ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're an Underdog

by Shedon Rampton

Whoever wins the 2004 presidential election, it will be remembered historically as a watershed moment in American politics. The Internet, whose transformative potential has been predicted for years but never fully realized, has finally become a powerhouse organizing tool for political activists.

An Internet-centered campaign strategy enabled Howard Dean to emerge from nowhere and become a serious contender in the U.S. Democratic Primary. At the beginning of 2003, Dean had virtually no money and no name recognition outside his home state of Vermont. By the end of the year, his fundraising had not only outpaced his rivals but had set new records for presidential primaries. More importantly, the money was coming from sources that previously had not been able to participate meaningfully in campaign giving. Dean received 97 percent of his contributions from individual donors, with 61 percent coming from donors who gave $200 or less. Only 11 percent of Dean's money came from big-money donors who gave $2,000 or more. (By comparison, the Bush campaign has received 53 percent of its money from donors in the $2,000+ range.)

Money, for better and for worse, has long been the mother's milk of politics, and until now, the dominance of big donors has been due

Flack Attack

There is no doubt that the Internet has changed the political world that we live in. This year so-called online bloggers reported back from the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, providing readers with personal, behind-the-scenes accounts of the two parties' campaign pep rallies. But perhaps even more noteworthy, political organizations were able to use the Internet to disseminate a strongly progressive and anti-war message that had been mostly absent from corporate, mainstream media. In addition, these groups were able, for the first time, to raise significant amounts of money—nationally and in a short amount of time—in support of their campaign efforts.

In this issue of *PR Watch*, we depart from our usual reporting on manipulative PR campaigns and take a look at how two campaigns—Howard Dean for President and

MoveOn.org—have harnessed new technology to serve a growing American grassroots,. pro-democracy movement. Center of Media & Democracy research director Sheldon Rampton reports back on the two campaigns, basing his articles on research compiled on Disinfopedia.org (a CMD project, see *PR Watch*, 4th Quarter, 2003).

Also in this issue, senior researcher Diane Farsetta investigates the new group Move America Forward, a Republican Internet organization. Disinfopedia editor Bob Burton profiles the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, a conservative group dedicated to creating right-wing think tanks. Plus we've included a couple pictures from our 10th anniversary celebration. This issue also marks *PR Watch*'s expansion to 16 pages and the addition of a page featuring our books and giving you an opportunity to further support our work.

in large part to the fact that the transaction costs involved in recruiting and processing small donations eat up most of their value. The Internet has changed this equation by making it possible to raise large amounts of money from small donors at minimal cost, with credit card transaction fees constituting their biggest expense. "For the first time, you have a door into the political process that isn't marked 'big money,' " says Carol Darr, director of the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet in Washington. "That changes everything."

Money, however, is only part of the picture. Equally, if not more importantly, the Internet has become a vehicle through which like-minded citizens are finding one another, building relationships and networks offline as well as online—or, as some geek activists like to put it, in "meatspace" as well as cyberspace.

FOR WHOM THE WEB TOLLS

The corporate PR community noticed the Internet's potential for political purposes early. In 1995, public relations specialist Edward Grefe, a former vice president of public affairs for the Philip Morris tobacco company, joined Republican Party organizer Martin Linsky to author their own book, titled *The New Corporate Activism: Harnessing the Power of Grassroots Tactics for Your Organization*. In it, they argued that a "new breed of guerrilla warriors" could win political battles for their corporate clients by adapting the tactics used by radical organizers on the left. "The essence of this new way," Grefe and Linsky argued, "is to marry 1990s communication and information technology with 1960s grassroots organizing techniques."

By 1998, however, Grefe began to worry that "communication and information technology" was actually a threat to the interests of his clients. "Do not ask for whom the web tolls. It may be your company," he wrote in the September 1998 issue of *Impact*, a public relations industry trade publication. As an example of this trend, Grefe cited the recent success of an international treaty to ban land mines. "From beginning to end," he wrote, "that globe-spanning campaign, coordinated by a Vermonter, was a movement started by people who had no power base, only a mission and a keen awareness of the rallying power of the Internet . . . . Most politicians around the world wished the campaign would fade away. It succeeded because it appealed to people at the grassroots in other countries who then pressed their leaders to act."

The result, Grefe warned, is that "we are being trumped. In nations around the world, grassroots movements are being formed that will spread fast and far beyond borders . . . . I would like to be able to assure you that the United States Congress—that Washington itself—is still the dominant player in handling world issues. That would be reassuring to those spending millions of dollars in this country to defeat agendas being driven by millions of people in other countries. I cannot, however, offer such assurance."

In 1998, computer entrepreneurs Wes Boyd and Joan Blades launched an online petition opposing the impeachment of President Bill Clinton following his affair with Monica Lewinsky. The petition, which called on Congress to "censure Clinton and move on" to more important matters, quickly attracted half a million signers. Since then, millions more have joined MoveOn.org's campaigns against the war in Iraq and other causes. In response to homophobic remarks by radio talk-show host Laura Schlessinger, gay rights activists launched StopDrLaura.com, which successfully campaigned for the cancellation of her TV show. In 1999, opponents of corporate-led globalization used the Internet effectively to coordinate protests against the World Trade Organization that came to be known as the "Battle in Seattle."

Here are some other examples of ways that the Internet has changed politics:

South Korea's traditionally authoritarian political system has been transformed within the space of a few years from conservative to liberal—"all seemingly overnight," the *New York Times* reported in March 2003. According to many observers, it noted, "the most important agent of change has been the Internet. . . . In the last year, as the elections were approaching, more and more people were getting their information and political analysis from spunky news services on the Internet instead of from the country's overwhelmingly conservative newspapers. Most influential by far has been a feisty three-year-old startup with the unusual name of OhmyNews."

OhmyNews takes its name from the idea that the news should be stories that make the reader exclaim, "Oh My!" It has used the Internet to merge traditional reporting with grassroots newsgathering. It has a staff of several dozen full-time reporters and editors, but most of its news comes from more than 20,000 "citizen reporters" who write for the site, contributing about 200 stories per day. This army of citizen reporters has enabled OhmyNews to explore stories that the mainstream media in Korea previously ignored. According to *San Jose Mercury News* tech columnist Dan Gillmor, "OhmyNews is transforming the 20th century's journalism-as-lecture model—where organizations tell the audience what the news is and the audience either buys it or doesn't—into something vastly more bottom-up, interactive and democratic."

The Philippines—a relatively poor country with a large technology gap—underwent its own political changes in 2000 and 2001, when opponents of President Joseph Estrada used web-linked mobile phones and Internet mass mailings to expose corruption and bring down his government. *Christian Science Monitor* reporter Ilene Prusher noted that Estrada's rapid downfall contrasted with the country's uprising against dictator Ferdinand Marcos 14 years previously, which took years to organize using ham-radio broadcasts and mimeographed fliers. The opponents of Estrada, she noted, "are putting tens of thousands of people into the streets of Manila in a matter of minutes. Call it 'spam democracy' or 'instant protesting,' but the pace of events in this society offers a cautionary tale for government leaders everywhere."

The U.S. anti-war movement was unable to prevent the war in Iraq from occurring, but this failure should be balanced against some appreciation of the speed with which the movement was able to mobilize itself and make its views felt. The Bush administration did not begin its public push for war until September 2002, and within the space of only a few months, organizers pulled together demonstrations on February 15, 2003 that involved an estimated 11 million people worldwide—unprecedented numbers to protest a war that at that point had not yet begun.

