

OUR STANCE

Demand decides gas prices

Well it's officially a recession, but more importantly to the many penny pinchers out there, it's officially the beginnings of affordable gas prices.

As gas prices went up, consumer spending, travel and anything affected by consumer spending and travel went down.

And down some more. And down even further. Until we got here, in a recession.

Surely gas prices weren't the cause of the recession, but it certainly did play a powerful role as food prices and nearly everything else inflated just as rapidly as pumps robbed checking accounts across the country.

Regardless, it feels good to spend \$20 filling up the tank opposed to the \$40 it took just a month or so ago.

But as prices stay low, one can't help but think how this is affecting profits. Is this a sign that gas companies are going to be the next contenders for chapter 11 bankruptcy?

Hardly. According to a report by *USA Today*, retail gas prices may have dropped by 55 percent since July, but wholesale prices that gas stations use to buy their gas have dropped by 68 percent, leading to a surge in profits for stations across the

nation. If wholesale prices have dropped so significantly, charging us cheaper prices may seem like a sure sign of failure, but we're essentially still being charged enough to make these gas moguls a pretty penny.

In fact, the report stated that gas companies are making more today than they were when stations were charging more than \$4 a gallon.

It may seem like the best of both worlds. They're making money. We're saving money. But how long is this really going to last?

Well the answer to that really can't be solved without wondering how long demand will stay down.

What got us into the gas price blues in the first place was the fact there was a limited supply of oil and a huge demand from our giant SUVs and gas-guzzling cars.

Not to mention our complete ignorance toward how much oil we consume in a given year.

As gas prices crept up, we reversed the effect by cutting back.

Many people got hybrid cars, some people just cut back their travels and other resorted to a good old-fashioned bicycle.

It wasn't uncommon to hear students whining about gas prices in classes nearly every

day. Likewise, it was no shocker to see students utilizing the shuttle systems or even walking to campus.

In essence, we lowered the demand, and now we're reaping the benefits of that.

Therefore, the only way for this trend to continue is keep demand right where it's at.

Our country should continue to promote greener vehicles and push for new technology. The more we move forward, the less travel will be a significant expense.

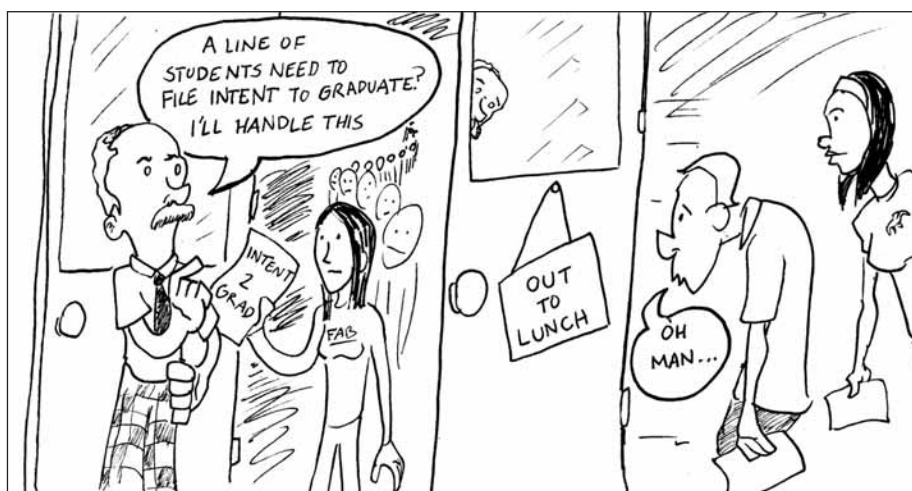
Clay Ingram, a spokesman for AAA in Alabama, told *The Tuscaloosa News* that this is precisely what needs to happen.

"Everybody needs to remember to enjoy this while we can, but continue to use the energy conservation habits we've developed," Ingram said. "These lower gas prices that we're seeing are actual, hard proof that energy conservation really works. We're now reaping the benefits."

It seems like the ball is in our court now.

If we want to keep these low gas prices, we're going to have to keep the demand down and keep pushing for a greener America.

Falling prices today simply can't hold us back from a healthier tomorrow.



RINALDO STEPHENS / CENTRAL FLORIDA FUTURE

What do women really want? Jerks

What is it about jerks that women absolutely love?

