

David Fenton: Media Maestro of the Left

A New Left Alumnus Finds Success as a Scare Specialist

By John Gizzi

Summary: *Alar on apples? The war on SUVs? The efforts of MoveOn.org in the 2004 elections? These activist campaigns, and many others, have something in common: they were orchestrated by the Left's pre-eminent media maestro, David Fenton of Fenton Communications.*

In 1927, Bruce Barton wrote *The Man Nobody Knows*, a bestseller that characterized Jesus Christ as the world's greatest sales manager and the Twelve Apostles as his sales representatives. The book made Barton a much-sought-after guru on marketing and advertising, and helped him win a seat in Congress in 1935 as an anti-New Deal Republican representative from New York. Barton went on to establish the largest advertising agency in the nation, Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborne, which went into the history books as the first Madison Avenue firm to oversee a presidential campaign. BBD&O packaged Republican Dwight Eisenhower to the American people in 1952, promoting him in path-breaking TV campaign commercials.

If there is an heir to Bruce Barton today, it is David Fenton, founder of the Fenton Communications public relations firm. Brimming with clients ranging from corporations (Ben and Jerry's) and advocacy groups (Natural Resources Defense Council) to political interests (the new "527" committees funding the 2004 presidential campaign) and overseas icons (Nelson Mandela), Fenton's 40-person shop sports offices in New York, Washington and San Francisco. Now 22 years old, Fenton Communications is what *Fortune* magazine has dubbed "the country's leading social advocacy p. r. firm."



Fenton's Alar media scare: (standing, L-R) "Mothers and Others" co-founders Meryl Streep and Wendy Gordon Rockefeller pose with ABC reporter Nancy Gould Chuda, plus two Natural Resources Defense Council attorneys (seated).

It is ironic that where a right-wing Republican adman took public relations into presidential politics, a left-wing adman has successfully moved public relations into cause advocacy.

At 51, high school dropout Fenton is a product of the New Left. He got his start under the aegis of Youth International Party (Yippie) leader Abbie Hoffman, one of the "Chicago Seven" conspirators indicted for inciting riots at the 1968 Democratic national convention. Fenton learned the public relations trade at *Rolling Stone* magazine, helped produce the "No Nukes" concerts of the late 1970's that featured Bruce Springsteen and Bonnie Raitt, and eventually launched his own firm.

Since then, Fenton, according to the Center for Consumer Freedom, "masterminded the mad cow scare campaign, the organic marketing craze, the phony Alar-on-apples food scare, and more." His career has taken him from the pro-Marxist governments of Angola and Nicaragua during the 1980's,

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Organization Trends

through work for the environmentalist groups Natural Resources Defense Council and Greenpeace during the 1990's, and most recently, into the big money world of political activism, where he represented the George Soros-funded "527" group MoveOn.org.

David Fenton's career and clients are emblematic of the preoccupations of the contemporary far left. The only thing that differentiates the public relations tycoon of today from the Bohemian leftist of his *Rolling Stone* days is his attitude toward profit. Fenton freely admits he likes to make money—specifically, to “make money by doing good things.”

Leaving aside whether his causes are truly “good things,” there remains the question of this high-powered flack's tactics. What are his methods of public persuasion? Do they rely—as the Center for Consumer Freedom claims—on the “hook, lie, and sinker?”

Not a Marxist, But . . .

“I'm not a Marxist,” Fenton told the *Weekly Standard* in 1996. “I'm a Democrat!”

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Address:

1513 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1480

Phone: (202) 483-6900

Long-Distance: (800) 459-3950

E-mail Address:

rbidinotto@capitalresearch.org

Web Site:

<http://www.capitalresearch.org>

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It is safe to say, however, that as a young man, Fenton cut his political eyeteeth in a Marxist organization.

Fenton worked as a photographer in the 1960's for the Liberation News Service (LNS), a news provider for radicalized college and “underground” newspapers opposed to the war in Vietnam. According to David Armstrong's *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America*, “The propagandistic nature of LNS was embedded in its coverage. Like any of the underground media, LNS often romanticized foreign revolutionaries, making them into larger than life superheroes with qualities that American radicals hoped they, themselves, would have someday.”

As he built his corporate empire in the early 1980's, Fenton benefited from his leftist reputation and enjoyed the patronage of Marxist foreign governments and radical conspiracy-minded groups. In 1983-84, Fenton Communications registered with the U. S. Justice Department as an agent for the Marxist regime of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, the Marxist regime of the Prime Minister Maurice Bishop of Grenada and the anti-American governments of Andreas Papandreou of Greece and Michael Manley of Jamaica.

