

Campaign 2002

Al Shugart, Write-in Candidate

It was first announced in July 2001 as a news exclusive on Chris Shugart's radio show "Uncommon Sense." That Sunday, Al Shugart announced he planned to run for Congress in the 17th District. On the show, Al expressed his dismay for how dysfunctional our government has become. "It's time again to protest," he said, "We have to elect an independent who accepts no campaign contributions."

During the radio show, Al laid out a three point plan he intends to put into place should he be elected to office. Al proposed to 1) Determine what a Congressman does; 2) How a Congressman does it; 3) Report back his findings. Al also made his first campaign promise—He pledged to "read anything I vote on."

The breaking story quickly hit the newspapers. The August 14 Santa Cruz Sentinel reported on some of the campaign details such as: Al Shugart will be a write-

in candidate with no party affiliation on the November 2002 ballot; Campaign donations will not be accepted; Campaign spending will not exceed \$3000.

In the Sentinel, Al said "The conventional wisdom tells you you can't get elected as a write-in candidate, but the conventional wisdom has been wrong before." On his political competition, Al said, "I'm 70; Sam Farr is only 60. I'm 10 years smarter than him."

Two days later the Monterey Herald continued the story. Al explained his frustration with the influence of political

parties and contributors, "It's the whole system. I'd like to see the whole Congress filled with independents."

Sam Farr's staff reacted to Shugart's announcement by saying: "We would wonder whether a man who ran his dog as a candidate for Congress in the past truly has a sense of commitment one needs to be a good public servant."

When asked to respond, Al was unconcerned with his past association with dogs in politics. "My two best friends are dogs," he said. ■



Turned On And Tuned In

For the past year and a half Friends of Ernest attempted to expand its reach via the airwaves in the form of a radio show that FOE Executive Director called "Uncommon Sense." The show got its start at Santa Cruz radio station KSCO. It then moved to KTX (since changed to KION) in Salinas "It's hard to explain what motivated me to put a radio program together. I've never done anything like it before," explains Chris. "It seemed

like a good idea, and I thought I'd be good at it."

The broadcast experiment is now complete, and the overall success of the weekly Sunday afternoon program isn't easy to determine. "Uncommon Sense" took an irreverent look at the various current events of the day in an attempt to view them from a perspective not found elsewhere in the media. Chris, the host of the show explained, "Some things strike me as funny, others just tick me off. I'm not much into conventional wisdom, so my take on some things are off the beaten path." Filling out the program was Al, who called in on a regular basis and was known as the "Uncommon Sense call-in co-host."

Now that the program has come to an end, Chris plans to devote more time to the Friends of Ernest website. Sound clips of show highlights will be one of the new features available soon. ■

Government by Committee

Although the media usually pays close attention to how the House and the Senate conduct their daily business, you could make a pretty convincing argument that most of the important work doesn't even take place on the chamber floors. In reality much of the federal government work occurs out of public view, behind the closed doors where Congressional committees meet.

There are approximately 250 committees and subcommittees in all, and the House and Senate each have their own committee system. And there's not much uniformity from one committee to the next, each having the power to adopt their own rules of procedure. There are standing committees, such as the Budget Committee or the Judiciary Committee, which generally have legislative jurisdiction, while the select and joint committees, like the Senate Committee On Ethics, or the Joint Economic Committee, are mostly for oversight and housekeeping



Chris Shugart is on the air.



From the Rooftop

Voting Right By Al Shugart

“Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.”

– George Jean Nathan

At my office recently we were talking about those everyday things you deal with whose names you don't know. One example was the metal or plastic tips that keep your shoelaces from fraying.

“They're aglets,” said our resident cross-word puzzle expert.

A quick check with the dictionary verified that.

Someone else asked if anyone knew the name of the ridge that runs part way down the blade of a shovel.

I was stumped, but then so was our resident gardening expert.

The little game reminded me of what used to be my favorite obscure trivia question. Used to be. Today, thanks to the election brouhaha in Florida, most people are well aware that the little circles of paper you punch out of your ballot are called chads.

In Florida, as you may recall, there were dented chads, dangling chads, dimpled chads—even pregnant chads. Much time was spent examining seemingly unmarked ballots to see if anyone had an intent to vote. (If Florida had used a “None of the Above” option on the ballot, voters could have made it clear they were casting a protest vote against all the candidates. As it stands now, whether a voter means it

as a protest or not, an unmarked ballot looks like a mistake.)

