

Religious Right Taking Control of Local GOP Groups

WEST CHESTER, Pa. — Jim Hanak was elected last year to the Chester County Republican Committee, one of those obscure party posts that often draws little interest but can carry a big voice in recruiting and endorsing candidates for local offices.

A soft-spoken man with passionate politics, he represents a growing force that is splitting the personality of local Republican politics across the United States.

Hanak is also state director for the American Family Ministries, a conservative, anti-abortion group. His dual roles represent an evolving nightmare to moderate Republicans: the quiet takeover of local GOP organizations by religious activists they view as obsessed with abortion and homosexuality and intolerant of those who don't share their views.

"These people are zealots," argues Ellen Harley, a state representative from suburban Philadelphia. "They want to impose their idea of God and their idea of values and push the social issues to the fore. That has never been what Republicans are about. A political party should not be about the business of trying to define God."

It's a festering feud that belies all the

recent talk of Republican unity against President Clinton's tax increases. Unity over economic issues only masks the GOP's deep cultural divide.

"It is not going to go away," Republican National Committee member Elsie Hillman says of the split.

Because of their strength at local levels, religious conservatives now have significant influence over Republican parties in at least 18 states: Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Washington and Virginia.

Since 1988, when religious broadcaster Pat Robertson showed surprising strength in GOP presidential caucuses, Christian activists have realized the influence of low-level party posts, and the ease with which these positions can be won. "I could have been a Nazi or a communist and still have gotten elected," Hanak said last year after his election to the county GOP committee.

While the Republican National Committee and most state GOP committees remain in the hands of "party regulars," local strength gives Christian activists power to endorse candidates for school

boards, county commissions and state legislatures.

Christian political leaders deny any attempt to control the GOP, notwithstanding Robertson's 1991 pledge to have "a working majority of the Republican Party in the hands of pro-family Christians by 1996."

Ralph Reed, executive director of the national Christian Coalition, explains, "We are involved in the party but we don't seek to become the party. A political party is not a church. Its job is not to promulgate a doctrine of faith and save souls. Its job is to field candidates and win elections."

Burt Day remembers the day he discovered the inroads of the religious right.

He was standing by the door of his Iowa GOP district meeting in May 1992 when he noticed a most unusual thing: a crowd. As the room filled, most of the newcomers headed straight to Christian activist Cindy Lyons for instructions.

"It became apparent that there was a real stealth campaign to put some new people on the committee," Day said. He survived a challenge but two other moderates did not. When it came time to pick Iowa delegates for the national convention, Day realized his local experience was

hardly unique.

"There were only four delegates to the national convention that weren't in some way controlled by the Christian Coalition," he said. In all, some 40 percent of the 2,000 Republican convention delegates were loyal or sympathetic to the religious right.

Nationally, Christian right involvement in Democratic politics has been negligible. But here in Pennsylvania, where Gov. Robert P. Casey is among prominent anti-abortion Democrats, there is a potential for modest inroads. South Carolina and Virginia are other targets for gaining Democratic Party slots. Some longtime Republicans have begun organizing to dilute the influence of the religious activists. In South Carolina, for example, a former state chairman has established the Republican Leadership Council, named deliberately after the Democratic centrist group that Clinton once led.

"It's a problem we moderate brought upon ourselves," says Sue Mullins, a former legislator in Iowa now active among Republicans who oppose the religious right. "We got lazy and they got active and they are very dedicated to keeping their power. Getting that same degree of dedication from moderates is going to be difficult."

'Huffing' Inhalants Gaining Popularity Among Teens

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — When Ryan Link came home after a night out with his friends, it wasn't smoke or alcohol his parents smelled on his breath — it was gasoline.

Ryan, 17, was a "huffer" — someone who inhales fumes from gasoline, hairspray, butane, or any number of household products to get a cheap high.

When Ryan's parents sought help, their minister advised them to "make light of" their son's substance abuse. The family doctor and the high school counselor didn't know how to handle Ryan's problem, and other parents thought the Links made too much of it.

Parents and educators often dismiss the dangers of huffing, despite its prevalence, its increasing popularity among teens and its potential deadliness, said Catherine MacIntyre, the director of the International Institute for Inhalant Abuse in Englewood.