In 1984 Fenton helped publicize the claims of Robert White, who had been Jimmy Carter's ambassador to El Salvador. White alleged that a Salvadoran political leader, Roberto D'Aubuisson, was the mastermind behind the 1980 murder of El Salvador's Catholic archbishop, Oscar Romero, and that the Reagan Administration was suppressing information on the murder.

To publicize his charges White organized a private “Commission on United States-Central American Relations” whose members included Cynthia Aronson of the far-left Institute for Policy Studies; Janet Shenk, vice president of the North American Congress on Latin America (an offshoot of the revolutionary Students for a Democratic Society); Adam Hochschild of *Mother Jones* magazine; veteran radical journalist I. F. Stone; and left-wing Hollywood activist Ed Asner, then president of

the Screen Actors Guild. Fenton Communications handled the group's publicity arrangements.

The firm's most bizarre client in its early years was the Christic Institute. Named for an idea propounded by Catholic philosopher Teilhard de Chardin that a Christic force unifies all beings, the Institute was a self-described “interfaith public interest law and policy center.” In fact, it was a radical conspiracy-monger.

Led by a former ACLU attorney, Danny Sheehan, the Christic Institute had launched the celebrated Karen Silkwood case—a multi-million dollar lawsuit against Kerr-McGee Corporation, alleging that union organizer Silkwood, a former employee, was murdered in 1974 because she discovered a conspiracy to smuggle nuclear weapons out of the U. S.

In 1986, the Christics filed another sensational lawsuit charging that a ring of Nicaraguan anti-Communist rebels and ex-CIA officials—including “Contra” leader Adolfo Calero and retired Gen. John Singlaub, head of the World Anti-Communist League and a leading Contra supporter—were involved in drug trafficking, gun running and conspiracy to kill a rival Contra leader, Eden Pastora. The Christic's press conference announcing the suit, which was widely covered by the national press, was arranged by Fenton Communications. David Fenton, according to *The Nation* magazine, was the Christic Institute's “public relations consultant.”

Gen. Singlaub spent more than a quarter of a million dollars defending himself, as he would later put it, “against something that didn't happen.” When the Christics were unable to produce witnesses to the charges of murder and drug dealing, a judge ordered them to pay Singlaub, Calero and the other defendants \$1.2 million in legal costs—effectively closing down the Christic Institute.

With the collapse of Communism, Fenton Communications began to cultivate and service accounts closer to home. “The Sandinistas aren't around to pay expensive bills anymore, so they [Fenton Communications] had to move domestic,”

observed Amy Ridenour, president of the National Center for Public Policy Research and a seasoned Fenton-watcher. "Once the Cold War ended, most of the hard-left people moved on to some other cause and for a while, the environment was where most of them hung their hats."

That was where David Fenton hung his. The Fenton website sports a *Who's Who* of the "hard green" activist groups: the Center for Food Safety, Greenpeace, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Organic Consumers Association, Seaweb. All, observed the Center for Consumer Freedom, "are happy to pony up big bucks to give their lunatic messages the Fenton touch."

Fenton and the Great Apple Scare

Even more than his association with the Christic Institute, Fenton's retention by radical environmental groups has prompted media scrutiny of his tactics. And no incident provoked greater scrutiny than his pivotal role in fomenting the Great Apple Scare.

In 1989, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) completed a study on Alar, a chemical growth regulator used by farmers on apples. The study claimed that Alar caused cancer, particularly in children. NRDC was a Fenton client, and he saw a huge p. r. bonanza. Months before the public release of NRDC's report, Fenton orchestrated a publicity campaign to play up Alar's "cancer threat to children." He lined up cover features in major magazines and newspapers and booked interviews with NRDC representatives on popular TV programs. Fenton also helped organize an NRDC front group—Mothers and Others—with actress Meryl Streep as its chairman.

Fenton coordinated these activities and timed them to coincide with the release of the NRDC report, titled *Intolerable Risk*. The report was not published in a scientific journal. As Bonner Cohen later reported in *Business News* (September 20, 2000), it "had not undergone independent peer review and was not based on human exposure to Alar." Rather, Fenton enlisted gullible reporters at CBS's "Sixty Min-

utes" to release NRDC's hysterical "findings" directly to the public.