New York Times writer George Packer called the protests "an instantaneous movement. . . . During the past three months it has gathered the numbers that took three years to build during Vietnam. It may be the fastest-growing protest movement in American history. . . . Internet democracy allows citizens to find one another directly, without phone trees or meetings of chapter organizations, and it amplifies their voices in the electronic storms or 'smart mobs' (masses summoned electronically) that it seems able to generate in a few hours. With cell phones and instant messaging, the time frame of protest might soon be the nanosecond."

Although the Howard Dean campaign is the most successful example to date of Internet fundraising in election campaigns, other candidates have also used it with some success. Jesse Ventura used the Internet effectively in his successful third-party run for governor of Minnesota. In 2000 presidential race, Bill Bradley raised more than $2 million via the Internet in his Democratic primary race against Al Gore. For the Republican primary that same year, John McCain used the Internet to raise $6.4 million.

As these examples all illustrate, the Internet seems to be more useful for "outsider" candidates than for party frontrunners. "The Internet is tailor-made for a populist, insurgent movement," says Joe Trippi, who managed the Howard Dean campaign. In his campaign memoir, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, Trippi notes that the Internet's "roots in the open-source ARPAnet, its hacker culture, and its decentralized, scattered architecture make it difficult for big, establishment candidates, companies and media to gain control of it. And the establishment loathes what it can't control. This independence is by design, and the Internet community

values above almost anything the distance it has from the slow, homogenous stream of American commerce and culture."

The Internet also invites a decentralized approach to campaigning that runs contrary to the traditional controlled, top-down, message-focused approach. "The mantra has always been, 'Keep your message consistent. Keep your message consistent,'" said John Hlinko, who has participated in Internet campaigns for MoveOn and the electoral primary campaign of Wesley Clark. "That was all well and good in the past. Now it's a recipe for disaster. . . . You can choose to have a Stalinist structure that's really doctrinaire and that's really opposed to grassroots. Or you can say, 'Go forth. Do what you're going to do.' As long as we're running in the same direction, it's much better to give some freedom."

CRITICISMS

Internet activism has been criticized on grounds that it gives disproportionate access to affluent activists, failing to empower poor people, minorities and elderly citizens who either lack access or are inexperienced in the new technologies. Another concern, expressed by author and law professor Cass Sunstein, is that online political discussions lead to "cyber-balkanization" —discussions that lead to fragmentation and polarization rather than consensus, because the same medium that lets people access a large number of news sources also lets them pinpoint the ones they agree with and ignore the rest.

"The experience of the echo chamber is easier to create with a computer than with many of the forms of political interaction that preceded it," Sunstein told the *New York Times*. "The discussion will be about strategy, or horse race issues or how bad the other candidates are, and it will seem like debate. It's not like this should be censored, but it can increase acrimony, increase extremism and make mutual understanding more difficult."

Another observer, University of California professor Barbara Epstein, warns that the impersonal nature of communication by computer may actually undermine important human contact that always has been crucial to social movements. However, some Internet sites, such as Meetup.com, have been used by activists for the very purpose of overcoming the social isolation that has become common in modern, TV-fed society.

The Internet has also been criticized as a place where technologically clever but antisocial "geeks and nerds" congregate, engaging in debates that are intense but irrelevant and have little impact on the "real world." Recently, however, the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet published a study in which it found that the Internet activists actually have considerable potential to influence the thinking and behavior of others offline. Its study was titled "Political Influentials Online in the 2004 Elections." It defined "online political citizens" (OPCs) as people who use the Internet to engage in activities such as visiting Web sites of candidates or political parties, making contributions to candidates or political organizations online, sending or receiving political email, or posting comments on political weblogs and chat rooms.

MoveOn.org's anti-war billboard rejected by Viacom.

OPCs, the study found, "are not isolated cyber-geeks, as the media has portrayed them. On the contrary, OPCs are nearly seven times more likely than average citizens to serve as opinion leaders among their friends, relatives and colleagues. OPCs are disproportionately 'Influentials,' the Americans who "tell their neighbors what to buy, which politicians to support, and where to vacation. . . . Normally, 10% of Americans qualify as Influentials. Our study found that 69% of Online Political Citizens are Influentials. . . . Online Political Citizens have strong ties to their communities. They actively participate in local institutions, hold positions of responsibility and, like most Influentials, have strong opinions they do not hesitate to share. The data belie their reputation as isolated techies, aging ex-hippies or, as one news story would have us believe, love-spurned youths who have pulled up stakes to join the political equivalent of the Foreign Legion." ∎

From Flying Toasters to Cyber Voters

by Sheldon Rampton

Since its launch in September 1998, the MoveOn.org Web site has become a fundraising and organizing powerhouse, attracting more than 2 million subscribers and raising tens of millions of dollars for liberal causes and Democratic party candidates. Its success has surprised even its founders, computer entrepreneurs Joan Blades and Wes Boyd.

Before venturing into online politics, Blades and Boyd were the cofounders of Berkeley Systems, an entertainment software company known for the flying toaster screen saver and the online game show "You Don't Know Jack." After selling the company in 1997, they became concerned about the level of "partisan warfare in Washington" following revelations of President Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. They launched MoveOn.org initially to oppose the Republican-led effort to impeach Clinton. Initially called "Censure and Move On," the web site invited visitors to add their names to a bipartisan online petition that stated, "Congress must Immediately Censure President Clinton and Move On to pressing issues facing the country."

At the time, it appeared likely that MoveOn's petition would be outmatched by conservatives, who already had several Web sites dedicated to ousting Clinton. A reporter who interviewed Blades on the day after the MoveOn launch wrote, "A quick search on Yahoo turns up no sites for 'censure Clinton' but 20 sites for 'impeach Clinton,'" adding that Scott Lauf's impeachclinton.org Web site had already delivered 60,000 petitions to Congress. Salon.com reported that Arianna Huffington, then a right-wing maven, had collected 13,303 names on a Web site, resignation.com, which called on Clinton to resign.

Within a week, however, support for MoveOn had spread rapidly and exponentially. Blades calls herself an "accidental activist. . . . We put together a one-sentence petition. . . . We sent it to under a hundred of our friends and family, and within a week we had a hundred thousand people sign the petition. At that point, we thought it was going to be a flash campaign, that we would help everyone connect with leadership in all the ways we could figure out, and then get back to our regular lives. A half a million people ultimately signed and we somehow never got back to our regular lives."

From the beginning, MoveOn did more than simply collect names in a database. It also mobilized activists in the real world, recruiting 2,000 volunteers to deliver the petitions in person to members of the House of Representatives in 219 districts across America, and directing 30,000 phone calls to congressional district offices. After Republicans in Congress went ahead and impeached Clinton, MoveOn made its first move into political fundraising, asking its members to sign a pledge that they would give money and volunteer time to defeat politicians who voted for impeachment.

In June 1999, MoveOn established its own political action committee, the MoveOn PAC, with the ability to accept contributions online via credit card. It was not the first organization to fundraise online for political candidates, but its success was unprecedented, raising $250,000 in its first five days of operation and $2 million over the course of the 2000 election to help elect four new Senators and five new House members. "That may not seem like a lot of money to most people, but it was a revolution in fundraising for campaigns from average citizens," Blades recalls.

According to Michael Cornfield, director of the Democracy On Line Project at George Washington University, MoveOn's achievement created "a change in attitude" in the political fundraising community. "It is like a bell has gone off," he said. "The race is on. 'Let's raise money online.'" He compared MoveOn's achievement with the pioneering of direct-mail fundraising in the 1970s by the religious right and conservative fundraisers such as Richard Viguerie.

The most significant innovation was MoveOn's success at raising funds from small donors, with an average contribution size of $35. Direct mail fundraising brings in lots of money, but most of the money raised goes to pay for printing, postage, and processing costs. By comparison, MoveOn's fundraising costs were minimal, with credit card transaction fees taking the biggest bite out of donor contributions.

