

National News

PIRG environmentalists exposed in college paper

The January issue of the Hunter College-based paper *Spheric*, distributed throughout City University of New York, ran a major exposé of the New York Public Interest Group, or NYPIRG, Inc. The original PIRG was founded as part of the Ralph Nader-linked environmental vigilantes following the 1970 Earth Day extravaganzas.

Spheric accused NYPIRG of getting \$3 from every CUNY undergraduate (added on to their tuition fees), using high-powered lawyers to defend the secret taxation, and falsifying research for the purpose of grabbing the spotlight.

Half of the outlays gained from tuition checkoffs, according to *Spheric*, go to salaries—around \$2 million in New York State alone, out of a \$4.1 million budget, with only 46 full-time employees.

Moreover, “it seems the PIRGs don’t care how truthful the muck they rake is; their ‘research’ is bogus. . . .

“To get the necessary ‘facts,’ the PIRGs distort information, use illogical reasoning to arrive at their predetermined conclusions, shuffle figures and wrap up the product in deceptive language. When their methodological errors are brought to light, their response is to personally attack the critic,” *Spheric* wrote.

D.C. coalition fights to get AIDS funding

For the first time in a decade, Washington, D.C. is opening up to competitive bidding its \$2 million annual grant to the city’s sole provider of comprehensive AIDS services in the city. For the past 10 years, according to the March 7 issue of *New Federalist*, the grant has been routinely awarded to the Whitman-Walker Clinic, whose board-adopted mission is to act as “a lesbian and gay community health organization whose services are dedicated to gay men and lesbians.”

Author Dr. Debra Hanania-Freeman wrote that, in the early 1980s, some 68% of reported AIDS cases in Washington were among homosexual or bisexual men. By 1991, “roughly 73% of the reported AIDS cases occurred among African-Americans. . . . And, perhaps the most disturbing statistic of all, black children aged 13 and younger represent 93% of all AIDS cases among the District’s children.”

A group called Sankofa Community Coalition of HIV/AIDS Services is now fighting to wrest the city’s grant from the Whitman-Walker Clinic. “If we want to put a color on this pandemic, the color would have to be black,” said Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad, a founder of the coalition and director of the Abundant Life Clinic. Last year, the lesbian chief of the D.C. Agency for AIDS/HIV was fired after it was discovered that she had overridden efforts by a panel to award a contract for a public information campaign to the Abundant Life Clinic. Her animus stemmed from the fact that Dr. Muhammad is a leader in the Nation of Islam and, she told the panel, “Muslims hate gays.”

Hospital argues right to deny infant treatment

Fairfax Hospital of Falls Church, Virginia is fighting a Feb. 10 federal appeals court ruling that federal law indeed does mandate that the hospital must provide life-saving treatment to a disabled infant. “Baby K” was born in October 1992 with a partially developed brain, a condition known as anencephaly. Baby K’s mother insisted the child receive ventilator assistance, against the hospital’s argument that this “ethically inappropriate” treatment was an indignity that “prolongs her death.”

Some doctors classify infants with anencephaly as “dead,” and Fairfax Hospital argued that Baby K “lacked the essence of personhood” and asked the court to relieve it of federal laws protecting vulnerable patients. The U.S. District Court ruled last July that denying Baby K emergency care would violate the right to life under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, the First

Amendment guarantee of religious freedom, the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act, the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act, and Sec. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The hospital’s unsuccessful appeal to the Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals claimed that a Virginia law giving doctors the right to withhold “futile” care takes precedence over federal and constitutional protections.

The hospital’s legal challenge now claims that Congress never intended for the federal emergency care laws to control “sensitive” end-of-life decisionmaking. The Society of Critical Care Medicine and the American Academy of Pediatrics, among others, have entered *amicus* briefs supporting the hospital.

School privatization facing strong opposition

Washington, D.C. School Superintendent Franklin Smith was forced by the school board and unions to shelve plans to privatize the public schools in early March. The plan was viewed by some parents as turning the control of schools in the predominantly black city over to a white elite, including the Minneapolis-based Education Alternatives, Inc., which Smith had slated to take over running the schools. Parents said EAI had no educational experience or “track record,” according to the *Washington Post*.

Other opposition came from the Washington Teachers’ Union and the Board of Education. Critics in the D.C. government said the plan was designed to boost profits of EAI, while doing nothing to improve student achievement. A D.C. civic organization said private managers would create “separate but unequal” schools. The Board of Education was the most decisive opponent, members of which were heavily lobbied by citizens.