And then there was Florida's “butterfly ballot,” which had an obvious design flaw that could mislead inattentive voters. The problem, of course, should have been detected and corrected before the election. Curiously, a similar butterfly ballot had hurt Bob Dole's chances in Florida during the previous presidential election. In advance of each election the ballot was available for review. But nobody—Democrat or Republican—bothered to check it out. At least nobody with any common sense.

As a result of the election debacle, a bi-partisan National Commission on Federal Election Reform issued a report this past summer that contained some useful ideas (and some not so useful ones). Though it insisted election reforms were necessary, it made them optional for the states.

That provision is inadequate, according to Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn, and Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., who co-authored the Equal Protection Voting Rights Act, which would require that all the states meet uniform federal standards for voting. It would make compliance mandatory and would allocate \$3.5 billion to help the states implement the measures.

According to Dodd, “The effective exercise of a citizen's fundamental right to vote should not

depend on whether that citizen's home state has decided to accept federal funds—any more than it should depend on that citizen's race, income, or physical abilities. Repeal of poll taxes and literacy tests was not made optional in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. We should not make nondiscriminatory voting places optional in 2001.”

To ensure everyone gets a chance to vote, the election-reform commission also recommended Congress create a national Election Day holiday. They overlooked the fact that it's up to the individual states to decide if they want to recognize a holiday. Congress isn't authorized to establish national holidays for anyone except federal employees and the District of Columbia.

More to the point, why bother with squeezing all voting into a single election day? Why not have election week? With a 7-day window of opportunity, almost everyone would have the chance to vote. It's not a revolutionary idea. In fact, we have a system for voting over an extended period already in place: the absentee ballot.

Among other reforms I'd like to see:

- No one can announce candidacy for any office until 6 months before the election.
- A ban on publishing opinion surveys on how electors intend to vote.
- No more government-funded primaries. (If the parties want to have them

continued on page 3



Committee

Continued from page 1

tasks. In addition to the individual members, committees typically employ a number of additional staff who operate out of their own respective offices.

Before legislative issues ever get a chance to be discussed or debated within the House or Senate, they must pass muster within the committee from which they originated. Because the chair of each committee and a majority of its members come from the majority party, party partisanship has already influenced most proposals even before they get to a Congressional floor.

Several thousand measures are referred to committees during each Congress, and they select only a small percentage for consideration, meaning that the majority of submitted proposals are given little attention or ignored all together. Political lobbyists recognize the

considerable power that these committees have and as a result donate large sums of campaign money to the various chairmen, and other ranking and influential members of these committees.

Congressional committees occasionally conduct investigations, inquiries and the like, in order to gather information that might provide some basis for legislation. In 1985 the Senate Commerce, Technology, and Transportation Committee held a highly publicized hearing in an effort to institute a federal rating system for recorded music. A couple of years later, no less than five committees participated in the investigation of the debacle of the savings and loan industry.

More recently, the Enron Corporation bankruptcy sparked an investigation frenzy that set an all time record in Washington.

A combination of eleven Congressional and Senate committees and subcommittees got involved in the ensuing investigation. This might seem especially excessive when you consider that in spite of all the federal intervention and scrutiny, very little has come of it.

So remember, when you hear about the latest debate in Congress, know that there's been a flurry of activity that's preceded it, most of it having gone unreported in the press. It's likely you didn't hear about any executive agencies reports, or read about any information gathering hearings, nor did you come across any stories regarding reports submitted by witnesses from non-committee experts. That's all part of the standard political process, a process that every committee has to endure before a Congressional bill even sees the light of day. ■

and pay for them, fine, but why should independent voters finance them?)

• Keep the \$1,000 limit on political contributions, but ban all contributions—hard, soft, or intangible—from anyone or any organization outside a candidate’s district.

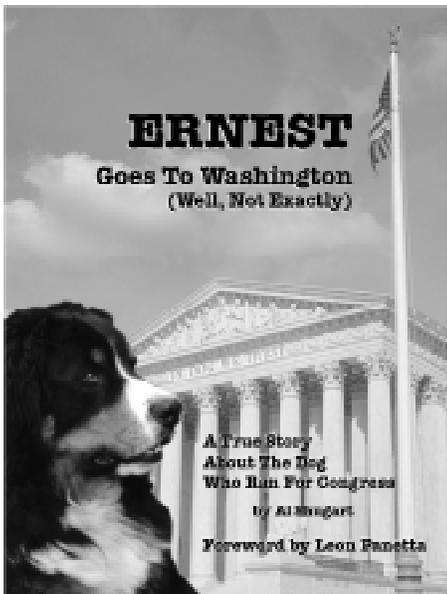
Sooner or later there will be Internet voting. Security is the problem now. But with new biometric ways of establishing identity—from fingerprints to iris-recognition to DNA checking—we’ll eventually solve that problem.

