

Bush Names new Faith-based czar

by *Bill Berkowitz*

Jay Hein, an experienced conservative think tanker, will also be deputy assistant to the president

The appointment of Jay Hein, a relatively unknown right-wing think tanker, to head the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives may be a sign that the George W. Bush administration has just about thrown in the towel on promoting what was supposed to be -- when announced in January 2001 -- the centerpiece of the president's domestic policy initiatives.

Unlike the high-profile appointments of John DiIulio, an independent-minded academic who first headed up the faith-based office and who resigned after being undercut by movement conservatives and his successor Jim Towey, the announcement of Hein's appointment came without any fanfare.

Moreover, the appointment of Hein followed on the heels of a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that raised serious questions about the faith-based initiative. "There are two big issues facing the faith-based initiative these days," both of which do not look good for the future of the program, Rob Boston, the assistant director of communications for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a non-sectarian, non-partisan organization, told me in a telephone interview. "Number one, to what extent religious-based discrimination will be tolerated in a taxpayer funded program. And number two, the question of effectiveness and results." Boston also pointed out that "From the very beginning, it appears that the faith-based initiative was at least in part designed with political goals: keep the religious right happy and, as a side, yet significant, benefit, bring a host of Latino and African American organizations to the Republican Party." According to the Indianapolis Star, Hein "was not originally on the short list of people being considered" to head up the Office, "but when White House officials -- at the suggestion of former Sen. Dan Coats, (R-IND) -- went to Hein for advice on candidates, they soon came to see him as more than an adviser."

"Jay has long been a leading voice for compassionate conservatism and a champion of faith and community-based organizations," Bush said in a statement issued on Friday, August 4. "By joining my administration, he will help ensure that these organizations receive a warm welcome as government's partner in serving our American neighbors in need."

Hein follows in the footsteps of other Indiana-based politicians who have advocated for faith-based organizations. Coats "sponsored some of the first legislation in that area while in Congress at the same time that then-Mayor Stephen Goldsmith was developing alliances with religious groups," the Indianapolis Star reported. "During the 2000 campaign, candidate Bush used Indianapolis -- and Goldsmith's initiatives -- as a backdrop to announce his intention to give faith-based groups a chance to use federal money. 'Indianapolis is clearly the epicenter of this, and we want ripples to go out across the country,' Coats said. He predicts Hein will make that happen."

Hein has most recently served as president of the Indianapolis-based Sagamore Institute for Policy Research (website), an organization he founded in 2004 and which the AP described as "a national think tank that

specializes in community-based reforms." * And, according to the White House's official announcement, Hein also serves as Executive Vice President and CEO of the Foundation for American Renewal, "which provides financial grants and other support to community-based organizations and educates the general public on effective compassion practices."

"This is a terrific opportunity to impact the national response to poverty," Hein said after accepting the President's invitation. "My appointment is a function of the high-quality research we have been doing at Sagamore from the very beginning. And I see this as an opportunity to continue and advance that important work, albeit from a new perspective," he explained.

"I look forward to serving, and I appreciate the support and encouragement of the Sagamore Board and research team as we put together a transition plan," he added. "I also look forward to returning to Sagamore and Indianapolis after my tenure in Washington."

"Hein is very smooth, very bright and he certainly comes across better than Jim Towey, who generally sounded (to me at least) like someone in way over his head," Sheila Suess Kennedy, an Associate Professor of Law and Public Policy at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, told me in an e-mail exchange.

"Where Towey appeared to come across as an none-too-bright ideologue who was too stubborn even to listen to the concerns of those who disagreed with him, Hein comes across as courteous and willing to listen, and seems possessed of a far more sophisticated intellect."

Up from the think tanks

In his native state of Wisconsin during part of the 1990s, Hein served as a welfare reform policy assistant to the state's former Gov. Tommy Thompson. In 1996, he was recruited by the Hudson Institute, and he eventually moved to Indianapolis, then Hudson's headquarters. While at Hudson Hein served as executive director of Civil Society Programs, "where he managed a twelve person, interdisciplinary staff; and a number of major research centers, including the Welfare Policy Center, the Faith in Communities initiative, and community-based healthcare reform," according to his official bio posted at the Sagamore website. When Hudson moved to Washington two years ago, Hein founded Sagamore.

According to its website, the name Sagamore is "from an Algonquin term used to describe a trusted person who helps build consensus, grapples with serious questions, and provides wisdom and advice."

Sagamore's mission is to:

"...provide independent and innovative research to a world in progress. In keeping with its commitment to pragmatic independence and hands-on innovation, SIPR is headquartered in Indianapolis, enabling its research team to influence the Washington Beltway and beyond, while making a difference in America's Heartland."