Nearly one-fifth of American high school seniors have tried to get high from some kind of inhalant, according to a 1991 study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Inhalants rank fourth in popularity among schoolchildren, behind alcohol, tobacco and marijuana, but ahead of LSD and cocaine.

Of Colorado eighth-graders, 21 percent reported using inhalants at least once in their lifetimes, according to a survey. Inhalants were also the drug of choice for eighth-graders across the country, according to a University of Michigan study released this spring.

Inhalant institute officials say huffing is attractive to juveniles because it is cheap and the products themselves are legal. Worse, it causes more irreversible physical damage than other drugs, and can kill on the first try.

The problem crosses cultural, economic and social lines: MacIntyre recently got a call from a prevention specialist in Nebraska who said kindergartners were caught huffing gasoline from baby-food jars. They had seen a second-grader do it.

A 15-year-old South Carolina girl ran her car off a road last September and killed two people. She told a judge she was so high from huffing she was unaware she had hit anything.

Ryan Link said he began huffing in the fifth grade. "I got introduced to it and thought, 'Heck, I'd try it,'" he said. Initially an infrequent diversion, huffing became a daily habit for Link.

"I didn't crave it," Link said. "It was just what we did when there was nothing else to do. We were bored."

Ryan and four or more friends would hallucinate when they huffed; he said their hair seemed to change color, or people appeared to be choking on toothpicks that weren't there.

Ryan's concentration and memory deteriorated when he was huffing, said his father, Dick Link. His grades dropped —

from a 3.5 grade-point average in eighth grade to a 0.8 GPA in high school. As a result, he had to drop baseball, football and wrestling. He grew increasingly violent, kicking in doors and verbally abusing his mother, his father said.

Link will be a senior at Berthoud High School this fall, and it has been 18 months since he huffed. His father credits MacIntyre's inhalant institute.

The 2-year-old institute is a clearinghouse for medical research and prevention programs. Dr. Neil L. Rosenberg, the institute's medical director, concentrates on research, while MacIntyre crisscrosses the country talking to students, police, emergency medical workers and parents. She frequently takes Ryan Link with her.

"We've heard over and over that the parents are relieved it's not cocaine," she said. "Parents think this is the glue-sniffing of the 60s, and it's not."

Today, huffers don't merely spray an aerosol on their sleeve or in a paper bag to sniff it. Many inhale butane directly from disposable lighters, or propellants straight from cans, Rosenberg said.

Until a few years ago, huffing wasn't socially acceptable among teens.

"Now it's cool. It's hip. It's in. Before, it was a trash drug," Rosenberg said.

It is impossible to tell how many kids die from huffing, Rosenberg said. Not only can it be lethal, it can make troubled teens depressed, violent and suicidal, he said.

Rosenberg has researched the effects of inhalants for seven years. Preliminary findings from his latest study show "unequivocally" that huffing not only causes permanent brain damage, but also measurable brain damage after only six months of abuse.

He said the inhalants entered the bloodstream quickly and sought out fatty organs, such as the brain, liver and kidneys. The high is immediate and can range from a dizzy, euphoric feeling to hallucinations.

Besides causing brain damage, chronic abuse can damage the kidneys, liver, central nervous system and bone marrow. It can cause the heart to beat irregularly or to stop beating altogether.

Some instances of respiratory failure in huffers have been reported as well, said Rosenberg.

Treatment can pose difficulties, Rosenberg said.

Besides having an abuse problem, chronic huffers are often brain-damaged. Many cannot even grasp the concepts behind traditional treatments — such as Alcoholics Anonymous' 12-step programs. Some also need physical and occupational therapy.

Ryan Link said he and his friends decided to quit when they began having difficulty speaking. Some words they slurred; others they couldn't say at all.

He also got caught by police. Link said the officer didn't know what he was doing, but he was so high he told her.

Marcos' Remains Returning to Philippines After 4-Year Wait

LAOAG, Philippines — Ferdinand Marcos' body was to arrive in his homeland Tuesday, nearly four years after his death and seven and one-half years after the former Philippine president was ousted in a people's uprising.