We say we hate them. We say we'll never date them. We claim that we have standards that a jerk will never live up to. Yet, when it comes down to it, jerks are who we're with at the end of the day.

Growing up, my mom used to snarl at me, "Nice guys always finish last." Of course, this was her manipulative attempt to get me to date who she wanted me to date rather than whom I actually liked. Either way, I really think she was on to something there. Do nice guys really finish last?

As I sit here watching a rerun of *True Life: I'm Jealous*, I can't help but ponder on the many relationships I encounter each and every day. The girls on this show are absurd.

They spend so much of their lives, on camera at that, stressing about some guy who doesn't seem to really care about them. Why do they do this? Is it for ratings? I'd like to say yes, but I see it everyday not only with my friends, but also with myself.

The truth of the matter is it's all about the chase. It's all about conquering the unconquerable. It's all about being that special lady who can break past a guy's wall of macho man-ness and get inside his heart. Just like Carrie in *Sex in The City*, we leave our near-perfect Aidsens for our emotionally unstable Mr. Bigs. It's just more exciting that way.

I have a friend who is an amazing guy.



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He's emotionally available. He's sensitive. He's thoughtful. He's kind. He's good looking. He's even family oriented, educated and a romantic.

But most curiously, he's single. On paper, he's perfect, but in reality, he's single. He has the hardest time with women, because they simply don't want a perfect guy. They want a guy they can impact. It's that whole "I'm going to take him under my wing and fix him" syndrome that so many of us fall subject to.

Disney did so many of us girls a severe disservice. It wasn't the fact that they made up perfect men in their movies to come save the beautiful princess, it was the fact that they led us to believe that the beautiful princess was actually happy with the perfect man.

You can debate me all you want. You can tell me you believe in perfect, story-book romances, but take a look around. Prince Charming is probably off somewhere sobbing, while some toolbag is off bickering with his girl.

Now don't get me wrong. Girls will still be entranced with their ideas of who Mr. Perfect should be, but take it from a pro, there's something about being the one who can bring the prince out of the prick that makes it all worthwhile.

So keep on keeping on ladies, you'll find the right one one day, it just may take a bulldozer to find the true charm behind the jerk. However, whether it's worth the months of construction is a task force only you can tackle.



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Education is key to AIDS prevention

As another World AIDS Day comes and goes, with people wearing ribbons and bracelets and donating money to various charitable organizations, one can only wonder what progress has been made in the fight against AIDS since the public was made aware of this serious disease during the 1980s.

It seems that much AIDS research and advocacy has shifted toward education and prevention rather than attempting to find a cure. Last week, a group of researchers at the World Health Organization presented an idea that could all but eliminate new HIV infections within 10 years.

The plan calls for adults and teens to be tested every year for HIV, and those that test positive should be given anti-retroviral drugs that are used for treating AIDS currently. The goal is to stop the spread of new infections so that the disease is relatively contained, and eventually it will be non-existent.

According to *The New York Times*, the implementation of this plan would be easier said than done. Without making HIV tests mandatory, how do you convince people to get tested once a year?

A valid question when some people don't even get standard physicals every year. The answer lies in government regulation, and it is part of the reason healthcare costs are so out of control.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United States spends roughly 16 percent of gross domestic product on healthcare and still has 16 percent of the population not covered by any health insurance. Many other countries,

including Sweden, Ireland, Canada and the United Kingdom, spent 7 percent to 9 percent of GDP on healthcare and have universal healthcare which covers nearly everyone.

There are many reasons for our unbelievable healthcare expenditures, but what it really boils down to is preventative care. The UCF Health Center has begun to proactively educate students on the risks of diseases like AIDS and meningitis.

The program called "Get the Knight Protection" aims to distribute information about common diseases that can be avoided by just taking a few simple steps and lifestyle changes.

Regarding AIDS, the Health Center says that one in four people don't know they are infected and that minorities are at the greatest risk of infection.

Former NBA superstar Magic Johnson initially said that he did not know how he contracted HIV, but he later admitted that it was because he had multiple sexual partners during his basketball career.

If we just took the time to educate ourselves and took precautionary measures, many of the rampant diseases that exist today would most likely not be the epidemics that they have become.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, AIDS was commonly associated with homosexuality, and it was thought that only a small percentage of HIV-positive people had contracted it from heterosexual sex.

