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Friends in High Places Fall election should favor ex-CU prof

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Caption: PHOTO: Special to The Denver Post/Chuck Kennedy Former University of Colorado professor Jerry Martin, now president of the **American Council of Trustees and Alumni**, is happy that he has connections in both the Democratic and Republican camps. The 5-year-old organization specializes in protecting against an overabundance of political correctness on college campuses. PHOTO: Associated Press file photo Lynne Cheney, seen in this August 2000 photo, was one of the founders of the **American Council of Trustees and Alumni**.

WASHINGTON - Don't bother to count the votes for president. Coloradan Jerry L. Martin has already declared himself the winner. "It's a win-win situation either way. We're going to have friends in high places," said the former University of Colorado philosophy professor with a broad grin.

He's right. Martin heads the **American Council of Trustees and Alumni**, until recently a rather obscure Washington-based education group that specializes in protecting against what it describes as overdoses of political correctness on college campuses. Martin and his council have clashed with university administrations across the country over everything from excessively lax academic requirements at some colleges to other

schools' efforts to silence professors who make unpopular statements.

What's got Martin smiling is the fact that the council has its feet firmly planted in both Republican and Democratic presidential campaigns. And his ties are up high.

No one less than Lynne V. Cheney, the wife of GOP vice presidential nominee Dick Cheney, founded the group and serves as its chairman. Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, D-Conn., the Democratic candidate for vice president, sits on its board of advisors and is an active proponent of the group's goals.

That's what Martin, the council president, would call the good news. The bad news, he says, is that his good friends soon are going to be attacking each other.

"It's going to be very painful," he said the other day. "I don't like the thought of these people taking shots at each other."

Martin, who has maintained his legal residence in Boulder despite his 18 years in Washington, won't say who is his favorite in the race. Increased visibility

But the new political roles of two of his group's backers already have given increased visibility to Martin and the council. The 5-year-old organization not only reflects Lynne Cheney's abhorrence of political correctness in academia, but also shows the influence of Martin's 15 years as a member of the CU philosophy department and his ties to Colorado's political establishment.

Former Colorado Gov. Dick Lamm, now running the Center for Public Policy and Contemporary Issues at the University of Denver, is also on the council board, and former Sen. Hank Brown, R-Colo., was one of the council's initial directors and remains an advisor. Now the president of the University of Northern Colorado, Brown is one of the few college presidents in the country the council has praised.

Colorado Gov. Bill Owens also has won the council's praise for his willingness to convene a joint meeting of trustees from the six boards overseeing the state's public colleges and to press them to take a more aggressive role in overseeing higher education in the state.

"What an idea!" noted Inside Academe, the council's newsletter. "... In

other words, under Gov. Bill Owens, the higher education commission is finally doing its job."

Martin, who spent 15 years at Boulder as a tenured professor and department chairman, knows academic life in Colorado well. "It's a wonderful lifestyle," he recalled in his small office in Washington's business district. "Only the super rich have it better."

But Martin, a Southern California native, says he became frustrated at some of the rules of academic life, even in his beloved Boulder. "I didn't agree with the agenda they were trying to pursue," he recalled.

So, in 1982 he took a year's leave to come to Washington. Martin landed on then-Rep. Brown's House staff in 1982 as an Andrew W. Mellon Congressional Fellow. The Colorado lawmaker liked Martin so well he asked him to stay for a second year.

When Martin asked CU for a third year's leave, the university balked. That's when Martin decided to give up his tenured position to remain in Washington, where he had discovered politics was nothing like it was in the political science textbooks.

"It was like jumping out of an airplane with a parachute that had never been tested," he said of his decision to seek a new career. Martin, however, thrived on Capitol Hill. And in 1988, when Lynne Cheney, wife of the then defense secretary, took charge of the National Endowment on Humanities in the Bush administration, Martin joined her.

PC fight

In the course of handing out grants to universities, Cheney became furious over the opposition a University of Texas professor encountered when he opposed a writing program for college freshmen. Martin said the program seemed better at pressing political viewpoints than teaching the points of English grammar.

After Cheney left office, several professors urged her to continue her fight against political correctness on college campuses. With funds from several foundations, she founded the council and hired Martin, one of her top aides at the endowment, to help.

In addition to the Coloradans Martin recruited, some other big names were added. Among them: Nobel Laureate Saul Bellow; Harvard sociology

professor emeritus David Reisman; Irving Kristol, editor of The Public Interest; and Martin Peretz, editor in chief of The New Republic.

Although the council, first known at the National **Alumni** Forum, was a newcomer to Washington's education establishment, it immediately took on some academic giants. It challenged Georgetown University for "dumbing down" its requirement that English majors take one Shakespeare course, questioned the University of Virginia's decision to allow a course of Dracula to count as a humanities course and accused the University of Chicago of "diluting academic standards" by reducing core course requirements.

This year the group won overwhelming approval for a Congressional resolution urging that more colleges require American history courses. That followed release of a survey showing that seniors at the nation's "elite colleges" had "an alarming ignorance of their heritage and a profound historical illiteracy."

Seniors didn't know what happened at Valley Forge, couldn't recognize the Gettysburg Address and didn't realize that George Washington had led American troops to victory over the British at Yorktown, the culminating battle of the Revolutionary War.

Joyous battles

For Martin, 58, such battles are joys, proof that the organization is putting its \$500,000-a-year budget to good use. One of his latest efforts is to bolster university trustees into taking a more activist stance in overseeing their schools. Too many are pushed into "ceremonial roles" while academic bureaucrats make the key decisions about courses and university policy, he says.

School budgets have grown at double the rate of inflation the past 15 years, he notes. "It can't keep escalating that way. "A college education doesn't mean as much anymore. Grade inflation has gotten to the point that it's almost social promotion at some colleges. A B+ is the average grade," he fumes. Telling students they are succeeding at some school is "lying to them."

Clearly Martin is angry about what's happening in academia. Recently another education group created a Center for Public Higher Education Trusteeship and Government, supposedly to broker relationships between state governments officials and higher education boards. It was an effort

to counter Martin's council, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Martin couldn't have been more delighted. He hailed the new group's arrival in a newsletter. "This looks like higher education circling the wagons," he happily proclaimed.

Once Martin's new friend takes office in January (whoever he may be), the Coloradan is hoping the folks in the wagons will find they need a lot more reinforcements.

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