

# APPALL-O-METER

## 9.3 Holy Gunsmoke

If there are awards in hell for chutzpah in the commission of mortal sin, the late Father Ryan Erickson should win 'em all. Police have concluded that the Catholic priest, when assigned to St. Patrick's parish in Hudson, Wisc., killed two men—then presided at one of their funerals.

The motive behind the murders, committed in 2002, has not been wholly established, but it's believed that one of the men had confronted the priest about molesting boys. Following the murders, Erickson was transferred twice. After police questioned him last year, he hanged himself in front of the rectory of St. Mary of the Seven Dolours in Hurley, Wisc. Police found child pornography on Erickson's computer.

St. Patrick's parishioners remember Erickson as a strict traditionalist—one a bit, shall we say, obsessed with certain sins. According to the *City Pages*, a Minneapolis-St. Paul news weekly, Erickson routinely spoke against masturbation.

"Even Sunday Mass is not safe from the immodest dress of some devils," he wrote in one e-mail to his followers. "They come to read, give out Holy Communion, etc., looking like an advertisement. There [sic] immodest dress says to all present: I'm easy! Please go home and masturbate to my beautiful body. The sad thing is that some do."

## 8.1 Our Porn World

Chris Wilson, a Florida porn Web site administrator, was arrested in October, thanks in part to an innovative barter arrangement he made with U.S. soldiers defending freedom in

Iraq. Wilson's site, NowThat's-FuckedUp.com, purveys amateur photos and videos dudes have taken of their wives and girlfriends doing very naughty things. As Wilson explained to the *East Bay Express*, many of his site's visitors were military, who

often wrote to thank him for "bringing a little piece of the States to them."

Problem was, soldiers had a hard time using their credit cards to access the site. So Wilson gave them access in exchange for

gruesome pictures of dismembered or otherwise defiled Iraqi and Afghan corpses. The photos appear over jocular captions, such as "What every Iraqi should look like."

Wilson, of course, portrays the site as a bastion for free speech and the public's right to know. "It's an unedited look at the war from [the soldiers'] point of view," Wilson told the *Express*. "There's always going to be a slant from the news media. ... To me, it's just a more real look at what's going on."

## 0.8 Nice Try

Given what his fellow Republicans have been up to, you can't blame Georgia General Assembly Rep. David Graves for mounting a gutsy defense in his drunk driving case. According to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Graves was nabbed at a roadblock and charged with his second DUI in two years. Graves argued in court that under the Georgia Constitution he was immune from prosecution, since he was doing legislative business—having dinner with colleagues—when he got likkered up. The judge rejected Graves' defense.

—Dave Mulcahey



# Laying the Groundwork

## The inside/outside strategy of the PDA By Phoebe Connelly

THE ENDORSEMENT OF Steve Young for representative of California's 48th district by the Progressive Democrats of America (PDA), like his campaign, happened quickly.

His was the first endorsement by the nearly year-and-a-half-old organization, and came at the end of the group's first "Grassroots Strategy Day," held on the Sunday after the September 24 peace march in Washington, D.C.

Formed in July 2004, PDA is a national progressive political organization that operates as a federal Political Action Committee—meaning they work directly with federal electoral campaigns, and face strict restrictions on contributions. The group's key staffers came from Dennis Kucinich's presidential campaign, and it counts amongst its allies Howard Dean's Democracy for America.

At the September meeting, PDA members discussed an electoral strategy of endorsing candidates both strategically and with the support of local chapters, electing secretaries of states to ensure electoral reform and bringing the antiwar fight to the 2006 primary.

PDA hopes to combine grassroots energy with a clear progressive agenda—their "inside/outside strategy"—to transform the Democratic Party. In a July report to PDA members, National Director Tim Carpenter described the strategy this way: "Heat in the streets, media campaigns, demonstrations, petitions, and

other shows of public intent are linked to decision-makers on the inside." Their first prominent national campaign was the challenge to the Ohio vote count, during which they worked with both the Green Party and the NAACP. In January they held a "Counter-Inaugural Summit" in D.C., with a keynote speech by Rev. Jesse Jackson, Jr. The group has since worked to promote the antiwar movement and firm up an electoral strategy for 2006.

Young's endorsement is part of the group's commitment to the grassroots. "We agreed when we launched that we would be grassroots," says Kevin Spidel, the national deputy director. "You see other organizations making strategic decisions without the local chapters, and we've seen activists come over to PDA because of that." The group has 15 chapters in California, and Young's endorsement came at the request of those chapters. "One of our beliefs is to grow our activists and support whatever they want to do in the progressive political world," says Spidel.

Young, an attorney specializing in employment law, became involved with PDA after a fundraiser the group held in Laguna Beach in July. "Steve said he was interested in the work being done, expressed interest in progressive politics," says Marion Pack, Young's field director. "He jumped in with both feet to the race for the 48th congressional seat."