"If candidates can use the Internet to raise significant funds through small donations and attract and organize volunteers at relatively little cost and labor, it could radically alter the balance of power in politics," observed political reporter Joan Loawy. "Suddenly candidates with fewer resources are more viable and the clout of moneyed special interests is diminished."

ANTI-WAR ORGANIZING

With the end of the Clinton era, MoveOn itself moved on, taking up new causes such as a campaign for gun safety laws in the wake of the student shootings at Columbine High School. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, MoveOn launched an online campaign calling for "justice, not escalating violence."

During the buildup to the invasion of Iraq, it circulated an anti-war petition, collecting 220,000 signatures in two months. As with the petition against Clinton's impeachment, MoveOn's petition included an off-line

component, organizing volunteers who hand-delivered signatures to senators and representatives. In October 2002, a MoveOn fundraising appeal raised $1 million in two days' time for what it called four "heroes of the anti-war effort" in Congress who opposed the Iraq resolution: Sen. Paul D. Wellstone of Minnesota, Reps. Rick Larsen and Jay Inslee of Washington, and Rep. Rush D. Holt of New Jersey. However, MoveOn also worked to raise money for Democratic candidates who actually supported the Iraq resolution, some of whom were locked in tight races in moderate or conservative states, including Missouri Sen. Jean Carnahan, and Senate candidates Ron Kirk in Texas, Jeanne Shaheen in New Hampshire, Tim Johnson in South Dakota and Mark Pryor in Arkansas. All told, it raised $3.5 million for the 2002 election cycle.

In September 2002, it issued a bulletin by Susan Thompson, "Selling the War on Iraq," offering "lessons in PR from previous wars" and warning that "the costs of regime change" would be "a whopping $200 billion" (which actually has turned out to be a low estimate). MoveOn predicted that "regular people will probably have to foot the bill" while "anyone with ties to the oil companies (Bush and Cheney for example) will probably profit immensely."

MoveOn also joined with 14 other organizations to form the Win Without War coalition, which also included the National Council of Churches, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the National Organization for Women. Win Without War in turn helped organize Artists United to Win Without War, a group of more than 100 anti-war actors, producers and directors from Hollywood.

In December 2002, MoveOn launched yet another petition, titled "Let the Inspections Work," with the goal of raising $40,000 to pay for a full-page anti-war appeal in the *New York Times*. Instead, its members sent in nearly $400,000. With the additional funds, it sponsored anti-war radio spots and TV ads in 13 major cities. It also attempted to place anti-war advertisements on the sides of buildings, billboards and buses but was thwarted when Viacom, which owns the largest outdoor-advertising entity in North America, refused to run the ads.

By early 2003, MoveOn boasted more than 750,000 members in the United States and hundreds of thousands more overseas. As war in Iraq neared, its member base grew and the pace of its activities accelerated. Whereas the Nexis/Lexis database recorded 155 news stories that mentioned MoveOn in 2002, in 2003 there were 2,226 mentions. By 2004, it had more than 2 million members.

HOW MOVEON MOVES

MoveOn uses e-mail as its main conduit for communicating with members, sending action alerts at least once a week. According to Joan Neils, a University of Washington graduate who analyzed MoveOn's success, one of the keys to its effectiveness has been its status as a "trusted, credible entity."

It achieves this status through a variety of strategies. "First of all," Neils says, "people who read a MoveOn e-mail or visit the site generally do so after receiving the message or link from someone they trust. . . . This is because almost every e-mail MoveOn sends encourages recipients to forward it on to others who share an interest in the topic. This is how they build their membership and it provides a foundation of trust among the recruited." By allowing recipients to unsubscribe and by ensuring members privacy by not selling or sharing information, the group differentiates itself form commercial emails and spam.

"Most fundamental to credibility is MoveOn's legitimacy through validation," Neils writes. "All of the supporting information MoveOn provides via e-mail and the Web is easily validated. For instance, e-mails always cite sources at the bottom, most often complete with links directly to the source."

MoveOn's Web site features multi-media content on many pages, including videos, audio downloads and images. In addition to communicating via the Internet, MoveOn advertises using traditional print and broadcast media as well as billboards, bus signs and bumper stickers, digital versions of which are downloadable from its Web site. It has also published a book, titled *50 Ways to Love Your Country: How to Find Your Political Voice and Become a Catalyst for Change*.

"MoveOn also uses the Web effectively for two-way communications," observes Neils. "One of the most interactive elements of the MoveOn.org site, and one that demonstrates the group's nonhierarchical organization is the Action Forum. The Action Forum is much like a blog, in which members write in issues they think are important and suggest strategies for action. Members then vote on submissions and the highest ranked issues rise to the top, thereby establishing MoveOn's priorities. It's an incredibly fluid, bottom-up approach to decision-making, allowing MoveOn to adapt and change as they go."

"The site is organized in ways traditional political consultants might not stomach," reported CNN in January 2004. "Any member can propose priorities and strategies to which others can respond, and the most-supported ideas rise to the top. That means ceding con-

trol over much of the content to motivated online participants, producing interactivity that adds grassroots credibility."

"We are steeped in feedback," says MoveOn founder Wes Boyd. The group's success, he argues, has stemmed from its ability to listen to supporters and develop campaigns that reflect their interests. "That doesn't mean you can't have a vision. Our model is 'Strong Vision, Big Ears,'" he said at the O'Reilly Network's 2004 Digital Democracy Teach-in. Feedback from members has also moved MoveOn increasingly in the direction of what the *Washington Post* calls "a vigorously liberal agenda" that goes "beyond simple opposition to the Bush administration."

While MoveOn's allegiance is clearly with the Democratic Party, within the party it is positioned as a counterbalance to the rightward tilt that has dominated Democratic leadership over the last decade. Boyd rejects the advice of "centrists" such as the Democratic Leadership Council, who argue that Democrats need to moderate their positions on war, taxes, universal health care and other key issues. Speaking in June 2003 at a "Take Back America" conference, Boyd said, "The primary way to build trust is to consistently fight for things that people care about." Grassroots America is ready to support a liberal agenda, he said, if only "someone will get out and lead. . . . Every time we did something, every time we showed leadership, our membership went up." ∎

Howard Dean: The Scream Heard Around the World

by Sheldon Rampton

Vermont governor Howard Dean only won a single state, his own, in his campaign to win the Democratic nomination for president in 2004. Nevertheless, his campaign was remarkable for its extensive use of the Internet to reach out to its supporters. Dean and his staff frequently "blogged" while on the campaign trail and even delegated important campaign-related decisions to the outcomes of polls conducted on his Web site. By soliciting contributions online, mostly in small donations from individuals, the campaign shattered previous fundraising records for the Democratic presidential primary. Dean has thus been credited with being the first national candidate to play to the strengths of the Internet, in particular by engaging the American public directly in the political process.

Dean began his bid for president as a long shot with few volunteers and little money. Dean's campaign manager, Joe Trippi, notes that as late as January 2003 "the Dean campaign was still squirreled away in a cramped, 1,000-square-foot second-story office above the dark Vermont Pub and Brewery. There were six people—seven if you counted the governor—working for Dean for America, most of whom had been longtime aides in the governor's office."

"[O]ne year before the Iowa primary, while the other campaigns had built sophisticated political machines, raised war chests of millions of dollars, and compiled computerized lists of potential supporters in key states, the Dean campaign had none of these things, had raised only $315,000, and had spent two-thirds of it just remaining on life support," Trippi continues. "There was a computer in the Dean headquarters—and a relative of the governor's had set up an early Web site—but it wasn't even turned on. They had gathered about 9,000 names of 'Friends of Howard,' people who had, at one time or another, told the governor that they might be interested in helping if he ever decided to seek higher office. . . . But instead of being readily accessible for sorting on a computer database, these names, along with names of thousands of other potential supporters, were scrawled on business cards, contact sheets, and scraps of paper and stuffed in a few shoeboxes—not even one shoebox for each state. . . . In most polls, his 'support' was less than the margin of error of the poll: 2 percent here, 1 percent there. When I arrived in January, Dean had been campaigning in Iowa by himself for months, and yet he was tied there with the Rev. Al Sharpton at 2 percent, badly trailing the 'serious candidates': Gephardt, Lieberman, Kerry, and Edwards."

