

New Clinton special prosecutor linked to religious fundamentalists

Martin McLaughlin
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The new head of the Office of Independent Counsel, who succeeded Kenneth Starr last month, has longtime links to the extreme-right circles which organized the impeachment coup against the Clinton administration, it was reported Monday. Robert Ray, who was selected by the same three-judge panel which picked Starr, ran as a school board candidate in Brooklyn, New York with the backing of Christian fundamentalist groups.

An article in the *Washington Post* November 22 provided details of Ray's background which have otherwise been suppressed by the major US media, including such newspapers as the *New York Times*, *Newsday* and the *New York Daily News*. These publications are all familiar with Ray's ties to the ultra-right, which go back nearly a decade. Nothing else has appeared in the American press in the time since Ray took office October 19.

Ray was a candidate for school board in Brooklyn District 15 in 1993 on the so-called Children's Slate, a group organized with the backing of fundamentalist television preacher Pat Robertson, on a platform of hostility to homosexuals and to educational programs in the public schools which advocated tolerance of gays, lesbians and other minorities.

The Children's Slate was organized in reaction to the introduction of the "Rainbow curriculum" by the District 15 board. District 15 covers Park Slope, Sunset Park, Carroll Gardens, Red Hook and Cobble Hill, in the north and west of the borough of Brooklyn. The liberal Good Schools Coalition won the May 1993 vote, taking five out of nine seats, while the Robertson-backed group won only two.

Ray, who was not one of those elected, spent the Sunday before the vote distributing a leaflet outside his church, which demanded: "Stop the Rainbow Curriculum. The teaching of homosexual lifestyles in

first grade." In a statement which he provided to a District 15 candidates' forum, Ray wrote, "I believe the 'Rainbow' controversy represents an assault on the moral authority of parents."

Two of the candidates on the liberal slate that defeated Ray spoke to the *Washington Post* about the campaign and offered differing recollections of Ray's role. Jill Harris, elected as an openly gay candidate, said Ray was "very inflammatory. When he ran for school board, he was running as an anti-gay candidate and a right-wing candidate. He targeted his message."

Pauline Toole described Ray, then a registered Democrat, as more of an opportunist who allied himself with the ultra-right to gain political advantage. He "painted himself as a conservative" but was not a "raving right-winger," she said. He supported bilingual education (almost a political necessity in a district which was then nearly 50 percent Hispanic).

At the time of this election, Ray was working as an assistant federal prosecutor in New York City, dealing mainly with narcotics cases. He worked in the US attorney's office for six and a half years, before being selected as an assistant by Donald Smaltz, who conducted a four-year Independent Counsel investigation into then Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy.

The case against Espy was among the flimsiest of all the prosecutions of Clinton administration officials instigated by right-wing groups. Espy was accused of receiving gifts, such as Super Bowl tickets and air travel, from agribusiness firms regulated by his department. While demonstrating the cozy relations between government officials and the industries they supposedly regulate—something not usually a cause of outrage in right-wing circles—the total of \$14,000 in alleged gratuities was blown up into a case which

required more than \$4 million to prosecute and ended in a jury trial in which Espy was acquitted on all counts.

Ray went to work for Starr earlier this year, after the Smaltz investigation ended and the Senate failed to vote Clinton's removal from office after impeachment by the House of Representatives. Ray is now charged with determining the disposition of a few legal issues, mainly related to the claim by Kathleen Willey that Clinton made an unwelcome sexual advance in 1993.

As in the Monica Lewinsky case, which was leveraged into charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, Starr's prosecutors had hoped to bring charges of perjury or cover-up over behavior which, if it occurred, was not criminal. Clinton fundraiser Nathan Landow and other Democratic Party figures were targeted, although not apparently Clinton himself.

Ray will also decide whether charges should be brought in relation to the early 1993 firings of White House travel office aides, another case in which a perfectly legal action—the sacking of holdover staff from the Bush administration and their replacement by Clinton loyalists—has been turned into a criminal case by alleging that White House aides had lied about Hillary Clinton's role in the decision.

Most importantly, Ray will have the responsibility for writing the final report of the Office of Independent Counsel on all the issues referred to it for investigation over nearly six years, including the Whitewater real estate investment and other Arkansas business transactions of the Clintons which are now more than 20 years old.

The political importance of this report is that it could well arrive in the midst of the 2000 election campaign, raising the issue of the attempted political coup in Washington once again before a broad political audience. Here Ray's political background is all the more significant.

Not only was he a politically active Christian fundamentalist, he worked for six and a half years for the US Attorney for the southern district of Manhattan, Rudolph Giuliani, now mayor of New York City. This fact makes Ray's selection as Independent Counsel even more extraordinary, since he will be issuing his report on the investigation into Bill and Hillary Clinton in the middle of the anticipated election contest for US Senate in New York state between Mrs. Clinton and his

former boss, Mayor Giuliani.



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