 2005 and maybe 2006.

Actually I would say, to me, one of the most interesting things about who wins or loses the White House in 2004 is the impact it will have on 2006 and 2008. Because if Bush wins, it’s a huge boost to Senator Clinton’s ambitions to run in 2008. If John Kerry wins, then Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton may have to get used to being a U.S. senator because she isn’t going to go any further.

You only have a few really big political figures at any time, and she’s new to the political scene as an elected official, but still she’s somebody who creates so much buzz, everybody talks about her, everybody’s interested in what she wants to do. And they either like her or they hate her, much like the president and much like her husband.

This presidential election affects her future. For some Republicans that’s more important than anything else. There’s a lot of inside buzz—talk about it on the Hill and in political circles. I don’t know if people in the real world are thinking about that.

But then there’s another thing. If the president is re-elected and the Republicans maintain control of Congress, they’re headed for a very, very difficult election in 2006 because there’s some pent-up frustration on the Republican side about the president’s legislative agenda and willingness to spend, spend, spend—creating a deficit. If Bush wins and the Republicans maintain control of both houses of Congress, I think in the next couple of years there will be a build-up of frustration on the Republican side and the conservative side. Why is a conservative Republican allowing government to grow in the areas of education and overall spending and transportation spending? So 2006 could be a problem for the Republicans.

If, on the other hand, John Kerry were to win in November, it will almost guarantee that Republicans will hold Congress for the rest of the decade, because he will get the blame for bloating government and for the frustration that is out there about government. People are not entirely happy about the direction of the country. If we have an economic boom and we can get out of Iraq, maybe they’ll be happy.

So you have this great irony. The party that does well in 2004 is likely to have big problems in 2006 and 2008, and the party that loses in the near term may actually win over a somewhat longer term. Be careful what you wish for. That’s my bottom line on 2004.

John Kerry, given the constituency groups in the Democratic Party, is going to have a hard time balancing the budget unless there is a huge economic boom, which is possible. But I think we’re seeing that events here are very important, both in affecting who is going to win in 2004 and what the longer range political outlook is. . . .

All the focus is on short-term events. We have a political environment now that has been poisoned by the Clinton years and the Bush years. When I say poisoned I mean creating a polarization on Capitol Hill and throughout the country that is unprecedented. We have these 24-hour news channels where we dissect everything that these politicians do and say at every moment. They’re constantly under a microscope and it creates an environment where it’s kind of hard for them to succeed, and if they do, it’s often by dumb luck.”

**The Supreme Court**

*Joseph Reisert*

**Harriet Sargent Wiswell and George C. Wiswell Jr.**

**Associate Professor of American Constitutional Law**

“I think one of the clearest differences between the two candidates would relate to the courts, which is obviously close to my study. Now, here it is clear that they would want to appoint very different sorts of people. President Bush, in the lead up to the 2000 election, let it be known that [U.S. Supreme Court] Justice [Antonin] Scalia is the model of an excellent justice. And many of the lower-court appointments have actually borne out this idea, that he’s wanted to appoint more historically and more textually oriented judges whose view is that the meaning of the Constitution is relatively fixed, because the Constitution’s authority is derived from the fact that is was ratified by the people at a certain point in time, and if the Constitution is to be changed, the people should change it through the amendment process.

Their view of the judicial role is that they should enforce what the Constitution requires through the judicial process, leaving the people free, through the electoral branches, to adapt to the changing times, enacting new laws as appropriate.

Justice Scalia, at any rate, has voted against abortion rights, has suggested that Roe v. Wade should be overturned. He voted against the Lawrence decision [which struck down anti-sodomy laws in Texas], which expanded federal gay rights. He’s got a strong notion of separation of powers and obviously voted for the issues that the president is for. The lower-court appointees for the most part have been in substantial conformity to that approach.

It is clear, I think, that a President Kerry would appoint a very different set of people. Kerry, like President Clinton, would appoint staunch backers of the abortion rights, justices who are more committed to the Constitution as it represents a kind of evolving commitment to what they regard as basic principles of justice.

Now the question is the role of the Senate, because over the last 20, 30 years, the Senate has become much more willing to reject nominees to the courts. And clearly if Bush were to appoint some outspoken conservative scholar who is on record for wanting to overturn Roe v. Wade, as long as there are at least 40 Democrats in the Senate, this will not be confirmed.

It is less clear how far the Republicans would go to block Supreme Court nominees on the other side. Justice Ruth [Bader] Ginsburg is actually famous for an argument published when she was a law professor that abortion rights were best justified, not by reference to the due process clause in the 14th Amendment that says states can’t deprive you of life, liberty, or property without following due process of law, but by arguing that actually abortion rights are an equality issue, a protection issue. It’s about women having to be able to get abortions
in order to take an equal place in society with men; otherwise women would always be hampered in their quest for social equality by not having full control over their reproduction. And the Senate did not strike her down and was pretty deferential.