In Trippi's memoir of the campaign, titled *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, he writes that Dean's greatest asset was "the candidate's refreshing honesty and lack of political guile, and the sameness of the other candidates," which "all gave Dean the whiff of a true insurgent. The challenge was finding some way to fast-forward the usual campaign building and, at the same time, skip over the dismissive TV media and appeal directly to the American people. . . . So right away we could see that our only hope was to decentralize the campaign, ease control away from the candidate and his handlers in Vermont (myself included), and let the momentum and the decision making come from the people—stop trying to control the river . . . just open the floodgates and see where the current took us. . . . Like someone whose

entire life has been building to this point, I knew without looking what our only hope would be: the Internet."

Dean began his campaign by emphasizing health care and fiscal responsibility. However, his opposition to the U.S. plan to invade Iraq quickly eclipsed other issues, resonating with disillusioned Democrats. Harnessing the burgeoning anti-war movement's momentum, the campaign built an impressive online presence.

MEET ME IN MEATSPACE

One of the first innovations that moved the campaign into motion was the Meetup.com Web site, which the campaign used to organize "Howard Dean Meetup Days" around the country on the first Wednesday of every month.

Meetup.com is a commercially operated online social networking portal that facilitates offline group meetings in various localities around the world. It allows members to find and join groups unified by a common interest, such as politics, books, games, movies, health, pets, careers or hobbies. It operates as a free service; users enter their zip code and the topic they want to meet about, and the Web site helps them arrange a place and time to meet. Its primary revenue comes from restaurants and other facilities that pay $29 a month to be listed on the site as possible meeting venues. Participants vote where to hold a meeting, and venues pay a finder's fee if their establishment is chosen.

Meetup.com was founded in 2000 by Scott Heiferman, Matt Meeker and Peter Kamali. "The primary inspiration was the book *Bowling Alone*, which is by Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam about the decline of community in America and how people don't know their neighbors anymore," Heiferman explained. "The Internet does a number of wonderful things, but it treats geography as irrelevant. We still live in a world where the local level is extremely important. . . . We are providing a service that revitalizes the Internet for local communities."

"The founders of the company knew people were staying in front of their computers, DVD players and TVs more and more, and losing personal connections," explained Meetup vice president Myles Weissleder. "After 9/11, they started thinking they could help do something positive in the world by having people reconnect—not with people in chatrooms across the globe—but in their own communities."

Meetup's founders did not see political organizing as a particular focus for the Web site, but Dean campaign manager Joe Trippi, who has worked for dot-com companies as well as political candidates, quickly grasped its potential. "On my very first day in the Dean campaign headquarters," Trippi recalls, "I offered up the closest thing I had to a strategy: 'We need to put a link to this web site, Meetup.com, on our campaign web site.'"

Trippi says he noticed Meetup.com because although Dean was "dead last among the Democratic candidates in almost every other meaningful measurement," he actually had more supporters on Meetup.com—432—than any of the other candidates. "After we put Meetup on the web site, I checked back, and suddenly there were 2,700 people who wanted to meet up for Dean. The number had taken one of those exponential leaps—what would turn out to be the first of many. The second-highest candidate, Kerry, had only gone up to 330 names. . . . And this burst didn't come from the campaign buying a TV spot or scheduling speeches—in fact, this wasn't the campaign at all. This was the people taking over."

Even with 2,700 members, however, Meetup had only begun to show its potential for political organizing. "Back then, the leading group on the site was a club for witches," reported *Wired* magazine's Gary Wolf. "Zephyr Teachout, Dean's director of Internet outreach, describes sitting across from campaign manager Joe Trippi in the early weeks and hitting Refresh again and again on her Web browser. 'I was obsessed with beating Witches,' she says. 'Witches had 15,000 members, and we had 3,000. I wanted first place.'"

"We fell into this by accident," Dean said later. "I wish I could tell you we were smart enough to figure this out. But the community taught us. They seized the initiative through Meetup. They built our organization for us before we had an organization." Dean's first personal realization of Meetup's potential occurred when he attended a New York City meetup on March 5, 2003 where he found hundreds of enthusiastic supporters waiting to greet him. "I've never seen anything like that, with no advance people, totally self-organized by a bunch of citizens," says Trippi. "It was a really great moment."

By March 2003, Dean's following on Meetup.com included 5,000 members, and the numbers grew rapidly from there. "His rivals grudgingly concede that Dean … has clearly tapped into something," the *Washington Post* reported in June 2003. "He is attracting the largest crowds of the nine Democratic contenders—which his staff attributes almost entirely to his campaign's Internet reach. His supporters arguably are the most intense for this early in the process, tens of thousands of them self-organizing in about 300 cities once a month." By the time Dean suspended his Presidential campaign in February 2004, there were more than 180,000 supporters signed up via Meetup worldwide.

After John Kerry and John Edwards emerged as the first- and second-place contenders in the January Ohio primary, the number of Meetups for Kerry and Edwards supporters spiked up dramatically. "Registrations for Edwards rose 44 percent to 3,949 people, up from 2,751. Kerry's registrations rose 22 percent to 22,076, up from 18,140," reported the *National Journal*.

CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK

In addition to helping spread the campaign's message, the Internet served as a system through which the campaign received continuous advice from Dean supporters. "One of the simple things was we had signs up on our site," Trippi says. "You know, . . . 'Iowa for Dean,' 'Another New Hampshire voter for Dean'—that people could download. We put up all 50 states. And the first mention on the blog was, 'Hey, you forgot Puerto Rico. You screwed up.' And we immediately realized that, yeah, Puerto Rico votes for Democratic nominations, so we put up a 'Puerto Rico for Dean' sign within a minute or two and got a protest from a guy in London saying that he was an American abroad who was going to vote in the presidential and we didn't have an 'Americans abroad for Dean' sign. So we put that up immediately, and the thank-you came from Spain. All this happened in a 10-minute part of time that was an amazing exchange between us and our supporters, and they saw the mistakes we made and we plugged them."

The campaign even developed its own software, including Get Local, a program that let supporters organize local events independent of the campaign; Dean-Link, a version of Friendster for the Dean campaign; and DeanSpace, a software package that allowed the many disparate, unofficial Dean Web sites to communicate directly with one another and also with the campaign. The campaign also used an innovative approach to keeping anti-Dean flames off Dean blogs, called "Troll Goal": "Whenever a troll flames a Dean blog, a Dean booster donates more money," explained *Wall Street Journal* reporter Lee Gomes. "The troll realizes he is only helping the candidate, and stops."

At the peak of the campaign, Dean for America employed three full-time programmers, plus a database team and more than 100 volunteers working on open source Dean-related software projects. The software, explained the *New York Times*, "allows any Dean Web site to reprint another's stories, images and campaign feed automatically, as if they have a collective consciousness. It also will provide a 'dashboard' for the people in Burlington, where the campaign can track patterns on its unofficial sites and observe which content is most pop-

ular." After the campaign ended, some of the programmers involved in developing software for Dean went on to develop CivicSpace Labs, which has developed an open source software package intended to serve as a powerful and easy-to-use grassroots organizing toolkit for people wanting to organize campaigns and connect with like-minded activists.

