Wednesday, November 7. 2007

DaBean/FlyYukon: The Ron Paul of Activeworlds

DaBean/FlyYukon, while currently in third place out of the three candidates for AWTeen Governor, could draw a significant number of votes in this election. DaBean, unlike the other candidates, hasn't posted a detailed platform containing numerous paragraphs of text. Instead, he and Kapara have simply stated they would ask for community suggestions and implement whatever the community wishes to get done. While community input is a great idea, his lack of specificity and weak assertion of leadership could also be seen as a sign of weakness by the voting public.

First, DaBean's greatest strength is perhaps his recognition that the Peacekeepers are a worthwhile resource and that their help would benefit AWTeen. The Peacekepers have existed for over ten years and have developed a well-tested training system that hasn't resulted in any major incidents for a long time. Whereas Strike Rapier and Matthew propose to implement their own system of dispute resolution as soon as possible after election, DaBean proposes to leverage the PK's to provide training, and that's a step in the right direction. Strike Rapier and Matthew, on the other hand, fail to see the PK's as a resource, instead believing they are a hindrance to the world's development.

DaBean has also stated his policy towards openness and transparency. I don't believe it offers any advantage over Matthew's. Whereas I support the confidentiality of information about pending events or building projects where the goal is to surprise the public, I disapprove of withholding any other type of data, even ejection logs. DaBean opposes the publication of world ejection logs.

Fortunately, however, my arguments on public accountability and ejection logs may be moot. Recently, Flagg stated that all ejections must be submitted to Activeworlds, Inc.. Whether Flagg would release the information to everyone else is less clear, but the idea that someone is watching over ejections to make sure they are performed responsibly is a comforting one.

The biggest concern with DaBean's campaign, however, is the idea of "community involvement." At first, "community involvement" sounds like a great idea. After all, who wants a world run by dictators and bureaucrats? We've already had a world like that and don't need one like that again. However, the possibility exists for the world to move too far in the opposite direction, that is, towards anarchy. There will need to be some points where DaBean steps in and takes control.

Don't forget, however, that DaBean brings to the table valuable experience as one of the Caretakers of AWNewbie, a post in which he has done an excellent job. AWNewbie is a welcoming world that has become a significantly positive influence on Activeworlds. He certainly hasn't demonstrated weak leadership in that world, and DaBean makes up for many of his shortcomings in that he has a no-nonsense attitude towards world management. He doesn't want to organize any committees or have votes among committee leaders. Instead, he wants to empower users to manage their own affairs and work as a passive leader - the Ron Paul of Activeworlds.

Indeed, DaBean and Paul have many commonalities. Both are dark horses who present significantly different ideas than the leading candidates. Both want to limit the size of the government and let people live their lives, or in DaBean's case, to let people do what they want in AW without Governor interference. They both want to divide power amongst smaller entities (in Paul's case, the states, and in DaBean's case, the leaders). They are both fed up with the current system and push dramatic changes. And they both have the potential to become strong contenders for the position for which they are running, if they can convince people of the need for change.

In conclusion, DaBean has a lot of experience, but may have difficulty determining where to draw the line with his "community leadership" approach. If he can overcome this limitation, he may find himself moving up in the straw polls as the election draws to a close.

Posted by Brant in Campaigns at 12:53

Saturday, November 3. 2007

Strike Rapier: We need more information

Strike Rapier posted his "manifesto" before all of the other candidates in the AWTeen election, way back on October 21. Currently leading the polls, Strike seemed all but guaranteed a win in the election. However, with the recent announcement that GC had been eliminated from the race, Matthew appears to be gaining votes from GC and his supporters, shortening the gap.

Strike Rapier starts off well in his platform by stating that he would appoint two "co-Caretakers," Silverliner and s e V e n s. Both are good candidates for the positions, should they accept. Interestingly, Strike has chosen to limit his administration to two co-Caretakers, whereas Matthew has insisted on three people for the job. Having fewer co-Caretakers may increase the workload on the main Caretaker somewhat, but enacting such a policy also reduces the security risk of the Caretaker privilege password being divulged.

In my last post about Matthew, I didn't cover the issue of security at all, so I will comment on it here. Ever since Activeworlds 3.1 was released (or was it 3.2?), the Caretaker has had the right to issue a single command to wipe out all the property in the world. Whereas before that release the Caretaker had little more power than anyone else except the ability to set world rights and change the welcome message, now the Caretaker can destroy the entire world if (s)he so chooses.

Thus, Strike's policy of limiting access to the privilege password is a step in the right direction, although it does not go far enough. Ideally, he would limit use of the password to one co-Caretaker instead of two. Having one person with the password provides enough coverage for when Strike is offline, which in reality is almost never anyway.

That line of reasoning brings me to perhaps Strike's greatest strength - how often he is online. Strike Rapier said himself that he has a considerable amount of cash invested in Activeworlds in general, and thus has a financial incentive to see the technology succeed. With AWTeen one of the flagship worlds in the AW universe, Strike actually stands to make money from his tenure as Governor, albeit indirectly - because the more people that use AW, the more are likely to purchase his bots and use his services. He will be extremely motivated to improve AWTeen to its best possible state just for this reason.

