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THE 2000 CAMPAIGN: THE ADVOCACY GROUP; Group Fighting Political Correctness on Campus Delights in Ties to Both Parties' Tickets

By KAREN W. ARENSON

Jerry L. Martin, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, cheered when George W. Bush tapped Dick Cheney as his running mate. He cheered again when Al Gore chose Senator Joseph I. Lieberman.

No matter which party wins, so does the council, an advocacy group that fights what it considers political correctness on college campuses and seeks to move power from 1960's-era faculties into the hands of alumni and trustees.

The council has strong ties to both vice-presidential candidates. Lynne V. Cheney, Mr. Cheney's wife and the former chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, is its chairwoman. Mr. Lieberman is one of the most active members of its advisory board. Both Mrs. Cheney and Mr. Lieberman were among its founders five years ago.

"These are not just two members of our council, but our two most active members," Mr. Martin said.

The council, based in Washington, bills itself as bipartisan, citing Mr. Lieberman and former Gov. Richard D. Lamm of Colorado, another Democrat, who is its vice chairman. But its positions are those more often associated with conservative intellectuals like Mrs. Cheney.

One council priority is for campuses to impose more strictly regimented core curriculums anchored by American history and Western civilization, like the ones that were the norm before the late 60's, when colleges began to give students more latitude in courses.

Another priority is to make more room for conservative views on campuses. Waving the

banner of academic freedom, the council wants to protect students and faculty members who take stands that may be unpopular.

Despite the anticipated connection to the White House, Mr. Martin rejects the notion of hoping to dictate a national higher education policy.

"I do not believe the answer to higher education lies in the federal government," Mr. Martin said.

With a limited budget -- about \$550,000 from foundations and individuals -- what he hopes is that the visibility for Mrs. Cheney and Mr. Lieberman will translate into greater visibility for the council. And he is not above using the leverage that such prominent names can offer.

In June, for example, the council worked with Mr. Lieberman on a Congressional resolution calling for university trustees and administrators and state officials to press colleges to require students to take United States history to graduate.

Educators, parents and others should be alarmed at "the nation's growing ignorance of our past and what it implies for America's future," Mr. Lieberman said in a heartfelt speech. The resolution passed both houses unanimously.

Another council aim is to gather support among alumni and trustees to use their power as donors and trustees to remake campuses.

The council is trying to encourage more alumni to behave like Lee M. Bass, who in 1995 withdrew a \$20 million gift from Yale University when it did not expand its Western civilization curriculum as he had wished. It is also trying to cultivate trustees who will insert themselves aggressively into campus affairs.

Mr. Martin said he planned to initiate training for activist trustees in 20 states with major public university systems "to do in other states what we have done in New York." New York is one state in which the council has had the most success, he said.

At the State University of New York, for example, where Mr. Martin said he talks informally with Thomas F. Egan, SUNY's chairman, and Candace de Russy, a vocal SUNY trustee, trustees have approved a uniform core curriculum for undergraduates that includes American history and Western civilization.

Mr. Martin said he also had a working relationship with trustees at the City University of New York, talking occasionally with Herman Badillo, the chairman, and Benno C. Schmidt Jr., the vice chairman.

Mr. Badillo has called for CUNY to study whether it should put in place a core curriculum similar to SUNY's, and he and other trustees have said they personally favor an American history requirement.

A former philosophy professor at the University of Colorado, Mr. Martin, who is 58, went to Washington as an Andrew W. Mellon Congressional Fellow in 1982, and stayed. He worked first as a Congressional aide, and then at the National Endowment for the Humanities under Mrs. Cheney. In 1993, after she left, he became acting chairman. Two years later, he worked with her again to form the National Alumni Council, the group that later became the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

Mr. Martin has not entirely abandoned academic life. Between efforts to reshape universities, he has taught public policy and political science as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and at the Catholic University of America.

Lately, however, the council, which has a staff of six, including Mr. Martin, seems to have taken over his life. He married a Brooklyn College philosophy professor, Abigail Rosenthal, after the battle there. (He and she were on the same side.) In early August, he cut short a vacation in Milbridge, Me. -- "a very small town with two gas stations" -- to think about how he could capitalize on the Cheney and Lieberman candidacies.

"I thought I had better come back and figure this out," he said.

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