Alar, declared "Sixty Minutes" host Ed Bradley, was "the most potent cancer-causing agent in the food supply today." This ominous news was echoed the next day at other Fenton-orchestrated publicity stunts—including Meryl Streep's appearance on "Donahue," countless front-page news stories and cover features in major women's magazines. Predictably—and intentionally—Fenton set off a nationwide panic. Terrified mothers chased down school buses to remove apples from their kids' lunches and poured apple juice down the drain. Grocers removed apples and juice from their shelves. One panicked mom even called a poison control center asking if she should bring her apple juice in for disposal as a toxic waste.

There was only one small problem with Fenton's portrayal of Alar as a killer ingredient: it was a lie.

and the U.S. Department of Agriculture believe there is not an imminent hazard posed to children in the consumption of apples at this time." The Environmental Protection Agency pointed out that someone would have to eat 50,000 pounds of Alar-treated apples a day for life to have an increased risk of cancer.

It was too late. The messenger already had an impact. Fenton's scare tactics cost Alar's manufacturer, Uniroyal, millions of dollars and forced it to pull Alar from the marketplace. It caused apple growers to lose over \$100 million; some were forced out of business.

But NRDC and David Fenton prospered. Timed with the "60 Minutes" episode, NRDC issued a paperback book on pesticides, priced at \$6.95 per copy, and set up a 900 phone number, priced at \$3.00 **per call to handle book orders.** (*USA Today* dutifully published the 900 number on its front page.) NRDC also aired com-

About his Alar scare campaign, Fenton boasted, "A modest investment repaid itself many-fold in tremendous media exposure and substantial, immediate revenue."

Reader's Digest assigned investigative journalist Robert Bidinotto (now editor of Capital Research Center's *Organization Trends*) to look into the scare. In his October 1990 report, "The Great Apple Scare," Bidinotto revealed the shoddy "science" underlying NRDC's "study." It turns out that NRDC had based its cancer-risk calculations for Alar on laboratory experiments on rodents—experiments that a Scientific Advisory Panel for the Environmental Protection Agency had rejected as so flawed as to be worthless. Even a co-author of the NRDC report, Lawrie Mott, admitted to a reporter that "the studies have major problems and are not adequate for quantitative risk assessment." Despite her admission, Mott and NRDC continued to cite worthless "statistics" that claimed Alar would cause cancer in up to 5,952 children.

To calm the public panic, the Food and Drug Administration issued a statement on March 16, 1989: "The FDA, EPA,

mercials featuring Streep on national TV. Her appearance on "Donahue" promoting the book sparked the sale of over 90,000 copies. Bidinotto reported that an NRDC official "proudly told me that during the scare, NRDC phones were ringing off the hook with new members and contributors."

Fenton boasted about his handiwork to the *Washington Times* (September 13, 1998). "A modest investment repaid itself many-fold in tremendous media exposure and substantial, immediate revenue... Lines started forming in health food stores. The sales of organic produce soared. All of which we were very happy about." He told other reporters: "Usually it takes a significant natural disaster to create this much-sustained news attention for an environmental problem. We believe this experience proves there are other ways to raise public awareness for the purpose of Congress and policymakers."

The “other ways” included shameless fearmongering. David Fenton had indeed put his client on the map. His work for NDRC led him to orchestrate similar campaigns for other environmental groups. It also put him in contact with two high-dollar angels who were destined to become major players in American politics: George Soros and the Tides Foundation.

news over their handling of the issue) and Dr. Samuel Epstein, whom the American Association for Cancer Research once rated as “the least credible scientist on issues of environmental cancer.”

The “Fenton touch” did not work this time. The American Dietetic Association concluded, “The evidence is clear that

As with Alar and BST, Fenton’s swordfish campaign relied on gross misrepresentations of fact. According to Rebecca Lent, director of the Highly Migratory Species Division of the federal government’s National Marine Fisheries Service, which regulates commercial fishing: “Swordfish are not considered endangered...I think [the “Give Swordfish a Break” campaign] will end up having a detrimental effect on our fishermen. . .I know a lot of [U.S. fishermen] who have lost their jobs already.”

In July 2000 Fenton Communications wrapped its tentacles around food giants Campbell Soup and Kellogg’s. This time Fenton used the Center for Food Safety to go after genetically improved foods produced by the two companies. At twenty-two Fenton-orchestrated press conferences held nationwide, Campbell and Kellogg’s were urged to stop producing all foods containing genetically improved ingredients. The news conferences featured Peter Hoffman, incoming chairman of Chefs Collaborative, who spoke about the benefits of organic foods and “sustainable cuisine.” Funding for the effort came from the organic food industry.

