

TIME TO SAY GOOD BYE

Better teaching, better living and better rankings: these were the three campaign promises I made for the student trustee election in 2006. As my term comes to an end, I feel it is my responsibility to compare what I promised to do what I have actually accomplished in the past two years. During my tenure, my understanding of the original platform was deepened and broadened, but I have never, never forgotten my promises to you.

Better Teaching

My primary instrument to improve teaching was



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Trustee
Viewpoint

to declassify the course evaluation results. We began our efforts in CALS first, which was considered the most difficult to overcome. Several years ago, the CALS faculty senate passed a resolution prohibiting the dean and associate deans from seeing the evaluations. However, through our efforts, in February this year, they approved a resolution to openly provide the results to everyone in the Cornell community. After the resolution was passed, Provost Bidy Martin gave student trustee Kate Duch and me the opportunity to present the same idea to all the deans of Cornell. They were very receptive to our idea. I am confident that other colleges will follow in CALS' footsteps.

Better Living

My plan was to create a low-cost health

insurance plan for students with families. I worked on this project throughout the last two years. In my first year, I tried to use my economic knowledge to design a solution, but later found that no solution is possible without some initial subsidies. As a result, I set in motion a movement last October to ask the University to assist people without health insurance. This movement caught the attention of the trustees and the administration; President David Skorton mentioned my initiative in his article in Alumni Magazine on Jan. 24. Now I am a member of the student health insurance advisory committee and have begun working out feasible steps to solve this problem.

I should apologize that I did not fully achieve my goal due to the complexity of this issue. In the past year, many of my supporters asked me to run for reelection as student

trustee; I considered this possibility. Based on my current progress in the health insurance initiative, I believe I would see this campaign promise come true with a second term.

But I need to apologize to my supporters that I chose to give up this opportunity. I believe it is not appropriate to run for a second term. Firstly, it is not fair. The incumbent student trustee has a huge advantage over the challengers. Secondly, every student leader has his or her personal bias. Since student leaders are not full-time representatives, we only have energy for a certain number of projects, while spending relatively little time on others. The best way for better representation is to have a new student trustee. Thirdly, being a student trustee is a life-changing experience. I hope more students

can share this valuable experience with me, so we will have more committed alumni. I hope future student trustees can appreciate my thoughts on this issue and give more opportunities to younger students.

I did have some concerns, however: will I still have enough strength to continue my efforts after I step down? Finally, I came to an epiphany: Even though I will have less political power, the strongest source of influence is not politics, but rather justice. If you look at human history, politics sometimes leads people in the wrong direction, but ultimately justice always wins. I believe that everyone in this world should have some basic rights. Affordable health care is certainly one of them. As a progressive institution, Cornell should be a leader in fighting for justice worldwide, but such a commitment begins within our own community.

Better Ranking

My initial goal was to attract the best and brightest students from around the world to Cornell, thereby increasing Cornell's ranking and prestige. I personally spoke in front of more than 20 Chinese newspapers, radios and television stations about the unique opportunity Cornell provides. My effort, in partnership with others, allowed Cornell to witness the greatest ever increase (66 percent) in applications from China in 2007.

My understanding of the importance of international exchange was considerably deepened during my term. In the past two years, I have witnessed — through media or my personal experience — how minuscule misunderstandings between people of different backgrounds can develop into hatred between them. I then realized that international exchange is much more important than "increasing Cornell's rankings." We need to promote interaction among young adults from different countries. The friend-

ships developed when people are young will accompany them for their whole life and lay the foundation for the world peace.

Therefore, I arranged the Cornell Daily Sun's trip to China last winter, and also helped arrange the Glee Club and Chorus club trip to China during spring break. In hopes of expanding my efforts to other countries, I have established a group called the "Student Overseas Exchange Steering Committee." I hope our efforts can help Cornell to become a locus of dialogue for the next generation of global leaders.

New Initiatives

The biggest priority I have found during my tenure is sustainability. It not only includes the sustainability of the environment, but also the sustainability of Cornell. It is critical for the sustainability of Cornell to attract, educate and help current students so that they will be more committed to the University and come back to help the next generation of Cornellians. For that reason, I pushed terribly hard for no-loan financial aid, and I also advocated better career services, hoping it could help every student find his or her passion at Cornell.