So one wonders if push came to shove, which way would the moderate Republicans go? Would they really fight to block nominees like Justice Ginsburg? And they didn’t in the Clinton administration. And Justice [Stephen] Breyer, in 1994, went through pretty easily.

But sooner or later a president ought to be getting a number of appointee appointments to the court. Three or four is what they said up to the 2000 election. You know, life expectancy is longer and you can’t really retire the year before an election. It just is sort of not done. And if you are hoping that the president of the other party wins, you shouldn’t retire. If you want the president to appoint someone like you, he is probably not going to be able to do it during an election.

Assume—and it strikes me as highly unlikely—that three Bush appointees are added to Thomas and Scalia. Assume they stay on; that gets you five votes to overturn Roe v. Wade. All that does is return the issue of abortion to the states, whereupon most of the states, places like California, New York, then proceed to enact pro-abortion laws, and places like Louisiana, Pennsylvania and other conservative states are going to enact more restrictive abortion laws. And that will impose some burdens on women seeking abortions. Or, to put it another way, will presumably save the lives of some unborn children who might be killed. But what the people ultimately want through their elected representatives they would be able to get.

The majorities in every state who wanted abortion to be highly regulated—they would get it. If they wanted it to be relatively unregulated—that is what they would get. So there is an argument that has been made that suggests that this would be a good thing for the electorate to make these decisions rather than the court.”

A Global Economy

Patrice Franko

GROSSMAN PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

“Last fall I was up at a conference in Montreal and the anti-Americanism was palpable, and it was amazing to me, coming from our Canadian partners. When you talk to Latin American colleagues, they fundamentally are fed up with the U.S. There was always this kind of junior-partner sense, but this has, in my view, reached a new level. This lack of trust, this lack of credibility, is making it very difficult for us, in the future, to resolve what are going to be increasing problematic issues in Latin America.

Most countries in Latin America are going through a very difficult time right now because they have adopted, in varying degrees, a liberal economic reform package, a market package essentially, that was designed to—or that at least promised—economic growth. And the growth has been highly uneven, highly unequal. So people’s patience with this is clearly on edge.

You can look at Brazil or you can look at Peru. There are beginning to be these street uprisings that call into question the stability of governments. There had been a time in Latin America when the military toppled governments, but if we look at what is toppling governments now in Latin America it is the high level of dissatisfaction with the economy and people feeling the governments have basically failed them.

Now if we say some of that is a U.S. problem, then at what level are we truly engaged to be able to try and support governments that are essentially in danger? At what level are we truly crafting innovative policies that might give governments more breathing room in terms of the very tough economic constraints that they face?

The problem is that when you go down the unilateral path it starts to close off other options as conflicts and tensions emerge, and I just don’t know that the Bush administration, at this point, can really do a U-turn with any credibility and say, ‘Oh yeah. We need partners.’

To solve the kinds of problems that we are looking at—poverty, the environment—we need cooperation and we are not building that kind of trust. . . .

Now Kerry was not particularly anti-free trade. He’s now gotten on, in a politically effective way, the outsourcing bandwagon, which is something that I think is somewhat divisive. It seems to me, in terms of where things might go or how this election might change things, that I would like to see more of the kind of message that [Sen. John] Edwards was conveying. The message of the two Americas and the need to invest in our social infrastructure. And that’s different, I think, than the problems of outsourcing. That has just played into Americans’ worries about job insecurity, which is very high at this moment. I think that is an effective strategy, but I also think that it is distracting.

Globalization is here to stay; companies are going to outsource. We are not going to be able to protect ourselves, given the changes in technology, the Internet, from a truly global marketplace. Therefore what we can do is to invest in human capital—education, health services and our social infrastructure—to make American workers that much more productive and creative.

This whole debate is taking the Kerry campaign in a politically effective direction for him, but I think that it’s distracting from the fact that what we really need is a social agenda for the U.S. We really need to think about health care so that when we are looking at health care cost, as compared to Canadian health care cost or European cost, U.S. firms are not at a disadvantage.

There is no way we are going to compete with China, which is waking up to the international economy and sending out new shock waves. So to be focused on this outsourcing thing may get Kerry votes, but I think it is also important that he generate a kind of mandate for investment in the social sector.”

Environmental Direction

Thom Tietenberg

MITCHELL FAMILY PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

“My sense is that in this election [the environment] doesn’t achieve the same level of prominence that it has in some other elections. It is one of the major differences between the two candidates.

I think it is fair to say that to the Bush administration environmental regulation has been too onerous, too restrictive. The environmental community sees the administration as being anti-regulation, lacking many of the regulations that were already in place and failing to implement regulation in other areas where it seems appropriate.