Last year Fenton fired his latest environmental broadsides against a new target: sport utility vehicles. One campaign attacked automakers on religious grounds. Fenton-produced ads for a group called the Evangelical Environmental Network challenged automakers with the question, “What would Jesus drive?”—insinuating that driving SUVs was unChristian. A second Fenton campaign helped syndicated columnist Arianna Huffington spread her claim that SUV drivers support terrorism by consuming oil from the Middle East. Huffington and Network director Rev. Jim Ball say it’s a coincidence that they both used Fenton.

“These aren’t little campaigns that are springing up as people come to the same conclusions,” said Jason Vines, former vice president for public relations at Ford Motor. “It’s orchestrated.” Vines, a spokesman for the pro-SUV forces, denounced Fenton for “a track record of creating a crisis out of thin air.”

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A spokesman for the pro-SUV forces denounced Fenton for “a track record of creating a crisis out of thin air.”

Scaremongering, A to B (Alar to Bovine)

Throughout the 1990’s, Fenton and his environmentalist clients adapted their scare tactics to food-related campaigns. He would later maintain to *Fortune* magazine that “We take on only things that are true and that we believe in, and we won’t spin or distort or put out misinformation under any circumstances, even if we believe in the causes for which we would be asked to do that.” [Italics added].

Having demonized apples, he turned his attention to milk. Fenton’s clients included ice cream titan Ben and Jerry’s, several organic and natural products companies, Greenpeace, the Consumers Union and the San Francisco-based Center for Food Safety. Fenton coordinated their attack on the use of the bovine growth hormone in cattle. The hormone had increased milk production in cows by ten to 25 percent since it was developed in the 1980’s. But Fenton and company charged that it rendered milk harmful and even cancerous. They claimed the cows themselves were harmed.

Citing their own studies, the groups claimed bovine growth hormone was dangerous and demanded its removal from the marketplace. They organized a Genetically Engineered Food Alert Coalition (with funding from the organic industry) and promoted as “experts” ecologist Michael Hansen, journalists-turned-activists Steve Wilson and Jane Akre (fired by Fox TV

BST (bovine somatotropin) does not change the composition of milk, and consumers should have complete confidence in the milk supply.” Echoed the American Medical Association: “BST is a protein hormone that is produced naturally by cows to help them make milk. Supplementing cows with small amounts of BST has been shown to increase their milk production by 10-40% per cow without harming the animal or altering the nutritional value of their milk.”

The next Fenton production was the “Give Swordfish a Break” crusade. In 1999 more than 270 restaurant chefs and owners signed up for a campaign to limit swordfish consumption by removing it from their menus. The campaign alleged that the swordfish population was in temporary decline. Campaign supporters maintained that swordfish could be served when the population recovered.

It was a phony claim. The umbrella group for crusade, called SeaWeb, made little secret of its desire to save many ocean species from the fisherman’s net. As a 1999 study by the Center for Consumer Freedom pointed out: “The ‘Swordfish’ activists’ list of over-fished seafood includes: Cod, scallops, sole, sea bass, sturgeon, redfish, red snapper, and monkfish. They also recommend addressing ‘the problems caused by shrimp production’ with labeling, boycotts, and an ‘eco-tax’ to recoup environment costs associated with shrimp farming.”

PAST AND CURRENT CLIENTS OF FENTON COMMUNICATIONS

Environment

Alaska Wilderness League
 Alliance to Save Energy
 California Public Interest Research Group
 Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies
 Center for Genetics & Society
 Center for Marine Conservation
 City Parks Forum
 Earth Institute
 Energy Foundation
 Environmental Law Foundation
 Environmental Law Institute
 Environmental Media Services
 Environmental Working Group
 Forest Ethics (formerly Coastal Rainforest Coalition)
 Greenpeace
 National Environmental Trust
 National Religious Partnership for the Environment
 Natural Resources Defense Council
 Nature Conservancy
 Ocean Law Project
 President's Council on Sustainable Development
 Rails to Trails
 Rainforest Action Network
 SeaWeb
 Sierra Club
 Surface Transportation Policy Project
 Trust for Public Land
 World Wildlife Fund

