

## 'November' paints unflattering picture of Oval Office - - San Mateo Daily Journal

With the election a mere week away, an intellectually and ethically challenged American president is deeply worried about his chances for re-election in David Mamet's "November," presented by Dragon Theatre in Redwood City.

President Charles Smith's (Peter K. Owen) fears are justified. As pointed out by his chief of staff, Archer Brown (Fred Pitts), the American people hate him, and his campaign has run out of money for last-second TV spots.

Smith decides to extract the money from a hapless, sputtering representative of the National Turkey and Turkey By-Products Manufacturers (Bill Davidovich), which usually pays the president \$50,000 to pardon a turkey for Thanksgiving.

In the midst of these machinations, the president summons his ace speech writer, Clarice Bernstein (Stephanie Crowley), to the White House even though she has called in sick. She has just returned from China where she and her female partner adopted a baby girl.

The wheeling and dealing goes back and forth. One of the negotiations involves Bernstein agreeing to write a turkey-pardon speech for the president if he'll agree to preside over her marriage to her partner. As pointed out by the president and his aide in this 2008 play, same-sex marriage is illegal, but Bernstein is undeterred.

As if all this weren't enough, an Indian chief, Dwight Grackle (James Devreaux Lewis), barges into the Oval Office after the president insulted him on the phone.

Director Troy Johnson deftly oversees the three principals — Owen as the president, Pitts as the aide and Crowley as the speech writer. Owen is telegenic and glib enough to at least look presidential, while Pitts is marvelously low-key yet blunt as his aide. Crowley is believable as the ailing Bernstein, who is quick-witted and tough when trying

to achieve her own goal.

On the other hand, Davidovich as the turkey lobbyist and Lewis as the Indian chief overact, and both are too loud for Dragon's intimate space.

Still, this two-act production is enjoyable not only for its often humorous, even absurd moments but also for its credible hints at how business might sometimes be conducted in Washington, replete with lots of four-letter words.

"November" will continue at the Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway, Redwood City, through Dec. 15. For tickets and information call (650) 493-2006 or visit <http://dragonproductions.net>.