



TO: Interested Colleagues  
FROM: Roger J. Limoges, Senior Policy Analyst  
RE: Report on Fidelis  
DATE: Updated August 17, 2005

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On June 30, 2005, the day before Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor announced her resignation from the nation's highest court, a new organization called Fidelis took out a full page ad in *Roll Call*, the political newspaper that covers Capitol Hill, regarding possible upcoming Supreme Court vacancies.

Under a picture of Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean, Fidelis accuses Senate Democrats and aligned interest groups of "mean spirited attacks" against conservative judicial nominees and "anti-religious bigotry" toward nominees with "deeply held religious beliefs."

To illustrate its point, Fidelis invokes the judicial nomination battle involving then Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor, known as perhaps President Bush's most extreme and hard-line conservative nominee to date. Pryor, now a circuit court judge, once referred to *Roe v. Wade* as "the worst abomination of constitutional law in our history,"<sup>1</sup> and has developed a far-right agenda on everything from gutting the Americans with Disability Act to deputizing attorneys from the right-wing American Center for Law and Justice to defend the constitution of the State of Alabama.

The *Roll Call* ad is reminiscent of similar advertisements placed during the 2004 election cycle which groundlessly accused Senate Democrats of opposing Catholics and people of faith nominated to federal judgeships.

Below the ad copy, which cost Fidelis approximately \$10,000, is a link to its website, [www.judgesoffaith.org](http://www.judgesoffaith.org).

On July 6, Fidelis purchased an advertisement in the *Nevada Appeal*, the hometown newspaper of Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, bringing attention to Reid's allegedly "intolerant remarks" toward Attorney General Nominee John Ashcroft.

In addition to the above, Fidelis has expanded its advertising campaign to additional media markets through radio and internet advertisements. The internet ads, which have also targeted US Senator Tom Harkin (D), have appeared on websites such as National Review Online, Catholic Exchange, Town Hall and World Net Daily.

In an August 10 press release, Fidelis announced the launching of CNNBias.org, a website mocking CNN for agreeing to air an anti-Roberts television ad, but allegedly refusing to air a Right to Life of Michigan ad in 1998 which featured Mother Teresa.

Fidelis also launched a fundraising campaign, including an advertisement in the ultraconservative Catholic newspaper, the *National Catholic Register*. The advertisement, addressed to "Catholics of America," recycles out-of-context quotes from prominent Democrats including party chairman Howard Dean in an effort to make them look intolerant.

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<sup>1</sup> People for the American Way, "William Pryor: Unfit to Judge," June 9, 2003.

## About Fidelis

Fidelis, which claims to be a “Catholic-based” organization, is comprised of four separate entities: Fidelis, Fidelis America, Fidelis Media Fund and Fidelis Center for Law and Justice. Their mission is to support the candidacies of antiabortion candidates for Congress and support the nominations of ideologically conservative judges.

- Fidelis, Fidelis Media Fund and the Fidelis Center for Law and Justice were incorporated in the State of Michigan as separate entities between March 31 and May 3 this year. Fidelis America was incorporated with the Federal Election Commission on April 25.
- Fidelis, Fidelis Media Fund and the Fidelis Center for Law and Justice are listed as domestic nonprofit corporations. Fidelis America is registered as a “nonparty nonqualified political action committee,” a form of political action committee.
- Fidelis itself is incorporated as a 501(c)4, which designates the group as a tax-exempt civic league or social welfare organization. Contributions are not, however, tax deductible.
- Fidelis Media Fund is the group’s 527 organization, which means that it was created to receive and disburse funds to influence or attempt to influence the nomination, election, appointment or defeat of candidates for public office.
- The Fidelis Center for Law and Justice is a 501(c)3, non-profit, non-partisan religious organization, similar to many other educational nonprofits.
- Fidelis America’s designation as a “nonparty nonqualified political action committee” means that is not supposed to support one particular political party. PACs are formed by special-interest groups to raise money and make contributions to the campaigns of political candidates.
  - While Fidelis America is not supposed to support one particular political party, in a recently released 2006 Senate report, the group actively promotes GOP Senate incumbents and disparages those such as “pro-abortion Catholic Maria Cantwell,” an incumbent US Senator from Washington.
- The Fidelis group has stated that it will be involved “in the most competitive House races and Senate races...those with a margin of one or two or three percentage points.” These include Senator Rick Santorum’s (R-PA) re-election race. Santorum, a Catholic with very conservative views on choice and gay rights, is facing a stiff challenge from Pennsylvania Treasurer Bob Casey, who is also anti-choice. It is expected to be the most competitive Senate race in the nation in the next election cycle in 2006.