As the *Washington Post* noted, "experts also credit his campaign with developing savvy online fundraisers—essentially online telethons that posted their goals alongside urgent deadlines and icons counting the donations as they came in. It was a simple idea, employed by any number of public TV stations. But it was a campaign innovation, allowing Dean to turn otherwise mundane fundraising pitches into a high-tech call to arms. Experts said it was a significant improvement from how candidates had previously asked for money online—usually, by simply urging supporters to send a check sometime before the next election."

By the fall of 2003, the Dean campaign ranked first among the Democratic contenders in the raise to race funds. Its success at Internet fundraising and grassroots organizing even impressed Larry Purpuro, who organized the Republican Party's year 2000 online initiative, the e.GOP Project. Although Republicans out-hustled Democrats online in the 2000 election cycle, Purpuro said, the Dean and other efforts by groups such as MoveOn showed that the tide had shifted and Democrats were "ahead in the game. . . . Left of center organizations are showing more energy, innovation and more strength in numbers."
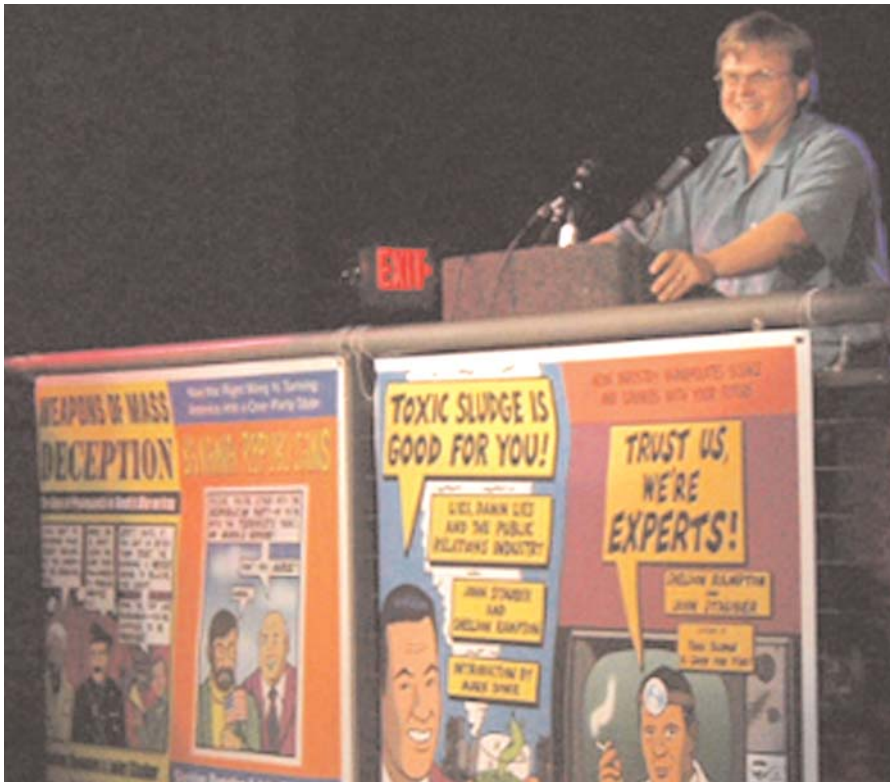
DEFEAT IN IOWA

"Howard Dean had the best-funded, best-publicized bid to be the Democratic nominee; he was so widely understood to be in the lead that the inevitability of his victory was a broad topic of discussion," observed Internet consultant and writer Clay Shirky. Nevertheless, his campaign suffered a devastating blow in the Iowa caucuses, which represented the first votes cast in primary season. According to polls, Dean had been a strong contender in Iowa in the weeks leading up to the primary, but he actually finished third in Iowa, trailing behind John Kerry and John Edwards.

At a post-caucus rally in Iowa, Dean gave an animated speech intended to cheer up his supporters. For television audiences, however, the speech came across as loud, peculiar, and unpresidential. It became known as "Dean's scream," driving his poll numbers down and contributing to his losses in subsequent primaries.

CMD Celebrates 10 Years!

The Center for Media & Democracy celebrated the Center's 10th anniversary on June 18, 2004. CMD staff and nearly 200 friends and supporters gathered at the hip Club Majestic in Madison, Wisconsin. Attendees heard talks by the evening's special guest *Demcracy Now*'s Amy Goodman and the Center's founder John Stauber and his co-author and CMD research director Sheldon Rampton.

The Center for Media & Democracy wishes to extend thanks to the event's co-sponsors as well as to all the people who have supported our work over the years. Without your belief in and support of our work, it simply wouldn't be possible.

Helps us continue to expose government and corporate propaganda by becoming a sustaining member or making a contribution in celebration of a decade of work. Contact Diane@prwatch.org for more information.

CMD research director Sheldon Rampton tells a joke during his talk at the Center's 10th Anniverasay Celebration.
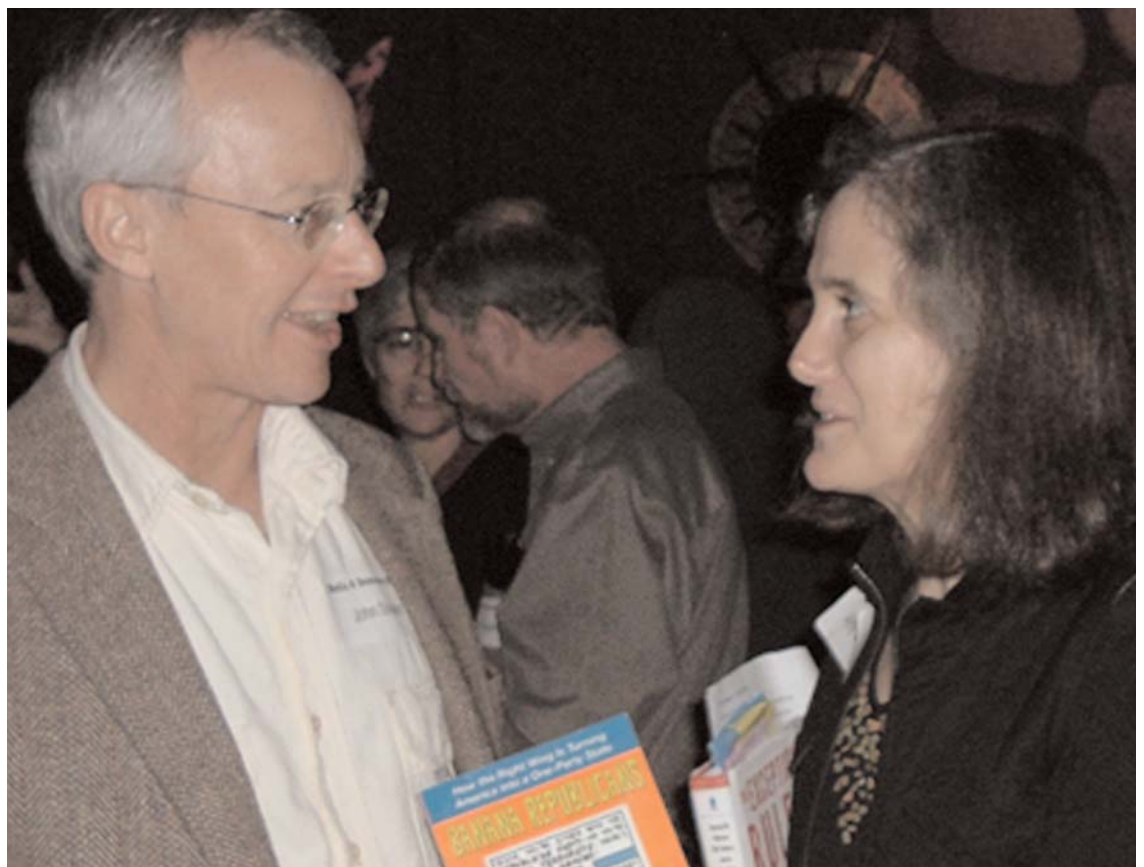
CMD executive director John Stauber chats with Democracy Now's Amy Goodman.