That, it seems to me, was an issue that was shared with the Reagan election, the issue of what the proper role of the government is. I think that there is some sense in the Bush administration that regulation has gone too far and it’s cut too deeply and the cost of regulation exceeds the benefits. In an area that I think is really of interest—energy and national security—we are depending more and more these days on imports of oil. That makes us vulnerable internationally for national security reasons, and what do we do about that? The administration approach is that we have to gear up the domestic supply to replace imports. The environmental position is that we have to think about reducing demand
and increasing energy efficiency and that simply using our dwindling supply of energy would have serious long-term consequences.

Another flash point between the communities is that the Bush administration in its search for alternative domestic sources of oil turns to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as a major source of oil. The environmental community points out that (a) the amount of oil that is there won’t in the long run make a significant difference, but (b) it is a unique place with unique ecologies. And the track record with other pipelines is not terrific. There is a major difference there.

And of course my own area of research is in climate change, and that is a very huge difference.

President Bush the candidate announced that he was for doing something about climate change, and the environmental community had great expectations about that. What happened after he became president is that he completely changed his mind and so decided that climate change was something he was not going to pursue. And so from my point of view, we’ve paid a very high price for that since.

It seems that the Bush administration stand on climate change was primarily two-fold. One is that the science is probably wrong, but then their own National Academy of Science came out and basically said climate change is real and we ought to be doing something about it.

The second position is that it cost too much for the U.S. to meet its obligations under the [U.N.] Kyoto Protocol [United Nations climate change agreement], but a close analysis of that indicates that the cost of meeting the Kyoto Protocol basically involves a slight delay in reaching the same level of wealth, so instead of reaching a given level of wealth in 2006 we would reach it in 2007.

I think that most people have this image that the economy is going to nose dive if we were to do that. Absolutely none of the models suggest anything like that. They suggest that the increase in wealth will be slightly slower. And I think a lot of people in the country think, since climate change has strong inter-generational characteristics, that we could have huge impacts on the future. I think that most people think that is a safe precaution to take.

We have more choices now than we will have in the future. And the more we don’t make those choices, then the narrower and narrower those choices become. And the harder and harder it is to make them. The whole notion of sustainability has become absolutely crucial, and a lot of what is going on now is flying in the face of this.”

**A Natural Gap**

**Liliana Butcheva-Andonova**

**Assistant Professor of Government and Environmental Studies**

“I don’t think the environment will be a huge issue in this presidential election partly because of the attention given to security issues, the Iraq war, terrorism, education reform. But on the other hand, things like climate change and energy policy are issues, particularly in states that are more aware of and more sensitive to those kinds of issues.

In the Northeast, the states themselves are much more proactive on climate policies. I expect in these states this will be more of an important question that the candidates have to address. Also, if Nader remains part of the race, then it could become even more important for Kerry to position himself on certain environmental issues.

On climate. George Bush has made his position very, very clear. He has pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol; he has said that any action on that front is not in the interest of the U.S.

I think the two candidates have quite different positions on these issues; I don’t think a lot of the voters understand the details of that. Kerry’s position is likely to be framed more cautiously and to emphasize the opportunities in terms of efficiency, greater energy independence and less dependence on imported energy, and the creation of jobs as a result of a more proactive position on climate.

This may alienate some stakeholders in the process such as interests associated with coal, energy production, Midwestern states, but these are already aligned with the position of George W. Bush anyway so I don’t think Kerry has anything to lose by alienating those kinds of constituencies. He has a lot to gain by projecting a more proactive position on energy issues, particularly in New England, New York, California.

The other environmental issue that I think may emerge—genetically modified organisms—will be much more difficult ground for Kerry to tread; pressure internationally, mostly from the European Union, makes it a very politically difficult issue. If you’re a presidential candidate you wouldn’t want to see yourself yielding to European pressure on GMOs, certainly not now.

And of course, air pollution standards. That has much better understood effects on health than, let’s say, climate change. So it’s a much easier issue for people to comprehend. There have been attempts to relax some of the standards on combustion sources by the current administration that would all play in the favor of the Democratic opponent of George W. Bush, if he wanted to use them. This issue is going to have less resonancy in Midwestern states that depend on coal and in the Northeast, New England and New York. There are a lot of industries that could be affected in different ways, and Congress is going to play a huge role.

The president is ultimately tied by the politics that is reflected in the voting on the Hill. For any climate treaty to be ratified by the U.S. it would have to have Congress on board. So a president wouldn’t be able to do that singlehandedly, but a proactive position could make Congress more sympathetic to a reformed climate treaty or policies that could move the U.S. closer to a consistent climate policy.

Also the whole crisis in Iraq—I don’t think people here see the linkage between energy, war and climate because that’s not an easy linkage to make in the current climate. But there is a clear linkage, and the more people see the costs of interventions to secure energy resources, the more likely the support for energy efficiency in terms of policy and technological innovations. But again, somebody at a fairly high level will have to make that linkage explicit because it’s not immediately clear.

These kinds of issues need to become more mainstream political issues rather than radical political issues in order for these kinds of politics to take hold.”