

US Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to address right-wing, pro-impeachment organization

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The year-long impeachment campaign has lifted the lid on a political fact well known within the political and media establishment, but concealed from the American people--the intimate links between extreme right-wing organizations and individuals and officials in the highest echelons of government.

Among the institutions that have played a critical role in promoting the political conspiracy that has culminated in the Senate impeachment trial is the Supreme Court, and events have demonstrated that this supposedly non-partisan body includes justices with close ties to the most reactionary elements in American society.

It was Chief Justice William Rehnquist--who played a role in authorizing Nixon's illegal wiretaps nearly three decades ago--who appointed David Sentelle, a protégé of Senator Jesse Helms, as head of the three-judge panel that oversees the independent counsel. Sentelle promptly fired Robert Fiske and appointed right-wing Republican Ken Starr to replace him.

And it was the Supreme Court's May 1997 ruling against a White House motion to delay the Paula Jones sexual harassment suit that set the stage for all that has followed. Rehnquist is now presiding over the trial he helped bring about.

Over the past week a controversy has emerged concerning another Supreme Court judge and his ties to the far right. Associate Justice Clarence Thomas is scheduled to appear as the keynote speaker at the February 9 Lincoln Day dinner of the Claremont Institute, a right-wing think tank that is actively campaigning for the removal of President Clinton.

On Monday Barry Lynn, executive director of the Washington-based liberal group Americans United for

Separation of Church and State, sent Thomas a letter of protest urging him to cancel his speech to the institute. Observed Lynn, "I don't believe any justice should celebrate Abraham Lincoln's birthday by dining with a right-wing group that tries to limit legal protections for minorities." As of this writing, Thomas has not replied to Lynn's letter.

Other speakers listed by the Claremont Institute for its February 9 colloquium, to be held at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, include Terry Eastland, publisher of the *American Spectator*, and Bill Kristol of the *Weekly Standard*. The master of ceremonies for the event will be the television game show host Pat Sajak.

Eastland's *American Spectator* is funded by the billionaire publisher Richard Mellon Scaife. It has been a clearing house for salacious gossip and extravagant allegations against Clinton from the first days of the Clinton administration. In late 1993 the *American Spectator* published charges by Arkansas state troopers who claimed to have procured sex for Clinton while he was governor, referring in passing to a woman named "Paula." This article, whose author subsequently issued a public retraction, was seized on by Paula Jones as the pretext for her suit.

Bill Kristol is a pundit who appears regularly on Sunday TV interview shows. He plays a prominent role in the right wing of the Republican Party.

A dossier on the Claremont Institute published by Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) outlines the institute's promotion of right-wing libertarian policies as well as positions central to the agenda of the Christian right. It also notes the political ties of the institute to other bodies that have played a major role in the impeachment drive.

AU points out that Thomas has a long-standing connection to the institute, which is based in Claremont, California. He addressed the group in December of 1993 and has accepted its Statesmanship Award.

One of the institute's main financial backers is Scaife. Claremont accepted \$75,000 from the Sarah Scaife Foundation in 1994 and \$225,000 in 1997.

Claremont President Larry P. Arnn ran unsuccessfully for Congress in the Republican primary for California's 43rd Congressional District in 1992. Last year he was asked by Republican congressional leaders to help shape the party's platform for the year 2000.

Arnn is also a member of the Council on National Policy, a network of right-wing Republican officials, leaders of Christian right organizations and other far-right operatives that meets regularly to plot strategy. The Council on National Policy has played a major role in orchestrating the impeachment drive, and it numbers among its members Republican politicians who have been at the forefront of the campaign: Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, and Bob Barr, one of the House managers prosecuting the case against Clinton in the Senate. Other members include Senator Jesse Helms, House Majority Leader Dick Armey, Pat Robertson, Free Congress Foundation President Paul Weyrich, and religious right radio broadcaster James Dobson.

Claremont's board of directors includes Howard F. Ahmanson Jr., a multimillionaire and California-based religious right activist. Ahmanson has spent large sums to promote a philosophy known as "Christian Reconstructionism." According to the AU dossier:

"Reconstructionists believe the Old Testament's harsh legal code should be binding on modern society. They advocate the death penalty--some say by stoning--for a number of religious 'offenses,' including apostasy, blasphemy and 'unchastity.' The Reconstructionist view is perhaps best summed up by a 1992 quote by Ahmanson: 'My purpose is total integration of biblical law into our lives.' Ahmanson gave the Institute \$185,000 in 1995."

The Claremont Institute maintains an "Impeachment Resources" section on its web site, and invites visitors to sign a petition demanding Clinton's resignation.

In terms of its policies, Claremont opposes the

constitutional separation of church and state; it campaigned for Proposition 209, the constitutional amendment in California that banned affirmative action; it opposes legal protection for gays; it opposes gun control; and its president, Arnn, has publicly called for the repeal of the Sixteenth Amendment, which gives the federal government the power to levy income taxes.

Among the institute's recent interventions is the filing of an amicus brief in a New Jersey court case concerning the refusal of the Boy Scouts of America to admit gays or atheists. Claremont argued in support of the Boy Scout policy.

Claremont is also promoting a video of a speech by Charlton Heston at its "Constitution Day" event last September, in which Heston praised the "God-fearing, law-abiding, Caucasian middle class."



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