Moving America One Step Forward And Two Steps Back

by Diane Farsetta

It was mid-July, and at least one conservative group was worried. "Move America Forward has obtained a list of the speakers at the Democrat [sic] National Convention, and it is rather apparent that this political convention will be nothing more than a 'Blame America First' pep rally." Move America Forward (MAF) warned that convention speakers would include prominent Democratic Party members Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, Ted Kennedy and Al Sharpton. "These individuals have used some of the most irresponsible language in seeking to advance their liberal political goals by trying to divide our nation and erode support for our military and the war effort," MAF wrote.

A few days later, MAF painted an even bleaker picture: "The news media is reporting that Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins will be attending the Democrat [sic] National Convention and headlining fundraisers to undermine support for the war on terrorism." The fundraiser the activist couple headlined, however, was for the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, a non-profit charitable organization widely respected for its human rights work. Regardless, MAF urged, "PLEASE!!! Help us raise the money to balance the leftist anti-war message."

MAF frantically fundraised to run their own TV ads during the Democratic National Convention. One ad claimed, "The Blame America crowd is at it again. But they were wrong about World War II, wrong about the Cold War, and they're wrong again today. . . . Stand behind our troops, as they help move America forward from the threats of terrorism."

On July 20, MAF continued to unfold its overwrought drama: "Today we attempted to confirm and purchase our order to air our television spots. You can imagine our surprise and supreme disappointment when we were told that 'other groups' had come in at the last minute and snapped up the remaining inventory of 60-second television ads. We don't have to think too hard to figure out who the culprits might be. Groups like MoveOn.org and The Media Fund can afford to pre-empt us on the airwaves at their will."

The same day MAF blasted those "other groups," the *Boston Herald* reported that the right-leaning group the Israel Project, which has worked with GOP pollster Frank Luntz, would "spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on TV ads." The Project deemed "the thousands of journalists, policy-makers and delegates that will flood Boston" during the convention to be "an attractive audience" for their pro-Israel message. But the *Herald* also found that the Israel Project's enthusiasm was not widely shared. "Advertising insiders and local stations say they're not seeing any run on ad time during special convention-related programming or newscasts," the paper reported.

MAF claimed victory over the "attempt to silence us" in a July 23 email. "What we've done these past few days is edit our ads into 30-second versions," MAF wrote. "We didn't indicate in our emails that we were going to do this, because we couldn't tip off the folks at such 'Bash America' organizations like MoveOn.org or else they would have tried to block us from getting on the air yet again."

CALIFORNIA SCHEMING

MAF's roots can be traced back to California's gubernatorial recall, which put movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger into office. In November 2003, one month after the recall election, the *Daily News* of Los Angeles interviewed Sacramento-based political consultant Sal Russo. He characterized the recall campaign he and other Republican strategists had organized and funded as a near-unstoppable, grassroots tour de force. "We took on the political establishment and won, and they feel empowered," said Russo of the 120,000 recall supporters in his database. "They want to be involved. . . . We'll change the name to something like 'Move America Forward,'" and go national, he predicted.

A week later, the Web site address MoveAmericaForward.com was registered to Russo's right-leaning political consulting/public affairs firm, Russo Marsh & Rogers. The firm had previously registered and designed the Web site DumpBarbaraLee.com, part of a vitriolic campaign against Representative Lee, the only member of Congress to vote against a wide-ranging "war on terror" resolution in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks. Russo Marsh & Rogers' political work includes consulting for the Recall Gray Davis campaign, media work for businessman Bill Simon's 2002 California gubernatorial run, and directing the election campaigns of such Republican notables as U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, New York Governor George Pataki, then-New Jersey Governor Christie Todd Whitman, and U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch's short-lived presidential run in 2000.

In May 2004, MAF was publicly launched. "There has seldom been a more important time in our nation's history for the people of America to stand up and proclaim our love for this great nation and the ideal of freedom," declared former California state representative, GOP consultant and self-described "taxpayer hero" Howard Kaloogian, who serves as MAF's chair. MAF's main objectives are "rebuffing the constant and escalating attacks on our military and the war against terrorism

by the shamelessly biased liberal news media, building public support and resolve for the continuation of our efforts to eradicate terrorist networks . . . [and] demonstrating our support and appreciation for the heroic men and women of our armed forces."

AMERICAN IDOLATRY

MAF's inner circle is remarkable for its extensive conservative connections. Kaloogian was a key recall proponent. He also had headed the Defend Reagan Committee, which mounted a successful campaign in late 2003 to pressure CBS to cancel what they called its "hatchet job" biopic, "The Reagans." MAF chief strategist Sal Russo, founder of Russo Marsh & Rogers, was also chief political advisor for the Defend Reagan Committee. Douglas Lorenz, a Russo Marsh & Rogers staff person and the national chair of the libertarian-leaning Republican Liberty Caucus, was the Defend Reagan Committee's grassroots coordinator and a recall campaign advisor. Lorenz registered MAF's Web site—which looks strikingly similar to the Committee's Web site, DefendReagan.org, also registered under his name. MAF's phone number was previously the number of the Recall Gray Davis Committee, Kaloogian for U.S. Senate and the Defend Reagan Committee. MAF shares office space with Russo Marsh & Rogers and, according to multiple accounts, the receptionist who answers calls to MAF also answers Russo Marsh & Rogers' phones.

Conservative talk show host Melanie Morgan and National Tax Limitation Committee founder and president Lew Uhler are MAF's vice chairs. Former California Assembly Republican staffer Siobhan Guiney is the group's executive director. Guiney's biography credits her for fighting "for the people against liberal corruption." MAF boosters among conservative media personalities include Hugh Hewitt, a nationally syndicated talk radio host and a weekly columnist for *The Daily Standard*, columnist and FOX News contributor Michelle Malkin, and Rush Limbaugh.

MAF's "special advisor" is Marine Corps reservist and Afghanistan war veteran John Ubaldi. According to MAF, Ubaldi "personally put together a humanitarian relief project that brought over $300,000 worth of supplies for the people of Afghanistan. He is currently working on sending medical supplies and equipment to Afghanistan & Iraq."

News searches by *PR Watch*, however, yielded only one item referring to Ubaldi's humanitarian work. The *Ventura (Calif.) County Star* noted in June 2003 that Ubaldi "coordinated the shipping to Afghanistan" of "clothing and blankets as well as personal hygiene items,

rice, beans and detergent" collected by about 500 area children, but credited Anne Robinson as the "project leader." The paper reported the area Sunday school of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Saints, of which Ubaldi was a member, organized the aid effort.

Also of interest is a request for "networking assistance" posted by Ubaldi on a Marine Executive Association's job opportunities email, dated August 20, 2003. MEA provides Marines with "assistance in the career transition process." Ubaldi wrote about himself, "Has a Bachelor's Degree in government, worked on various local & State wide political campaigns for candidates. . . . Looking for a position in public relations or public advocacy in the Sacramento, California area to begin in the September time frame."

BLAME DEMOCRATS FIRST

MAF launched its first attack on May 26, when they called House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from northern California, "one of the worst examples of a 'Domestic Enemy' . . . certainly up there with the ranks of Senator Ted Kennedy and America-bashing filmmaker, Michael Moore." Pelosi earned that distinction by harshly critiquing George Bush over the Iraq war, calling him an "incompetent leader" and declaring, "The time has come to speak very frankly about the lack of leadership in the White House." To MAF, Pelosi's strongly worded dissent amounted to treason.

