

## **I recommend you vote for reality**

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### **Palaima: I recommend you vote for reality**

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Like many other Americans, I have already cast my votes in the local, state and national elections at an early voting center. My parents worked at polling stations when I was growing up outside Cleveland, Ohio. The working-class sons and daughters of immigrant Americans took the right to vote seriously. They knew how much was at stake for them in elections at all levels.

We are lucky that simple in-person early voting is available in Texas. It isn't everywhere, although it seems like a no-brainer. As Dr. Victoria DeFrancesco at the LBJ School of the University of Texas at Austin puts it, "the issue of insuring early voting and/or mail-in voting is of fundamental importance to ensuring the right to vote."

Many Americans, rich and poor, cannot be sure of voting on election day because of the jobs they hold or their family and personal obligations. Yet 18 states withhold from their citizens the simple insurance of a basic right.

In Florida, where the bogeymen of hanging chads, broken voting machines and incorrect voter registration lists still haunt citizens, early voting days have been reduced from 14 to 8 and the freest day for the working poor to vote early, a final Sunday, has been eliminated. Understandably then, large crowds of voters have been reported at early voting centers. The early voting location at UT Austin's Flawn Academic Center has been bustling all week.

I cast my vote early for another reason, so that I would not be tempted to watch, read or listen to any more campaign advertisements or what passes for analysis of candidates and their positions on cable news networks. Do so and you will be exposed to two viruses that have invaded our body politic, educational systems and news organizations and our very lives, the spin and brand viruses. The chief symptom of infection is our willingness to be satisfied with pretenses rather than realities, what we are told rather than what we know in our hearts.

Let's look at high-profile sports, where, as Tom Boswell argued 30 years ago in his book *How Life Imitates the World Series*, we can behold what we value or tolerate as a society.

The two biggest sports stories right now in Austin, besides the sizably publicly funded Formula One circus, underscore what is wrong with public figures who cast blame on others, debates that focus on image control, and campaigns that turn on how much money candidates can raise for advertising. They also make clear that higher education is not a hospital to cure these ills, but a laboratory now to breed and perpetuate them.

The first story is the doping scandal that has cost Lance Armstrong his Tour de France titles and his sponsorship income. The second is the bargain-basement record of the UT Longhorns football team under penthouse-salaried head coach Mack Brown. Both stories are clear-cut instances of finally detecting fire where smoke has long been seen and smelled.

Yet about Armstrong's systematic, long-term unethical behavior and coercion of others to cover it up, we are told by UT advertising professor Neal Burns that Armstrong should rebuild his personal brand, "essentially to disappear for some time," then come back and "really work on again creating a positive image of himself." A marketing professor at the Wharton School of University of Pennsylvania who researches "moral decoupling" by consumers concurs. Armstrong can survive by exploiting our "psychological wiggle room."

Meanwhile, on [Orangebloods.com](http://Orangebloods.com) Mack Brown, whose astronomical salary is supported by revenues from the Longhorn Network (LHN), blames the dismal performance of his teams in the three years since he received a \$2 million raise on his having to spend three hours per week, plus travel time, taping interviews for LHN. His exercise in blatantly self-serving spin and in pointing fingers at the goose that lays his golden eggs has drawn wry observations from national sports commentators.

UT safety Kenneth Vaccaro may have identified an antidote, advising that the players "forget about all the stuff that is distracting at Texas, the Longhorn Network, all the fans, all the glory, all the Nike, and get back to just playing football, because that is all that really matters ... ."

I hope Mr. Vaccaro graduates and runs for local public office. I will cast an early vote for him. He wants to live in a real world with simple and sound values. Don't you, too?