Young is running for the House seat vacated in August

by Republican Christopher Cox when President Bush appointed Cox chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Cox had held the seat in Orange County's largely Republican 48th district for 17 years. The special election was an open primary, with the top vote-getter from each party moving on to an election on December 6.

Young was the winner among Democrats in the October 4 special primary, but that isn't saying much. Of the 17 candidates in the primary, he finished fourth, with 8.7 percent of the vote. Young faces an uphill battle; not only was he beaten out by two Republicans, but also by the American Independent Party's Jim Gilchrist, who came in third with 14.7 percent of the vote. Gilchrist is the founder of the Minuteman Project, the vigilante group that organizes volunteers to patrol the U.S.-Mexico border for illegal immigrants.

At this point, PDA can offer Young and future endorsees its base of activists and its national profile. Pack says she knows at least three dedicated volunteers who joined Young's campaign after the PDA endorsement, and the entire PDA phone list was called for donations and support. Regardless of the outcome of this race, Pack takes the long view. "I think a lot more people will remain active," she says. "Steve is building a base right now; it will carry over to the next elections. [Because this is a special election] whoever is elected is going to face re-election in a year—if we don't win it this time, we'll go at it again. It's winnable. And we're going after it to win."

It remains to be seen how PDA will strike a balance between supporting more winnable campaigns and those that rise up from the grassroots. Young's campaign is



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE YOUNG FOR CONGRESS

particularly fraught: In 2004, 58 percent of voters in the 48th district chose Bush, and liberal senator Barbara Boxer also lost there by 8 percentage points. In contrast, PDA's second endorsement is going to progressive radio host Tony Trupiano, who recently announced his candidacy for Michigan's 11th congressional district seat. And

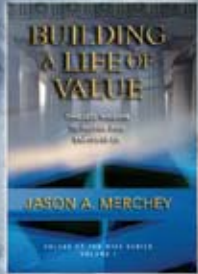
while the 11th district is arguably a winnable race—both counties in the district went for Kerry in 2004—the grassroots connection isn't as clear because PDA's presence in Michigan is still forming.

"I wouldn't call it a problem," says Spidel. "I would call it a situation we have to address." ■

**What do  
Buddha,  
Noam Chomsky,  
Aristotle,  
Einstein,  
Helen Keller,  
Mother Jones, and  
Frederick Douglass  
have in common?**

**Their religion? No.  
Their politics? No.  
Their gender or  
time period or nation? No...**

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"Wow, I remember when all these trees were a parking lot."

# Funding the Fundies

**HHS issues new abstinence grants.**

**By Silja J.A. Talvi**

**O**VER THE PAST FIVE years, the Bush administration's fixation on the no-sex form of sex education has put more than \$600 million into the coffers of abstinence-only programs. In mid-October, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families issued the latest batch of federal disbursements, totaling \$37 million.

Oddly, the grants for abstinence education are largely channeled to organizations helping females who have already become pregnant. Millions of dollars are going to dozens of so-called Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs), of which there are now at least 3,200 in the United States. CPCs do not offer abortions and attempt to sway pregnant girls and women away from that choice through counseling that emphasizes the trauma of abortion and the killing of life. Among the dozens of CPCs on the most recent list of federal grant recipients is the Several Sources Foundation Center in New Jersey, a Christian organization that touts its "chastity" training for women who have already become pregnant, and boasts of having "saved" 15,000 children, presumably from abortion.

Such blurring of the line between church and state has mostly flown under the radar, with one exception. In August, HHS suspended funding to the Silver Ring Thing organization after it was sued in Boston. The ACLU argued that federal money was being spent to reward students who chose a "faith-

based version" of the program. Those students received fancy Bibles and silver rings engraved with a scriptural verse, while the "secular version" students were given rings engraved "waiting." Silver Ring Thing has already gotten more than \$1 million in federal dollars, and the funding is likely to be restored once "tweaks" to the program are in place.

Scattered throughout the grant list are a few abstinence-focused agencies developing curriculum for junior high and high school students, including the Illinois-based Abstinence and Marriage Education Partnership (\$800,000) and Virginia's Educational Guidance Institute (\$698,840). Both of these agencies have ties to the right-wing Heritage Foundation.

HHS appears to have caught abstinence-only fever itself. Earlier this year it unveiled a new Web site (4parents.gov), designed to help parents talk to their kids about sex. According to the Feminist Majority Foundation the site was designed with the help of National Physicians for Family Resources, a group with strong ties to right-wing organizations.

"Tell your son or daughter that the best way to avoid getting an STD is for them not to have vaginal, oral, or anal sex," the site instructs parents, "until they are in a mutually faithful, monogamous relationship, preferably marriage."

In other words, just wait until marriage, and you can have all the anal sex you want. Better than a silver ring, perhaps, but it's unlikely to be what the pro-lifers had in mind. ■

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