

Caught in the Spin Cycle

Can Kitty Piercy outsmart the liars?

Karl Rove has reached Eugene. Oh, not literally – the President's master media manipulator is still working his black magic in Washington, DC, helping Republicans persuade Americans that slavery is freedom, war is peace, etc. But the contrived uproar over Mayor Kitty Piercy's refusal to attend the Mayors' Prayer Breakfast this year reveals that local right-wingers have adopted Rove's morally despicable yet politically successful tactics.



Led by Rove, the Republicans have mastered such messages in national and statewide campaigns over the last two decades, amplified them with cascades of cash from corporate interests, broadcast them over conservative media, and persuaded enough poor and working-class people to vote against their own interests to help elect Rove's candidates. It's a strategy that works by inflaming hatred and sowing division, and mainstream candidates with the ability to bring people together, like Kitty Piercy, are its biggest challenge.

Attack opponents on their strongest points. Rove's been doing this since his days as a political consultant for Texas Republicans. Is Al Gore one of the most technologically savvy leaders in American politics? Then take a fact (Gore was the strongest Senate advocate for funding for what became the Internet), turn it into something he never said ("I invented the Internet"), and thereby prevent him from using technological innovation as a campaign asset – because every time the issue comes up, he gets bombarded with questions about who invented the Internet. Is John Kerry a war hero? Find and fund some long-time right wing smearmeisters who'll make up lies about his war record. Is Kitty Piercy finally able to unite Eugene's often fractious progressives and moderates around a pragmatic platform of sustainable growth? Then attack her as a divider.

Use hot-button social issues to divide working people by distracting them from money issues. What Piercy and most Eugeneans want is a city government that puts health, jobs, education, the environment and other community values ahead of private greed. But real estate speculators and others who make money off taxpayer-subsidized sprawl or environmental degradation don't want the next mayoral campaign to focus on those issues. They know that if Eugene's citizens really voted in their own and the community's interest, they'd support Piercy's mainstream, sustainable growth policies. So her opponents change the subject to something inflammatory like religion.

Mask your aggression by accusing your opponent of being aggressive. During Bill Clinton's presidency, minority Senate Republicans prevented his moderate, mainstream judicial nominees from being confirmed by the Senate's Democratic majority. Now, President Bush disdains thousands of qualified veteran lawyers and judges, and instead nominates some of the most radically far-right ideologues in the American legal system. Yet Rove's minions accuse Democrats of being the aggressors by filibustering these wackos, and claim that current judges (many appointed by Republican presidents) are attacking Christians by upholding laws governing abortion, end-of-life choices, and so on. In Eugene, Piercy's refusal to attend the Mayors' Prayer Breakfast – an event that divides the community because some of its participants have attacked others' religious beliefs – is transformed by Rovian spin into a "divisive" act.

Keep your fingerprints off the weapons. In Rove/Bush's races against Texas Governor Ann Richards, Kerry and John McCain, shadowy, hitherto unknown organizations sprang up to slime opponents. That allowed his candidate to claim clean hands while the compliant corporate media repeated the attacks. Suddenly anti-Piercy bumper stickers and web sites have appeared.

Surely anyone who's paying attention will see through these smear tactics, right? Many of us thought the same thing when Rove spread similar lies in his previous campaigns. But we're not the audience. These spurious charges are aimed at angry religious dogmatics and others who pay little attention to politics until the last weeks before an election.

They won't hear that we finally have a mayor who's found a smart way to bring the community together over economic, environmental and human resources policies that a strong majority can support. Hate radio, TV and flyers deposited in church parking lots will send the message that Kitty Piercy hates Christians. And that'll get them mad enough to vote on that "issue" alone.

Whoever's behind these attacks has three years of Rovian spinning to make enough Eugeneans dizzy enough to think that a uniter is a divider. Because the last thing they want is a mayor for all Eugene.

Brett Campbell writes for EW and other publications.

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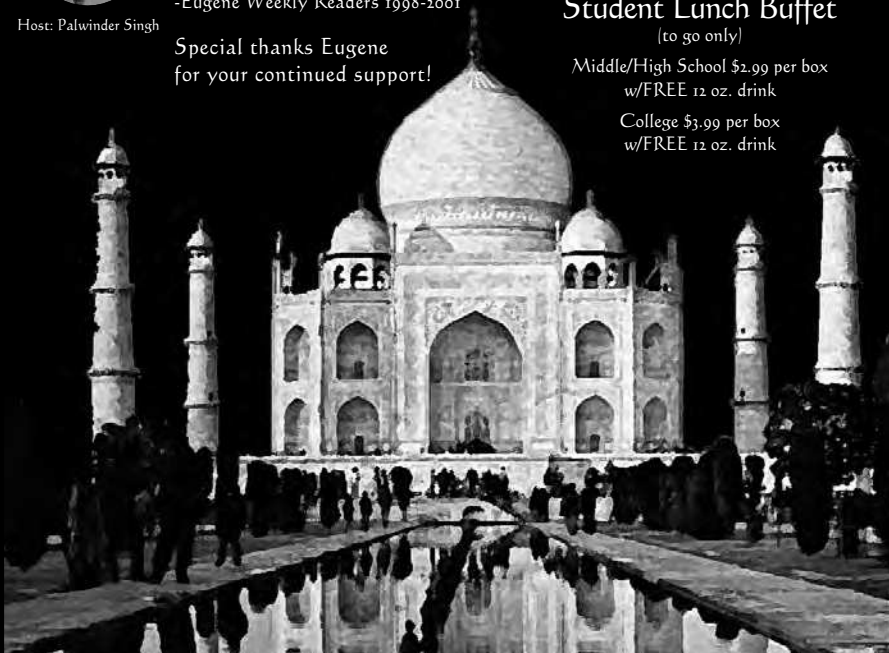
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