On the other hand, the potential for raising money could also lead to a loss of focus. Strike could become distracted from AWTeen by development of his Eclipse Evolution bot or a number of other projects. He has said publicly that he sees himself as "a mentor to those below [him]." Strike plans to take a more inactive role in the governorship by letting his committee leaders run the world and by resolving disputes that rise up to his level. While not necessarily a bad approach, Strike needs to watch out that his time isn't taken up by other tasks because the world seems to be running "just fine." Tony M continued development of his bots while Caretaker of AWTeen, and we know how his online time was limited as well.

Also, Strike makes no mention of his position towards transparency. While some leaders believe that some discussions should remain confidential, others go to the extreme and reveal only what is necessary. Since Strike will be implementing a committee system, I am curious to find out exactly how the decisions reached in the committee meetings will be distributed to the public. The public has a perception that Strike is not open enough and continually manipulates events behind the scenes. Hopefully, Strike will respond to this post with a comment about his stance on openness and transparency.

Finally, Strike proposes to set up "city-zoned" regions in Eclipse Evolution. From what he has disclosed, the idea sounds impressive. However, Strike has not stated exactly who would have permission to define zones, and who would handle the numerous requests to do so. One could imagine that Strike will quickly become overwhelmed when everyone wants his or her build "city-zoned" if he himself implements the zoning. If he plans to allow anyone to create a zone, people could take advantage of that permission and cause vandalism. Either way, this proposal is a problem.

Overall, it seems that Strike Rapier simply needs to provide more information about many of his proposals. What he has stated is not sufficient for a user to make an informed judgment about whether or not to vote for him. Let's wait until Strike fleshes out some of his proposals more fully before making a call on whether or not he would make a good Caretaker.

Posted by Brant in Campaigns at 12:27

Thursday, November 1. 2007

Matthew: Covers the basic issues, but what about leadership?

With the deadline for candidate registration having passed, today I'll start by writing one of a series of articles reviewing each of the candidates' platforms. I've chosen Matthew first because he recently entered the race to replace Jaguar Hahn, who effectively had been running a campaign in absentia.

It is a good move that Matthew became the head of his own campaign, because his commitment to Jaguar Hahn's campaign shows that he definitely has the motivation to succeed at the AWTeen Governor position, and that motivation is sorely needed. However, his stances on several key issues leave one wondering whether he would be able to maintain strong leadership throughout his tenure as Governor.

One interesting stance that Matthew takes is that he would establish a committee system. While I have, in the past, proposed that committees are inefficient, they are not an absolutely ineffective method in which to manage a world. However, having committee leaders become members of a Core is a system that has been rehashed about six times over the past seven or so years. Each time, one of the Caretakers has tried to get it right, and each time the Caretaker has failed.

The reason the Caretaker has failed is simple - the Caretaker is ultimately responsible for what happens in the world. When the time comes for the Caretaker to overrule the committees' decisions, the committee leaders become angry and chaos ensues. One could argue that the Governor faces an even greater challenge in this area now - because while Flagg might have been willing to give the Caretakers a second chance before, the voting public will not be so forgiving. If the Governor fails to get accomplished what needs to get accomplished, AWTeen's citizens will have no objection to canning him in February, and this Core system that Matthew proposes is not going to help him out come reelection time.

It is easy to imagine a case here where Matthew wants to propose a new and innovative idea for the world but is opposed by his committee leaders. His platform does state that he is allowed to veto decisions, but it does not provide him the power to unilaterally enact decisions. Matthew will find himself in a bind - the public will be clamoring for whatever change he has proposed, but the committee leaders will stand firm, perhaps even because they themselves would lose their positions as a result of the change. There would be a "constitutional battle," although the only constitution in dispute here would be the one Matthew imposed upon himself.

Moving on to the other issues of Matthew's platform, his stance on harassment is strong. Matthew claims he will eject those committing personal attacks for one day on the first offense. However, some have questioned whether he would actually enforce such an edict, as in reality it is difficult to determine when to draw the line on questionable offenders who continually nag but don't quite cross the line. On this issue, I say that only time will show whether Matthew, if elected, would uphold this stance or whether he would cave in to pressure.

Finally, while Matthew states that he wants to bring AWTeen together to host a major event, he only lays out in his platform that "C P will return as major events manager, and will be expected to hire a team that will run at least one major event per every three months." C P is a good man for the job - but Matthew himself would be an even better one. For a candidate who has championed the cause of making a major event a priority of his administration, Matthew should not be outsourcing his most important goal. C P would be an excellent addition to any committee and should be offered a differentposition, but Matthew's reelection will largely depend on whether the event succeeds or fails, and as leader I would want to have full control of the planning process for my key campaign issue.

In summary, Matthew's platform has all the basics together, but falls short in a few key areas. Matthew's key shortcoming that shows in all three areas is that he is not taking, or may not take, ultimate control of his Governorship. It is great to work with the community and give everyone a say, but in the end, he will be the boss, and he will be the one running for reelection.

Posted by Brant in Campaigns at 14:59