Whether that was true or not is up for debate because the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were just beginning to learn about HIV and AIDS and had no way of accurately tracking it.

After more than 20 years of research, though, it has become clear that AIDS is not just a "gay disease," because 80 percent of female infections come from heterosexual relations, according to information provided by the UCF health center.

President Bush has actually done more good for the AIDS epidemic, particularly in Africa, than any other president.

Under the Bush administration, more than 2 million people infected with HIV have received the lifesaving anti-retroviral drugs as part of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

Even Barack Obama praised the president for his uncharacteristically selfless policy.

Obama said in a videotaped message to the Saddleback Civil Forum on Global Health, "I salute President Bush for his leadership in crafting a plan for AIDS relief in Africa and backing it up with funding dedicated to saving lives and preventing the spread of the disease."

While we applaud the Bush administration for further expanding the AIDS relief program this year, it simply isn't enough to combat the spread of this deadly virus.

The World Health Organization estimates that another 7,500 infections occur daily and more than 33 million people are currently living with the disease. Something drastic must be done soon to help stop the spread of HIV and AIDS.

While we wouldn't normally advocate overbearing government regulations, mandatory annual health screenings may be the only way to open up the eyes of every man, woman and child to the health problems that threaten the future of human existence.

The media really love white people

Other than Barack Obama's successful bid for election, one news story has captured the attention of the entire nation, and it all started right here in Orlando.

The Caylee Anthony and Casey Anthony case has received vigorous, non-stop coverage in local and national media since the mid-summer. The story has a copious amount of front-page headline news potential due to the unusual circumstances of the case: a white girl goes missing, and it appears that her white mother could have murdered her.

Back in 2002, CNN, MSNBC and that other national news station made reports and conducted investigations on the abduction of Elizabeth Smart. The 14-year-old white Smart had been taken from her bed while her younger white sister watched in fear and silence, pretending to sleep so that she wouldn't be taken as well.

By far the most famous missing persons story is that of JonBenet Ramsey, the 6-year-old beauty pageant contestant who disappeared from her family's home, in December 1996.

The most recent report concerning the Ramsey case popped up in the news this past July, nearly 12 years later. JonBenet Ramsey also happened to be young, white and female.

Are you noticing a pattern?

It is no coincidence that the vast majority of missing persons cases with expansive media attention involve white female minors. News is a media like any other. Beyond informing you of current events, news in this country is meant to entertain, because entertainment makes money. In order to entertain the most people and make the most money, news companies report on the topics that they feel can appeal to the widest audiences.

Over the years, these companies have slowly boiled missing persons reporting down to a science, and the missing young white female has become the archetype for this sort of story. These are the characteristics of a modern damsel in distress, as



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defined by modern American reporting, and damsels in distress are quite appealing to audiences. Ask yourself questions: Can you recall ever seeing a kidnapped black girl making headline news? How about a teenage hispanic male, or an Asian boy from a single-parent household? Sometimes I think: "Maybe we're just lucky. Maybe the only people in America who get kidnapped are those unfortunate

white girls, meaning that I'm in the clear. I'm black AND I'm a male."

Or maybe America's news media is racially biased and pays no attention to people of any color that isn't white.

It shames me to say American news reporting is still racially biased, even when reporting on events as serious as child abduction. Media coverage is key in finding missing children; more media attention means more people seeing the face of the child or maybe hearing his/her voice. If the typical white girl in distress goes missing and her story receives national coverage, millions of people get a chance to see her face and listen to her story over and over again. But if little Jonny Doe gets taken from the hands of his black parents and no one reports on it, the odds of his situation becoming headline news are slim, meaning a few million less people will go unaware of his absence.

Placing media focus on one race is racist, because it implies that the race being consistently reported on is the only race that is important. The average reader, viewer or listener of the news is led to believe that anything reported on is relevant and important. Therefore, anything not reported on can be considered irrelevant and unimportant.

Every story about a typical missing white girl further insinuates the idea that, of all children, white girls are the most important. These stories imply that the welfare of white women is a top priority of the American public. There is no legitimate explanation and no reasonable excuse for news organizations to promote this kind of racism.