We could test it with Members of Congress. Currently when a vote is due on the floor of the House, they are summoned by a warning light in their offices. Eventually we could have them vote by computer from their homes. Besides keeping them in their own districts where they can meet with their constituents, such a system could significantly reduce the influence of lobbyists, big-money contributors, and even political parties.

Oh, by the way, we now know what the ridge in a shovel’s blade is called: it’s a frog.

And, if you’re interested, we also know what to call the best approach to election reform: it’s common sense. ■

Buy the book that started it all Ernest Goes to Washington (Well, Not Exactly)



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Book Review

The Federal Budget

Ponderous as Tolstoy, but much longer



More out of curiosity than a need for financial figures, FOE Chairman Al Shugart made a small purchase from the U.S. Government Printing Office. He ordered the entire set of publications that outline, enumerate, and describe the U.S. budget for the fiscal year 2002. Al received a stack of books about five inches tall and weighing about twenty pounds—six volumes at a cost of over \$300. It’s appropriately called *Budget of the United States Government*. Friends of Ernest has taken the time and effort to give you a brief outline of this enormous publication which, by the way, is over 2,500 pages long.

If one hopes to get through the entire six volume series, the place to start would be “A Citizen’s Guide to the Federal Budget.” More an introductory pamphlet than a book, this guide explains that the federal budget is “a plan for how the Government spends your money.” If you’re able to grasp this sophisticated concept, you might be ready for “The Budget System and Concepts.” This brief volume outlines the budget process including the legal guidelines that govern federal spending. In the back of the book is a glossary that defines many of the terms used in government spending.

Next we turn to the volume titled “Analytical Perspectives.” It’s about the size of a phone book, and contains economic analyses of how the government calculates and predicts federal income. Also included are many tables illustrating everything from loan transactions to the current budgets of all the government service agencies (Dept. of Agriculture, Dept. of Health, Dept. of Education, etc.). It also has detailed figures laying out the expenditures for Federal support of

the 2002 Winter Olympics—a figure that exceeded 360 million dollars.

“Historical Tables” isn’t quite as large as “Analytical perspectives.” It’s mostly pages filled with numbers that summarize the government’s income history. It also lays out a very general record of spending over the decades. “Historical Tables” contains a list of the numbers of government employees through the years. In 1962 there were a total of 11,903,000 government employees, or 6.4% of the entire U.S. population working in all branches of federal, state, and local government. In 2000 that figure was 21,885,000, or 8% of the entire U.S. population.

And now we get to the essential material of the whole series—a volume with the understated title, “Budget.” Self-explanatory as it is specific, this volume is over 240 pages of detailed figures that explain why our government costs so much money. In addition to the money the federal government spends directly, the budget also provides for incentive funding for things like health, education, and law enforcement which the federal government makes available to individual states.

The last volume is also the largest, at over 1,200 pages. Much more than an afterthought, the volume titled “Appendix” contains figures and calculations not covered in the previous volumes. It’s essentially a detailed explanation of exactly how the government estimates federal income and expenses.

If six volumes and 2,500 pages is any indication, calculating and preparing the U.S. budget is an incredibly complicated process, and frankly not a fun read. On the other hand, one thing worse than having to read it would have been writing it.

Government Bureaucracy Gives Mystery Meat an Entirely New Meaning

There’s a plan in the works to provide American school children a chance to enhance their lunchtime menu choices. The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture is developing the prune burger and wants to try it out on school kids. More nutritious perhaps? Less fat maybe? Incredibly, the health of America’s youth has nothing to do with the USDA’s meat-altering experiment.

Prune burgers have become the USDA’s answer to a glut of prunes that the department is paying growers to destroy. Rather than get rid of 20,000 acres of plum trees, the USDA came up with a recipe

made of ground beef and 4 percent prune puree. They’ve also developed a prune based pizza sauce that was unleashed on unsuspecting students in the Los Angeles Area.

In order to accurately evaluate school children’s response to the fruity concoctions, kids weren’t supposed to know what the food was until they ate it. John Lund, a USDA official who oversaw the taste test, said there’s no reason for schools to disclose that the burgers contain prunes, since there’s too little of the fruit to have the laxative effect for which prunes are known. ■



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920 41st Ave. • Santa Cruz • CA 95062

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