



NEW CAMPUS REBELS

Republicans, Libertarians and independents, oh my.

BY BOBBIE WILLIS

For the first time in forever, I am in a room full of people who believe George W. Bush is a good guy doing a good job being president, even though — many of them concede — he doesn't have the best public speaking skills.

This group is the UO's College Republicans (CR) club, as fresh-faced and clean-cut as a Tommy Hilfiger print ad. This first meeting I attend starts with seven people — five young men and two young women — as well as a few stragglers who join a little late. Grand total: nine attendees. (I am assured twice that this is a low turnout, that there were close to 18 people at the previous week's meeting.)

To start things off, we are pledging allegiance to the American flag, hung prominently from a dry erase board cabinet at the front of one of the Century rooms on the Skylight level of Erb Memorial Union. At the phrase "...one nation, under God," several voices emphasize, bellow even, the word God, with sidelong glances that say, "Yeah, you heard me — I said 'God.' You got a problem with that?"

Welcome to what's being called the new college rebellion: backlash against atheism and free love; backlash against government handouts and affirmative action; backlash, essentially, against modern liberalism and the presumption that college campuses are solely hotbeds of liberal thinking.

A May 2003 article in *The New York Times Magazine* indicates conservatism is gaining popularity on campuses across the nation; a poll released last month by Harvard University's Institute of Politics (IOP) also indicates a growing conservative persuasion among college students: IOP polled 1,202 students nationwide and found that

they generally support President Bush. More than half — 61 percent to be exact — approve of Bush's performance as president. (This is about 10 percentage points greater than the public at large.) This same study found that 75 percent of polled students "trust the military to do the right thing." A number of studies also show a spiritual revival on college campuses, with more and more students placing importance on religious and spiritual activities as part of student life.

One theory on this campus trend toward conservatism points to the events of 9/11 as the motivation for more politically conservative values. However, well before 9/11 in a March 7, 1999 editorial for *The Washington Post*, Paul Weyrich, president of the Free Congress and Education Foundation, whose mission is "fighting the culture war and returning America back to its traditional conservative roots ..." writes,

Today, the old rules of conduct are not merely broken, they are scorned. The ideology we know as political correctness — it is really Marxism translated from economic into cultural terms — proclaims the old virtues to be vices and the old vices to be virtues. ... So what is to be done? Continuing with a strategy that has failed is folly and guarantees defeat. Instead of attempting to use politics to retake existing institutions, my proposal is that we cultural conservatives build new institutions for ourselves: schools, universities, media, entertainment, everything — a complete, separate, parallel structure. In every respect but politics, we should, in effect, build a new nation among the ruins of the old. ... If we do not, the cultural Marxists can and undoubtedly will mobilize the full force of the state to destroy us. Like all ideologies, political correctness has totalitarian ambitions, as can be seen on many a university campus.

More paranoid minds might conclude that this current conservative backlash has been in orchestration since long before recent terrorist attacks and the war on Iraq.

CONSERVATIVE'S ANGELS

In the range of conservatism at the UO, College Republicans makes up the more traditional, morally conservative end of the spectrum. All but one of the 10 CR students I interview for this story have strong Christian backgrounds and values, as well as relatively active religious lives today. While some admit to a moderate amount of carousing, stances on alcohol and drugs tend to fall into the just-say-no or just-say-not-too-much category.

In my first CR meeting the discussions range from what "business casual" means for the club's upcoming Young America's Foundation conference in Santa Barbara, to what they should do for their "101 Things to Do on Campus" project — a laundry list of events to get the conservative message out there. Suggestions include setting up a Dunk-a-Liberal booth, as well as a *real* Coming out Day, not for homosexuals but for conservatives (whom these

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