## Staff

- Fidelis and its three related agencies only appear to have two employees. And, while the organizational structure of Fidelis claims to be nonpartisan and legally is set up as such, the organization seems to be staffed entirely by ultra-conservative Republicans. Even the organization’s lawyer, Eric Doster, who oversaw their incorporation, has impeccable GOP credentials, including being a member of the Michigan Republican State Committee, the Michigan Republican Lawyers Association, Republican National Lawyers Association and The Federalist Society.<sup>2</sup>
- The president of Fidelis is Joseph Cella. Cella was the president of the Catholic Prayer Breakfast. At this year’s breakfast, on May 20, President Bush was a keynote speaker. According to media accounts, the breakfast attracted some 1,600 attendees. It is worth mentioning that Austin Ruse served with Cella as

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<sup>2</sup> Martindale.com, Lawyer locator, viewed July 5, 2005.

Vice President of the Catholic Prayer Breakfast. Ruse, president of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, gained notoriety when he made shocking comments about then-First Lady Hillary Clinton. Speaking at the conservative Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, Ruse said that a priest from the Holy See's UN delegation guaranteed him "absolution if I just took her [Hillary Clinton] out—and not on a date."<sup>3</sup>

- Cella also served as the executive director of the Ave Maria List, a small Catholic political action committee that worked to defeat then-Senate minority leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) during the 2004 cycle. The Ave Maria List was a sponsoring organization of the “Catholics Need Not Apply” advertisements that were run in several newspapers throughout the country during 2004. Through the advertisements, the group accused Daschle and Democratic members of the Senate Judiciary Committee of discriminating against Catholic and religious nominees to the federal courts. The group also started a website, Daschledocuments.com where it chronicled what the Ave Maria List did to contribute to the defeat of Daschle. Most of these activities unremittingly attacked Senator Daschle’s support of a women’s right to safe and legal reproductive health care.
- Thomas Monaghan, the former Domino’s Pizza magnate is deeply involved in Fidelis. Monaghan has long been pushing his ultraconservative Catholic agenda, right down to naming all major projects that he is involved in as Ave Maria, including his law school, university, and a planned community, in which everything will be controlled, even what is sold at drug stores.
- The other employee, Brian Burch, runs the Fidelis Center for Law and Justice. He is the former director of development and communications for the conservative Thomas More Law Center, set up and bankrolled by Thomas Monaghan.
- The 29-year-old Michigan resident also appears as the media contact for Fidelis. In addition to his role there, Burch sees himself as somewhat of an entrepreneur. He has been purchasing domain names that might be useful in the forthcoming Supreme Court campaign. One of the judicial nominees Burch hoped to promote was Michael McConnell, a conservative from Utah. Burch purchased confirmmccconnell.org and confirmmccconnell.net and told the *Legal Times* that he would be “open to” selling the domains for an undisclosed sum, even to those who might oppose the nominations.
- The address of Fidelis is listed as: Fidelis, PO BOX 277, Chelsea, MI 48118. The address is in close proximity to the Thomas More Law Center in Ann Arbor. The email contact for the group is info@fidelis.org. A phone number is listed for a media contact, (734) 358-3433.
- The www.judgesoffaith.org website is registered by www.domainsbyproxy.com, a company that shields the identity of web owners. The registration was in June of this year. The fidelis.org website is registered to Right Internet, a small conservative group in Charlottesville, VA, that was instrumental in launching the campaign against CBS’ news anchor Dan Rather over the forged memos about President Bush’s National Guard duty.
- CFFC will continue to monitor this group and update you as necessary.

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<sup>3</sup> CFFC, “Bad Faith at the UN: Drawing Back the Curtain on the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute,” March 2001.