MAF urged people to "demand an apology from [Pelosi] to the American people and to our President." They gave out the direct email addresses of four of the Congresswoman's staff people—information not usually widely circulated. MAF also asked people to contact the "special interests and corporations" that were major Pelosi contributors in 2004, E&J Gallo Winery and Wells Fargo Bank. "Those people . . . should get the message that we—as consumers—want them to stop supporting 'Bash America' politicians like Pelosi or else be willing to lose our business," MAF stated.

Brendan Daly, Congresswoman Pelosi's communications director and one of the four staffers whose email address MAF listed, estimated that the office received a few hundred emails in response to the alert. But "most were not worth responding to," he told *PR Watch*. The emails were "not from constituents" and many were extreme in tone, along the lines of, "You're a communist, go back to where you came from," although "some were more measured," said Daly. The MAF alert "didn't have much of an impact," according to Daly, although he called a MoveOn alert in support of Pelosi "very helpful." (MoveOn was not responding to MAF, but to

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, who said Pelosi's criticisms "are putting American lives at risk.") The MoveOn alert generated letters-to-the-editor in newspapers across the country, with the message that "we should always encourage differing viewpoints in a democracy."

MAF's second target was the California state legislature's Asian Pacific Islander Caucus, whose members are all Democrats. The caucus planned to honor Wen Ho Lee with a "Profile in Courage" award during a brief presentation on the Assembly floor. On June 4, MAF slammed "left-leaning politicians [who] cannot find any words of praise for our brave troops fighting the War on Terrorism," but who "honor former accused spy Wen Ho Lee."

Dr. Lee, a Chinese-American scientist who worked at Los Alamos National Laboratory, was accused in 1999 of stealing U.S. nuclear secrets. However, the case against him didn't withstand serious scrutiny. An FBI agent admitted to giving misleading testimony against Lee in federal court. The judge lamented that "top decision makers in the executive branch . . . embarrassed our entire nation" and apologized for Lee's incarceration. The *New York Times*, whose coverage was so damning that an FBI investigator used its early articles in an attempt to get Lee to confess, admitted in retrospect to having "a problem of tone," not giving "Dr. Lee the full benefit of the doubt," and "not raising questions that occurred to us only later."

But MAF stood firm. Sal Russo told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "People are innocent until proven guilty, but just because something was not proven, that's no reason to celebrate." Howard Kaloogian questioned whether "Asian caucus members might be violating their oaths of office to defend against domestic enemies by honoring Lee." The caucus, saying they wanted to avoid an "awkward situation" for Dr. Lee, changed the event to a private dinner. Nearly 100 Asian community leaders from across California decried MAF as a group of "racist, right-wing zealots."

MOORE BASHING

Then came MAF's campaign against Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11*. In mid-June, before the film's U.S. opening, MAF circulated what it said were the names, telephone numbers and email addresses of theater owners, and urged people "to speak up loudly and tell the industry executives that we don't want this misleading and grotesque movie being shown at our local cinema." Salon.com reported that MAF included contact information for "a lowly theater payroll employee inexplicably listed on MAF's e-mail list of 'leading movie executives.'"

MAF rode the wave of *Fahrenheit 9/11* media attention. The Nexis news database lists nearly 240 articles (including letters to the editor) that contain both phrases "Move America Forward" and "Fahrenheit 9/11" from June 15 to July 25, including CNN, *USA Today*, *People*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. Many of these stories focused on the movie, with only brief mentions of MAF. In contrast, conservative talk radio helped promote MAF's campaign, according to the *San Jose Mercury News*: "Popular talk show host Rush Limbaugh . . . featured a lengthy conversation with a 16-year-old Nebraska girl who called the show seeking advice on how to stop [*Fahrenheit 9/11*]. After discussing the pros and cons of carrying a picket sign in front of her local theater, Limbaugh told her about Move America Forward."

MAF vice-chair Melanie Morgan claimed their anti-*Fahrenheit 9/11* campaign resulted in "probably well over 200,000 emails," but there are no reports of theaters canceling the movie. Moreover, Salon.com reports, "after the grass-roots political group MoveOn launched a counteroffensive, letters of support for the film's release began outpacing negative letters (according to an unscientific survey of five theater owners) at roughly 3-to-1."

It's difficult to gauge whether MAF has much true grassroots support. MAF's fundraising drive to run TV ads during the Republican Convention had raised over had raised over $175,000 by August 22, according to the group, but data on the average contribution sizes was not made public. *PR Watch*'s repeated interview requests to MAF were not returned. The only discernible measure of MAF's support, its online Message Board (actually a link to a Yahoo! Groups moderated forum), had less than a thousand members in mid-August. Moreover, at least some forum members appear to have joined to bait MAF supporters with pointed questions and contrary messages.

Considering its genesis, main players and short existence MAF could remain little more than an Internet-based "astroturf"—or fake grassroots—group. Given Bush's warnings that the War on Terror might last decades, a pro-military cum patriot police group run by Republican operatives could be very useful to conservatives. In an August 7 email, MAF wrote, "We are going to keep the pressure up—not just through the rest of this year, but throughout the duration of the 'war on terrorism.'" ∎

Atlas Economic Research Foundation: the think-tank breeders

by Bob Burton

For over two decades, a Virginia-based organization has been quietly working as the Johnny Appleseed of conservative think tanks. With a modest $4 million budget in 2003 and a staff of eight, Atlas Economic Research Foundation is on a mission to populate the world with new "free market" voices. In its 2003 review of activities, quaintly titled its *Investor Report*, Atlas boasted that it worked with "70 new think-tank entrepreneurs from 37 foreign countries, including Lithuania, Greece, Mongolia, Ghana, the Philippines, Brazil and Argentina," as well as with several American groups.

Briton Antony Fisher founded Atlas as part of his lifelong campaign to influence the "climate of ideas" and combat "creeping socialism." Atlas credits Fisher with assisting in the early stages of development of several conservative think tanks, including the Manhattan Institute, Pacific Research Institute in San Francisco and Fraser Institute in Vancouver, Canada.

Atlas identifies, screens and offers initial support to individuals and groups who want to create local think tanks. "Our ideal 'intellectual entrepreneur,'" says Atlas, is "someone who communicates effectively with businessmen, academicians and the general public." By facilitating the establishment of local think tanks, Atlas increases both the reach and local credibility of their "free market" message, thereby having "the most cost-effective impact."

Since its formation in 1981, Atlas has funnelled over $20 million in grants to think tanks that have passed its screening process. Atlas aims, it says, to "increase that amount tenfold in the next decade." In 2003, a little over $2 million of Atlas's budget was passed on to other think tanks. While large conservative foundations often make sizable, sustained and general support grants, Atlas believes less is more, giving small grants of $5,000 or less. Atlas then weans fledgling projects off this modest annual funding within five years, making exception only for specific innovative projects.

While Atlas calculates that its "family" comprises approximately one-third of the world's 470 "market oriented" think tanks, it worries that "many young think tanks lack know-how regarding reaching the media and communicating a message effectively." To help build these skills, Atlas recruited Vince Breglio, co-founder and senior executive with the market research and public relations company Wirthlin Worldwide. At its mid-August conference in Salt Lake City, Breglio gave PR tips in a two-hour workshop titled "communicating the message of liberty." A veteran of the 1980 and 1984 Reagan Presidential campaigns, Breglio is no stranger to helping sell unpopular ideas. Internal tobacco industry documents reveal he advised both R.J. Reynolds and Philip Morris on how to handle public opposition to smoking.