When I ran for my first campaign at the age of 15, my mother told me that the most important thing is to "say what you can do, and do whatever you have said." This is exactly the advice I have followed for the past two years. I would like to thank you all for electing me two years ago, and I apologize for the campaign promises which I have not fully achieved. I will continue to work on these promises even after I step down. My term as a student trustee comes to an end, but my service will not. I will continue to work for you and with you for a better Cornell.

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INVESTING IN CHANGE

Guest Room | Whitney Larsen '10

Cornell University is a high profile, high power investor. Our University holds shares in hundreds of companies around the world, and in order to thrive, it must be profitable in these investments. However, as the historic Far Above capital campaign passes the two billion dollar half-way mark, we remind ourselves that a university, unlike a corporation, must look at profit not as an end in and of itself, but as a means to a higher ideal. Where and how a university of our size and prestige invests can do much more than earn Cornell money. It is time for Cornell to follow in the path of almost every other Ivy League institution, with the sole exception of Princeton, in recognizing and institutionalizing the need for responsible investment practices.

Last fall, students from seven student organizations on campus convened to form the Cornell Sustainable Investment Coalition. We developed a proposal for a committee that would make recommendations to the Board of Trustees regarding how to use our shareholder power responsibly. The committee would consist of students, faculty, and staff, with opportunities for alumni and trustee involvement. It would engage with companies in which we're invested to promote sustainability and social justice.

As of last June, the Cornell Endowment stood at \$5.5 billion, after growing nearly 30% in the last fiscal year. The endowment consists of invested capital that generates interest as a crucial source of income to the University. It helps pay for scholarships, book funds, professorships, and is a big factor in how much loan-free student aid the University can offer. The endowment is the financial lifeblood of this University.

However, in the face of climate change, depletion of resources, an energy crisis, and vast social inequalities around the world, it is important to recognize the opportunities hidden in nearly \$6 billion dollars. With this

money, Cornell has the opportunity to help build an economy based on renewable energy, sustainable practices, and social justice. It's time to have the courage, initiative and intelligence to use our endowment to promote these goals.

There are a variety of means we can pursue to achieve these ends. One option would be for Cornell to make the conscious decision to divest from companies that demonstrate flagrantly irresponsible social practices. This sends a clear message of disapproval to the company, but, allows less-socially concerned investors to fill the void Cornell would leave, forgoing any say the University might have in company practices. Further, divestment from highly profitable companies contradicts the essential goal of the endowment: to fund Cornell's growth as an educational and research institution.

Another option, one Cornell has begun pursuing recently, is active investment in companies that exhibit sustainable and socially responsible practices. This helps provide companies the capital they need to bring innovative products and services to market, and we applaud and encourage these efforts. However, because of the complexities and risks involved in picking these companies, we see little room for student and faculty input in this process. Further, Cornell has limited capital, and so positive screening can only be part of the solution.

There is another way Cornell can use the power of the endowment to make change in the global economy, and that is shareholder engagement. About 21% of Cornell Endowment money is directly invested in stocks. The University, therefore, is a shareholder, or partial owner, in publicly owned companies, and so has a right to vote on and initiate shareholder resolutions. A shareholder resolution is simply a proposal from one shareholder to investigate or alter current company practices. By taking advantage of our significant research potential and dedicated students, faculty, and staff, Cornell can make edu-

cated decisions on how to use this shareholder power to work with companies to direct their tremendous market power towards promoting change.

Shareholder resolutions are an effective way to bring about change in corporate practices. For example, a shareholder resolution filed with Simon Malls, asking the company to report energy efficiency information to its shareholders, resulted in a company policy change, even after receiving only 8% of the vote (including favorable votes from Harvard and Dartmouth). Why would the company make these changes based on a resolution that did not pass? In reality, many shareholder resolutions do not achieve 50% of the vote, and even if they did, companies are not bound to follow them. However, they spark public discussion about how the company can move forward in a way that is both principled and profitable. As another example, ExxonMobil last year began to soften its stance against climate change initiatives after 31% of shareholders voted in favor of prioritizing greenhouse gas reductions.

We applaud President Skorton and the administration for working towards more sustainable endowment policies. However, we believe investing in companies that are already doing good work is not enough. With the pervasive social and environmental injustices perpetrated every day by actors in the global economy, we must use our significant economic leverage to help reshape current corporate practices. As we continue to raise billions of dollars, we must always remember that this money is not an end in and of itself, but a means to help Cornell promote the ideals and values that make our University a world-class institution. It's time to make ethical investing a coherent, standing goal of Cornell University. It's time to invest in change.

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