Santorum signs on with Ethics and Public Policy Center

by Bill_Berkowitz

Ousted Republican Senator will head up a new program called "America's Enemies"

In one of those "how can you miss them if they don't go away" stories, Senator Rick Santorum's resounding defeat in November's election has not sent him scurrying back home to Pennsylvania; Instead, Santorum will be staying in the nation's capital to head up a new program at the Ethics and Public Policy Center called "America's Enemies."

Santorum was also added to the Fox News Channel's stable of contributors. Set up some 30 years ago "to apply moral principles derived from Christianity and Judaism to public policy issues," the Center "is strongly, but not exclusively, associated with conservative Catholic intellectuals," the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette has pointed out.

Not nearly as star-studded, headline-grabbing, or politically potent as the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute or the Family Research Council, nevertheless, The Ethics and Public Policy Center has carved out its own special niche amongst the beltway's right wing think tanks and lobbying groups.

Ernest Lefever and the Ethics and Public Policy Center

Originally established at Georgetown University in 1976, the EPPC was the brainchild of Ernest W. Lefever. According to "American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia" -- published by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute -- during the Lefever era, which coincided with the rise of Ronald Reagan, the think tank "achieved prominent visibility" and was "hailed as one of the eleven 'bastions of neoconservatism' in the United States in the national media."

Early on, Lefever expressed his concern that "U.S. domestic and multinational firms" were "increasingly under siege at home and abroad." He claimed that they were "accused of producing shoddy and unsafe products, fouling the environment, robbing future generations, wielding enormous power, repressing peoples in the third world, and generally of being insensitive to human needs." Lefever determined that the Center was strategically placed "to respond more directly to ideological critics who insist the corporation is fundamentally unjust."

Lefever was President Reagan's first nominee to direct the State Department's Office for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. According to a Right Web profile, Lefever "was known as a fierce critic of President Carter's human rights policy." His human rights bonafides with conservatives in part may have grown out of a white paper he authored titled "The Trivialization of Human Rights," which was published in 1978 by the

Center.

Right Web pointed out that "In testimony before a Senate committee in 1979, Lefever set forth the neoconservative position on human rights -- one that would soon characterize the policy of the Reagan administration and would two decades later be adopted by the Bush administration. He recommended that the human rights records of governments receiving U.S. aid should 'not be judged primarily by their internal policies but by their foreign policies.'"

In a story that could be pulled from today's headlines, Lefever was forced to withdraw from consideration for the human rights post after it was revealed that the Center had taken $35,000 from the Nestle Corp. According to Right Web, "In an article in Fortune magazine, Lefever attacked Nestle's critics, who charged that the corporation's aggressive marketing of its infant powdered-milk formula in the third world was causing a new surge in infant death, as "Marxists marching under the banner of Christ."

Ironically, the post was filled by Elliott Abrams, "who espoused the same instrumentalist position on human rights as Lefever. Although Abrams entered the Reagan administration scandal-free, he left as a convicted criminal" -- due to the Iran-Contra scandal -- only to re-emerge as a key player in the Bush Administration. Abrams also served as the Center's president from 1996 to 2001.

In recent years, after George S. Weigel Jr., a Roman Catholic writer, took the helm in 1989 (he currently is a senior fellow at the Center) and during the current presidency of M. Edward Whelan III, a former advisor to the White House Counsel and Attorney General and a former clerk for Justice Antonin Scalia, the Center has focused its work on "clarifying and re-enforcing the bond between the Judeo-Christian moral tradition and the public debate over domestic and foreign policy issues."

Weigel, who has been a seminal figure in the conservative movement for quite some time, has been a strong, and unrepentant, supporter of President Bush's War on Iraq. In a recent story titled "Anti-Life Ethics in Iraq," Jacob G. Hornberger, the founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation, pointed out that in a recent Weigel authored article titled "Baghdad 2006=Tet 1968?" published in the December 7, 2006, issue of the Arlington Catholic Herald, the official newspaper for the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, Weigel continued to maintain "that the allied action [invasion] satisfied the conditions of a just war" - a position at odds with his own Pope's view of the war.

