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Column: Fashioning a new America

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My brief honeymoon with John Kerry is officially over. After a late charge in the primary season - based largely on the perception that he could beat President George W. Bush - Kerry has seemingly returned to the longwinded, visionless politician he resembled until his surge in Iowa. Unfortunately for America, that means the likelihood of another four years of a radical conservative agenda is increasing. However, Kerry still has the opportunity to cultivate a platform capable of lifting the American people up, rather than constantly reminding them how bad things are.

Kerry's biggest problem, surprisingly, is not his stunning lack of charisma, but rather the perception that his entire candidacy is dependent on the complete policy failure of the Bush administration. As long as soldiers keep dying in Iraq and new job numbers remain low, Kerry still might be able to pull out a win. And while I would do almost anything to see George Bush out of the White House, I - and millions of fair-minded Americans - would still like to see impressive job growth and success in Iraq. If either situation improves significantly, Kerry will be caught with his pants down and will lose in a landslide.

Democrats, however, should not hang up their hats just yet; there fortunately are still many months until Election Day. Sen. Kerry must reverse course and compose a compelling vision capable of convincing ordinary Americans that, even in prosperity, their lives can be significantly better.

First, Kerry should establish good governance as a central theme of his campaign. Americans on both sides of the political spectrum have the utmost respect for Arizona Sen. John McCain. The main catalyst behind this admiration comes from McCain's willingness to put his partisan political interests aside when it comes to improving the credibility and function of American government. His fight both for campaign finance reform and the 9/11 investigatory committee prove his serious commitment to making American government better. Co-opting this strategy would have an immeasurable impact on Kerry's ability to reach out to pragmatic voters in both parties.

Sen. Kerry has introduced an intriguing proposal to create jobs, but he must also develop a nuanced response to the impact of NAFTA on the American economy. As it is always easy to appeal to the basic emotions of people, Kerry could easily continue to demonize the agreement and blame it for America's employment woes. Instead, Kerry should formulate a policy that gives corporations incentives to remain in the United States while simultaneously supporting further economic development in Mexico.

Kerry must also formulate a foreign policy vision that appreciates America's immense influence and power but also teaches the developing world to love, rather than despise, America. There is no more important place to apply this philosophy than in the Middle East. First, Kerry must take an active role in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Kerry policy should acknowledge Israel's right to be free from terror while also recognizing the terrible suffering of the Palestinian people. Solving this crisis in a fair manner would both ensure the security of an important ally and champion the cause of one of the world's saddest stories.

Kerry should also impress upon the American people the paramount need to free itself from Middle Eastern oil. Our purchase of Saudi oil starts a chain of events that leads to the indoctrination of impressionable young Muslims in poverty-stricken areas such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. These are

precisely the youth that Osama bin Laden brainwashes into hating America. By developing alternative sources of renewable energy, American dollars would no longer be supporting the Madrasas that develop young terrorists.

The upcoming election is perhaps the most important election in a generation. The reckless policies of a trigger-happy administration have damaged America both at home and abroad. America cannot settle for another four years of reckless invasions, ill-advised tax cuts and a president who wants to write bigotry into the American Constitution. Unless John Kerry can step up and be a visionary leader, it will be dangerous to imagine the America in which we will be living four years from now.

-The writer, a sophomore majoring in international affairs, is Hatchet opinions editor.

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