

6-21-2005

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The Recorder

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Recommended Citation

Scheck, Justin, "Gore Headlines Liberal Confab" (2005). *History of GGU Law*. Paper 10.
<http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/history/10>

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VERONICA WEBER

Gore headlines liberal confab

By Justin Scheck
RECORDER STAFF WRITER

Whether he's painted as the occupant of moral high ground (if not the White House), the victim of conservative ideologues on the U.S. Supreme Court or someone who just barely slipped over the line between success and abject failure, Al Gore is a loaded figure for the left.

So it was with eager anticipation that a group of San Francisco attorneys and law students Friday waited for him to arrive at Golden Gate University.

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Gore was in town to headline a kickoff party for the local chapter of the American Constitution Society.

The organization — which started four years ago largely to counteract the Federalist Society — has been trying hard to build up its membership base almost since the Gore presidency evaporated. In fact, its aim is largely to address problems on the left that many fault for Gore's presidential loss.

"The *Bush v. Gore* case, no question, mobilized people," said ACS Executive Director Lisa Brown, who was Gore's lawyer during part of his vice presidency.

"But what we're trying to get at is bigger than that, to help the progressives on the legal perspective of what do we stand for," she added.

Answers to that question were bandied about by many in the VIP room, where lawyers, judges and the like waited for Gore to arrive.

As they conversed, the Federalist Society — and its effectiveness — was an oft-mentioned subject.

"They got a 20-year head start," said Elizabeth Cabraser, as serene in the waiting room as she was in front of the filled auditorium, when she introduced Brown, who introduced Gore. The Lieff, Cabraser, Heimann & Bernstein partner said that whereas liberal baby boomers grew complacent in the 1980s and '90s, the right mobilized and fought hard to gain influence. "They don't apologize," she said. "But on the left, we agonize."

Cabraser and a brace of other lawyers from Lieff, Cabraser were joined by plaintiff and defense attorneys from a host of other firms in supporting the event. Their focus seemed to be on curbing the agonizing and increasing the organizing.

"They say the Democratic Party represents a more diverse group of constituents, and it's hard to find a unifying principle. But I think that's just making excuses," said Jeffrey Bleich, a co-founder of the local chapter, on Monday.

"I don't think that these issues are plaintiff or defendant or even Democrat or Republican," added Bleich, a partner with Munger, Tolles & Olson and an active Democrat and defense lawyer.

Whereas the Federalist Society is focused on states' rights, Bleich said, the ACS expounds the view that the Constitution is "an evolving document that reflects the trials and errors of the country."

Gore's police-flanked arrival sent a hush through the VIP room, as the former vice president made a diligent handshaking circuit, being sure to tightly grip — and make requisite eye contact — with every lawyer, reporter and bartender in the room.

Eventually everyone followed him into the lecture hall, where he began his speech — which focused on wartime infringements on civil liberties — with a now-familiar refrain.

"I am Al Gore," he said. "I used to be the next president of the United States."

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