"In arriving at his conclusion that the war on Iraq was warranted," Hornberger notes, "Weigel is implicitly claiming that it is morally justifiable for U.S. soldiers, including Catholics, to kill Iraqi people (none of whom had anything to do with the 9/11 attacks) in order to achieve regime change in Iraq."

"It would be difficult to find a more morally and ethically abominable and perverted view of human life than that. What Weigel is saying is that when measured against regime change in Iraq, the life of an Iraqi citizen --

or the lives of thousands of Iraqis -- is of only secondary importance."

The Center has an enviable record when it comes to raising money. From 1985 through 2005 the organization received 191 grants totaling over $13 million. Among the Center's top funders are the Sarah Scaife Foundation, John M. Olin Foundation, Earhart Foundation, William E. Simon Foundation, and the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation.

Rick returns

According to a statement issued by the Center headlined "Rick Santorum Joins Ethics and Public Policy Center, Establishes Program on America's Enemies," Santorum's effort will be focused on "threats posed to America and the West from a growing array of anti-Western forces that are increasingly casting a shadow over our future and violating religious liberty around the world."

"As a United States Senator, Rick Santorum was a champion of efforts to counter the threat of radical Islamic fascism, to protect victims of religious persecution, and to promote democracy and religious liberty around the world," said EPPC President Ed Whelan. "We are honored that he is joining EPPC to continue his important and courageous work on these matters."

Santorum, who served 16 years in Congress (four in the House, 12 in the Senate) and lost his bid for reelection in November to Democratic candidate Bob Casey Jr., will become a senior fellow at the think tank. "In these perilous and uncertain times, I believe it is critical that we define the threats that confront America," Santorum said in a prepared statement.

"Without a clear definition and precise understanding of our enemies we cannot fight effectively and our own citizens become divided. It is my hope that the America's Enemies program at EPPC will help the American people -- including our leaders -- understand and communicate with clarity, honesty and consistency the enemies we face and the complex and enormous threat that they post to our lives and the freedoms we all enjoy."

In a National Review Online article titled "Rick's Return," Santorum told John J. Miller that perhaps he shouldn't have spent so much time emphasizing his pro-Iraq war position during the campaign: "Maybe that wasn't the smartest political strategy, spending the last few months running purely on national security. I was even more hawkish than the president."

In talking about his new project Santorum, never one to understate the case, said that he recognizes that "America's Enemies" is a "stark name." He then names his own Axis of Evil: "We wanted to be candid about

the fact that America really does have enemies and to point out that the nature of these enemies is much more complex than what people realize. It's not just Islamic fascism, but also Venezuela, North Korea, and, increasingly in my opinion, Russia."

But David Neiwert, an expert on fascism, says that fascism is a specific pathology constituted of a constellation of certain traits, only some of which are described by Islamic radicalism, and some of which are specifically repudiated by it. "Perhaps Santorum intends 'Islamic totalitarianism,' which would be accurate; but fascism is a very specific kind of totalitarianism, and what we see in the Islamic world today does not fit the description."

According to NRO's John J. Miller, "Santorum plans to organize lectures and conferences, write articles, and work on a book. (His book agent is Kathy Lubbers, who is Newt Gingrich's daughter.) 'We expect to be very, very active,' he says. One of his focal points will be religious liberty and how people of faith might confront radical Islam."

Miller, national political reporter for National Review and the author "A Gift of Freedom: How the John M. Olin Foundation Changed America," also pointed out that "at least two members of Santorum's Senate staff will join him at EPPC: Mark Rodgers, his former chief of staff, will be a fellow and Melissa Anderson (a former National Review employee) will be associate director of the America's Enemies program."

Santorum, who also plans to join a law firm in DC, will be responsible for raising "all the funds" for his new program. "Our goal is to raise several hundred thousand dollars in 2007," he told Miller.

It was also recently announced that Santorum was added to the Fox News Channel's stable of contributors. The former Senator should feel at home in both places.

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