Sheila Suess Kennedy, the author of the forthcoming book, "Charitable Choice at Work: Evaluating Faith-based Job Programs in the States (Public Management and Change)," pointed out "Sagamore was formed by staffers who elected to stay in Indiana when the Hudson Institute decamped. It has a number of employees, and offices near IUPUI, where I teach, and it has a very effective PR operation. PR will only take you so far, however."

"Jay's appointment to this important position is a reflection not only of his innovative leadership," said former Indiana Senator Dan Coats, who serves as co-chairman of Sagamore Institute's Board of Trustees, "but also of Sagamore's success in the field of public policy research, especially faith-based research and civil society research."

"Jay's experiences and profile in Washington will prepare and position him to strengthen Sagamore Institute and Indianapolis upon his eventual return to the think tank," Coats added.

"When you carry out research and programming like Sagamore, research that is innovative and influential, people are going to take notice," said Jerry Semler, Sagamore's co-chairman. "It's a good thing for Sagamore and for Indianapolis that Jay's efforts here have gotten noticed in Washington. But it's also bittersweet, since

we have to share Jay for a while."

According to the Sagamore website, "Semler and Coats are in the process of working with the rest of the Board to put together a transition plan and to appoint an interim director."

"We are thinking about it as an interim role, because Jay wants to return to Sagamore after his service in Washington," said Coats. "And we definitely want him to return. Between now and then, we plan to build on the foundation Jay helped establish. Part of that foundation is the people who are here at Sagamore, nationally known researchers, writers and policy analysts who have a heart for the heartland and a vision for the world. They are continuing their work, and that's why we are confident about what lies ahead for Sagamore."

Hein helped bring together a star-studded, mostly local, Board of Trustees that includes himself, Coats; C. Patrick Babcock, the Vice President for Health Programs at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan; Paul M. Brooks, the Co-Founder and Managing Director of The Helixx Group of Zionsville, Indiana; Dr. Carol D'Amico The Executive Vice President of Indianapolis' Ivy Tech Community College who from 1990 to 1999 was both a Senior Fellow in Education and Co-Director of the Center for Workforce Development at Hudson Institute; Dr. Leslie Lenkowsky, a Professor of Public Affairs and Philanthropic Studies at Indiana University in Bloomington, who between 1990 and 1997 was president of Hudson Institute, and later was appointed by President Bush to serve as chief executive officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service; Reverend Herbert H. Lusk II, the Founder and CEO, People for People, Inc. and Pastor, Greater Exodus Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania which, in January 2006, hosted "Justice Sunday III," a gathering of conservative evangelical leaders. Lusk's operations have received substantial amounts of faith-based money from the Bush Administration.

Other Trustees are Dr. Beverley Pitts, the President of the University of Indianapolis; Jerry D. Semler, CLU, Co-Chair, Chairman of the Board of Indianapolis' OneAmerica Financial Partners; Stephen A. Stitle, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Indianapolis-based National City Bank of Indiana; and P. Douglas Wilson, Vice President of Guidant Corporation of Carmel, Indiana.

Hein is an elder at Grace Community Church in Noblesville and has hosted weekly Bible study groups at his home. Grace's pastor, the Rev. Dave Rodriguez, described Hein as "a brilliant intellect and a great thinker" who has a "deep and abiding faith."

"The (faith-based) initiative is unfinished work," Hein told the Indianapolis Star in an interview. "There are some things that need to be strengthened."

"The White House's comment to me was that they have 2 1/2 years left, and that is the equivalent of the entire Kennedy presidency," Hein said. "They feel that is a healthy amount of time to accomplish unfinished business that they deem a high priority."

Americans United's Rob Boston maintained that it would be counterintuitive for the administration to hire someone whose so-called unfinished business will be to question the program's efficacy. "I expect that Hein will be more in the mold of Jim Towey, that he will take a partisan approach and act as an administration mouthpiece, rather than follow in the footsteps of the more research-oriented John DiIulio. There is no reason at this stage that the administration wants someone in that office who will bring a discerning scientific approach to the table." At the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Hein -- who was also appointed as deputy assistant to the president and will advise him on such domestic policies as immigration or responses to emergencies such as Hurricane Katrina -- will likely concern himself with playing patch-up, mending some of the huge holes exposed by the GAO report. While the president's faith-based initiative has not been institutionalized, or given the full congressional stamp of approval, it has nevertheless spread its tentacles to more than a dozen administration offices and several dozen states, and has handed out several billion dollars to religious organizations. "Despite experiencing legislative gridlock, it has certainly become a permanent part of the political landscape," Boston noted. "Since Bush was unable to get a comprehensive faith-based bill through congress -- despite the best efforts of Bush point men, Sen., Rick Santorum (R-PA) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-CT) -- the president brought the initiative into play through a series of executive orders and regulatory changes within certain cabinet level departments. Those orders have become the perpetual motion machines that future administrations may not even think to shut down."