Sources also report that wide circulation of pre-print copies of *EIR*’s Jan. 28, 1994 feature on privatization of education played a major role in spurring the opposition.

In Portsmouth, Virginia, eight parents demonstrated outside a school designated

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to be privatized on Feb. 28, where School Superintendent Richard D. Trumble is accepting bids from 22 companies to privatize five schools in Portsmouth, including EAI and the New York-based Edison Project. The parents demonstrated outside James Hurst Elementary school, as the prospective companies were touring the school.

FEMA director predicts more Midwest floods

James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), said on March 4 that conditions are right for more flooding this spring in the Midwest, where recovery efforts from last year's record floods remain incomplete.

According to Associated Press, National Weather Service surveys indicate that the soil in the nine states hit hard by last summer's flooding remains saturated. If there are heavy rains or fast melting of snow, more floods could occur.

Maj. Gen. Stan Genega, head of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers division overseeing levee repair, said that enough work would be done on the 500 levees under the Corps' jurisdiction by March 31 to withstand a 20-year flood. However, there are an additional 1,500 levees that do not qualify for Corps repair along the upper Mississippi and lower Missouri rivers. Some are being fixed by other agencies, such as the Soil Conservation Service, but Major Genega said that others would not be finished by spring—if ever.

ADL's Mintz loses big in New Orleans

New Orleans mayoral candidate Donald Mintz, a National Commission member of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), was soundly defeated in a runoff election against Marc Morial on March 5, after his own campaign was caught distributing racist and anti-Semitic leaflets attacking him. On Feb.

25, the New Orleans Human Rights Commission issued a report finding that the fliers "originated with the Mintz campaign." City investigators said that his campaign's mailing of the fliers, with titles such as "Stop the Colored/Jew Coalition" and "Say Never to Jungle Apes & Christ Killers," generated over \$200,000 in campaign contributions from outside the city.

The commission's report on "Fair Campaign Practices," while pointing out that it lacked the investigative tools of a grand jury and that Mintz and his campaign manager refused to appear before them, termed the campaign's use of the leaflets for fundraising "reprehensible in that it gave further distribution to these ghastly fliers."

Mintz's actions were defended by John Reynolds of the Southern Poverty Law Center, who whined that all Mintz was trying to do was "to confront hatred," side-stepping the fact that Mintz had accused his black opponent Marc Morial of circulating the leaflets.

Two anti-OBE bills introduced in Nebraska

Nebraska state legislator Kate Witek has introduced two bills to prevent the Nebraska Department of Education from mandating the brainwashing programs known as "outcome-based education" (OBE). Witek, author of Legislative Bills 998 and 999, said it appeared that the state is moving toward requiring it, thus usurping the power of local school boards, according to the *Lincoln Star* of Feb. 23. Witek said the legislature and the Department of Education have been pushing local school districts to adopt OBE, using the threat of losing accreditation if districts do not adopt "learner outcomes" devised by the legislature-created Nebraska Schools Accountability Commission.

The bills prohibit the state from mandating OBE, and call for the commission to be dissolved. The bills are opposed by the state's educational associations and the Board of Education, which allege that they fuel fears among conservative religious groups that OBE is a "satanic conspiracy."

● **OMAHA ARCHBISHOP** Elden Curtiss released a pastoral letter attacking "sex ed" in the public schools, which, he said, encourages "people to be sexually active." "Even though many public school districts claim that they stress abstinence with their students, they are not able to make the case for abstinence on religious and moral grounds, since they are forced by the courts to take a non-religious and value-free approach to human life issues."

● **ATTORNEY GENERAL** Janet Reno and Vice President Al Gore announced a new package from the administration to fight crime at a press conference on March 1. Gore said of the Republican's populist appeal for "three strikes and you're out" life sentences: "We want to avoid filling the prisons with life sentences for people who don't really belong there."

● **VIRGINIA GOV.** George Allen postponed the special legislative session on abolition of parole and sentencing reform until September. The session was supposed to be held this spring, but apparently the governor is not ready yet to try to ram through the proposed changes.

● **MARINE GENERAL** Joseph Hoar told the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 3 that it would strain Pentagon resources to fly soldiers and equipment into one war, let alone two. "I'm not sure it's workable for one major regional contingency," he said.

● **CHRIS DROGOUL**, the former Atlanta branch manager of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, was granted immunity to testify before a new grand jury on Feb. 28. Drogoul, who pleaded guilty in the case involving illegal loans to Iraq under the Bush administration, has spent two years in prison. His New York attorney said that the Clinton White House may now be trying to determine whether senior BNL officials in Rome knew about and approved of the loans.