A chartered jet carrying the body was scheduled to land Tuesday morning in

Laoag, the capital of Ilocos Norte, Marcos' home province in the Philippines. Burial is set for Friday in his hometown of Batac.

Thousands of people packed a cathedral in Agana, Guam, on Monday to honor Marcos as his body was brought to the U.S. territory en route back to the Philippines.

"Despite the many things they say, he is my father, he is my president, he is my

friend, he is my God," said Marcos' son, Ferdinand Jr. "Those ahead of their time must wait for the rest to finally comprehend. Tragedy lies in the suffering he had to endure for others' small-mindedness," he said at the Mass inside the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral.

Outside the church, a small group gathered carrying a sign that read, "Pray for the

Dead But Don't Honor Corruption."

"The reason we're here today is just to remind the people that he was not a hero," said Camila Garcia.

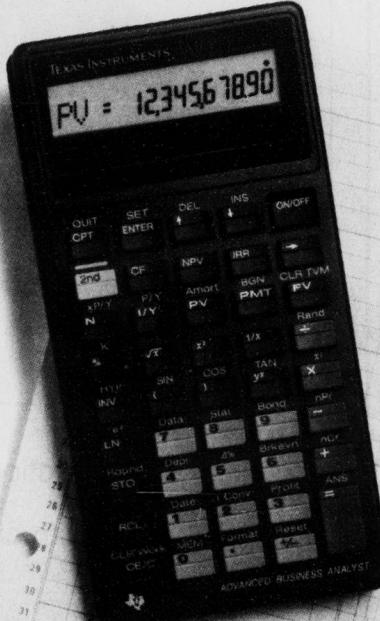
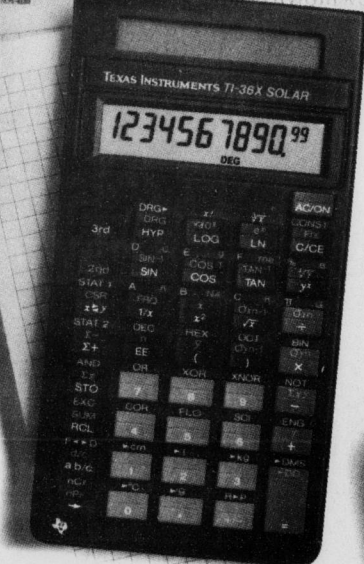
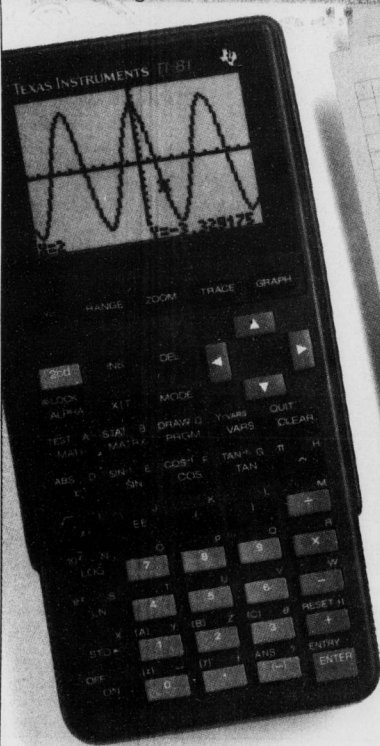
"Songs will be sung and stories will be told, but history will be the judge," said Roque Ablan, a Philippine legislator, who joined Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for the departed leader's trip home.

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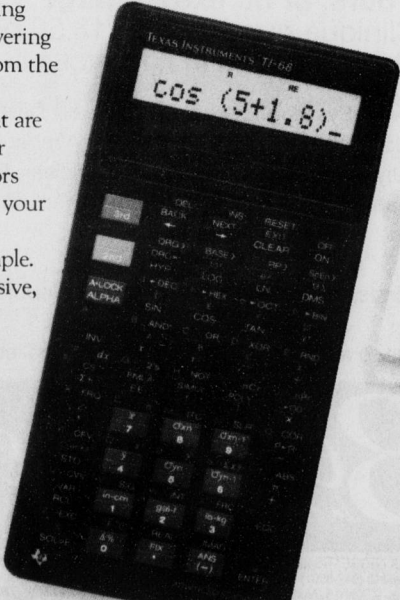
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