Atlas' financial support has come from a handful of conservative foundations and corporations, including the Sarah Scaife Foundation, Earhart Foundation and the Carthage Foundation. ExxonMobil has contributed over $500,000 since 1998, according to the Greenpeace Web site ExxonSecrets.org.

In 1995, Philip Morris contributed $475,000 to Atlas according to an internal budget document released as part of the legal settlement with several U.S. states' attorneys general. In 1997, despite a tight budget, PM staff recommended Atlas receive $150,000 because of the organization's ability, through its events and public advocacy work, to "positively impact the regulatory environment, particularly in Latin America." Atlas' think tanks, PM staff wrote approvingly, create "an improved operating environment for all PM businesses."

Ironically, Atlas requires its protégé think tanks to be independent—"That is, independent of corporations, independent of governments, independent of political parties and even independent of universities," Atlas President Alejandro A. Chaufen said in an April 1999 interview.

In a May 1998 fundraising pitch to tobacco giant Phillip Morris, Chaufen explained that keeping its think tanks off the dole of political parties, universities, government agencies and lobbies "helps keep their ideas and recommendations untainted by real or perceived political or organizational ties" and "helps protect them and us against potential scandal. Think tanks tied to politicians and parties can easily become instruments of corruption. Indeed, in several instances, public officials have enriched themselves and their allies through the 'think tanks' they control," Chaufen wrote.

Atlas' think tanks, Chaufen continued, have "remarkable successes" even though they were often faced with "unsympathetic local traditions and ideas. Still, these think tanks have become one of the first places opinion leaders and policy makers go when they are looking for market-based solutions to difficult social, economic or environmental problems." ∎

A version of this article is also on Disinfopedia, the CMD's online database that anyone—including you —can add to. If you would like to work on this profile on Atlas or its affiliates, go to www.disinfopedia.org. If you need a hand getting started, drop Bob a line at bob@disinfopedia.org.

Atlas Offspring Used U.S. Funds to Oppose Chávez

In 1984, the Atlas Economic Research Foundation helped set up a think tank in Venezuela called the Center for the Dissemination of Economic Information (or Centro de Divulgación del Conocimiento Económico, CEDICE). But contrary to Atlas' emphasis on independence, CEDICE has received U.S. funds to support the failed attempts to remove Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez from office. In its Summer 2004 *Investor Report*, Atlas writes, "Venezuela is not California, so no matter what happens with the recall referendum . . . the country will continue to face a daunting populist menace. All those involved with CEDICE . . . have been an invaluable and courageous voice for freedom, peace and prosperity."

CEDICE played a significant role in organizing and publicizing the positions of the opposition movement. CEDICE collaborated with the Center for International Private Enterprise—a Washington-based organization that administers money from the U.S.-funded National Endowment for Democracy, U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to internationally promote "democratic market economies through local business associations, think tanks, and other private sector groups." Together, CIPE and CEDICE worked "to move the debate in Venezuela from populist rhetoric to concrete reforms that will encourage participatory democracy and a better business environment," according to CIPE's 2002 Annual Report.

Relying on official documents obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests concerning the U.S. support of the anti-Chávez movement, the Web site VenezuelaFOIA.info writes, "Both CEDICE and CIPE [were] engaging in business-oriented efforts in Venezuela, working directly with Fedecámaras, the anti-Chávez business association that co-led the April 2002 coup and the Winter 2003 lockout (Fedecámaras President Pedro Carmona took over the presidency during the April 2002 coup and proceeded to dissolve all of Venezuela's democratic institutions before being forced from his self-imposed government). . . . More than $80,000 was allocated to CEDICE-CIPE's combined efforts by the NED right before the 2002 coup."

CEDICE's post referendum work will focus on the topic of business ethics, "specifically in the way it generates competition, efficiency, and productivity in society." In July 2004, CEDICE announced the creation of the Center for the Ethics and Corporate Citizenship. According to Atlas' Web site, "The Center will seek to promote ethical values that encourage businesses to be socially responsible within the community and develop initiatives that will contribute to progress and a quality of life within the framework of a free and responsible society."

DEAN SCREAM

After Dean's defeat, some people compared his campaign to the failed dot-com investors' bubble of the late 1990s. Shirky, who like many other observers was surprised by his loss, wondered if the campaign had actually been hurt by it use of the Internet, arguing, "Dean has accidentally created a movement (where what counts is believing) instead of a campaign (where what counts is voting)."

In a subsequent essay, Shirky argues that the Dean campaign's seeming lead was actually a "mirage" from the beginning. "We talked ourselves, but not the voters, into believing," he writes. "And I think the way the campaign was organized helped inflate and sustain that bubble of belief, right up to the moment that the voters arrived. . . . Dean's campaign was never actually successful. It did many of the things successful campaigns do, of course —got press and raised money and excited people and even got potential voters to aver to campaign workers and pollsters that they would vote for him when the time came. When the time came, however, they didn't. The campaign never succeeded at making Howard Dean the first choice of any group of voters he faced."

Campaign manager Trippi, however, believes that the remarkable thing was not that it failed but that it ever got as far as it did. "This was not a dot com crash," he says. "It was a dot com miracle. We started last January with almost no money and 436 known supporters."

The Dean campaign, he says, was "the opening salvo in a revolution, the sound of hundreds of thousands of Americans turning off their televisions and embracing the only form of technology that has allowed them to be involved again, to gain control of a process that alienated them decades ago. . . . [T]his revolution will not be satisfied with overthrowing a corrupt and unresponsive political system. It won't stop at remaking politics. And it won't pay attention to national borders. . . . It's the story of how to engage those Americans in a real dialogue, how to reach them where they live, how to stop selling to them and start listening to them, how to make better use of the most revolutionary idea to come along since the first man learned to light a fire. No, I'm not talking about the Internet. Or computers. Or telecommunications. I'm talking about democracy. ∎
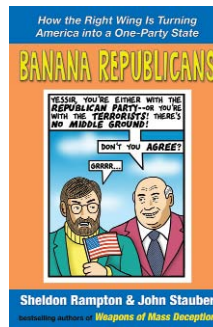
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The Center for Media and Democracy serves social change activists, journalists, researchers, policymakers and the public at large in the following ways:
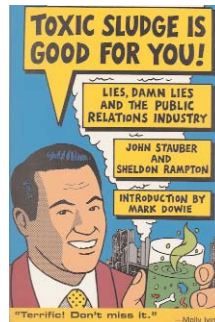
• Countering propaganda by investigating and reporting on behind-the-scenes public relations campaigns by corporations, industries, governments and other powerful institutions.

• Informing and assisting grassroots citizen activism that promotes public health, economic justice, ecological sustainability and human rights.

• Promoting media literacy to help the public recognize the forces shaping the information they receive about issues that affect their lives.

• Sponsoring "open content" media that enable citizens from all walks of life to "be the media" and to participate in creating media content.

Banana Republicans: How the Right Wing Is Turning America Into a One-Party State Tarcher/Penguin 2004

Founded in 1993, the Center for Media and Democracy remains the only organization dedicated to investigating and exposing deceptive public relations and propaganda campaigns and strengthening public interest reporting.

Trust Us, We're Experts: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles With Your Future Tarcher/Putnam 2001

Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq Tarcher/Penguin 2003

Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry Common Couage Press 1995
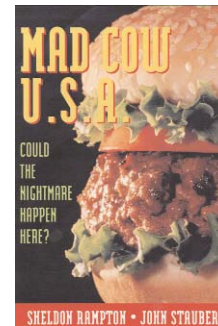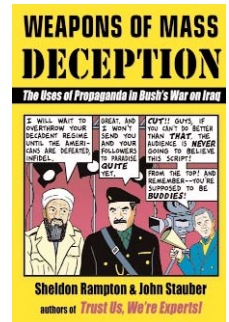
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