Health

America's Health Together
 American Medical Association
 American Speech-Language Hearing Association
 California Medical Association Foundation/ Pharmacy Partnership
 Center for Science in the Public Interest
 Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
 Harvard School of Public Health
 Health Consumer Alliance
 Healthcare Without Harm
 Mount Sinai Center for Children and Environmental Health
 National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences
 National Library of Medicine
 San Francisco AIDS Foundation
 Trauma Foundation
 White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine
 White House World AIDS Day Summit

Social & Economic Justice

American Academy of Arts and Sciences
 American Friends Service Committee
 Amnesty International
 Asia Society
 Burma Project of the Open Society Institute
 Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities
 Businesses for Social Responsibility
 Council on Economic Priorities
 California Council for the Humanities
 Center for Democracy and Technology
 Congress for New Urbanism
 Death Penalty Information Center
 Global Exchange
 Global Security Institute
 HOPE for African Children Initiative
 Intl. Campaign for Tibet & the Dalai Lama
 International Forum on Globalization
 Institute for Policy Studies
 John F. Kennedy School of Government
 Justice Policy Institute and Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice
 Justice Project
 Make A Difference Day
 MoveOn.org
 NAACP Voter Fund
 National League of Cities
 National Low Income Housing Campaign
 National Urban League
 National Voting Rights Institute
 Nelson Mandela - Presidential Election
 New Economy Communications
 N. Calif. Coalition for Immigrants Rights
 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
 People For the American Way
 Public Citizen
 Redefining Progress
 Rock the Vote
 School of the Americas Watch
 Service Employees International Union
 TransAfrica
 UNITE (The Apparel Workers Union)
 United Nations Development Program

Foundations

Arsalyn Foundation
 Benton Foundation
 Columbia Foundation
 David and Lucille Packard Foundation
 Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
 Environmental Law Foundation
 Ford Foundation
 Heinz Family Foundation
 Horizons Foundation
 John A. Hartford Foundation

John D./Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
 John Merck Fund
 Joyce Foundation
 Open Society Institute
 Polly Klaas Foundation
 Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund
 The California Endowment
 Tides Foundation
 Turner Foundation
 Women's Funding Network

Law Firms and Legal Organizations

Bushnell, Caplan & Fielding, LLP
 Legal Community Against Violence
 Lief, Cabraser, Heimann & Bernstein, LLP
 Lerach, Coughlin, Stoia, Geller, Rudman, Robbins LLP
 O'Quinn & Laminack
 Prison Law Office
 Waukeen Q. McCoy
 Wilner, Klein & Siegel
 Youth Law Center

"Socially Responsible" Businesses

Align Technology
 Ben and Jerry's
 Body Shop
 Green Mountain Coffee
 Honest Tea
 Kashi Cereal
 Rodale Press
 Seventh Generation
 Solar Energy Industries Association
 Washington Freedom Soccer Team
 Working Assets Long Distance

Products, Publications & Television

A Force More Powerful (PBS)
 A Woman's Place (PBS)
 Air America Radio
 An American Love Story (PBS)
 Bantam Books
 Bellevue (HBO)
 Broadway Books
 Dirty Pictures (Showtime)
 Doubleday Books
 In These Times
 Island Press
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 Livelyhood (PBS)
 Regret to Inform (PBS)
 Simon & Schuster
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Source: Fenton Communications website

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Fenton and the 527s

Fighting apple and swordfish producers might be considered a bit of a step down from promoting Marxist foreign governments. Perhaps that's why Fenton has turned his talents to elective politics and its most recent by-product: the so-called "527s."

These political organizations are named for a section of the U. S. tax code that permits them to receive unlimited amounts of individual, corporate and union "soft money." The McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law bans soft money fundraising for political parties, but that hasn't stopped the supposedly independent 527s. Sen. John McCain charges that 527s violate the law's spirit, but the Federal Election Commission has made clear that it wouldn't touch the issue until after the 2004 election.

Accordingly, "soft money" flowed into Election 2004 at record levels. America Coming Together, Harold Ickes Jr.'s Media Fund and the MoveOn.Org—the so-called "Big Three" of liberal 527s—spent more than \$100 million in total in a failed voter turnout effort to unseat George W. Bush.

served as a judge for the group's recent 'Bush in 30 Seconds' ad contest and contributed an essay to MoveOn.org's new book, *50 Ways to Love Your Country* (by becoming a left-wing activist).

"Most telling is Fenton's use of personal pronouns in the essay to describe the group's activities. 'Without the contributions of MoveOn members, *we* wouldn't be able to buy *our* own 30-second ads to unmask Orwellian deception propagated by our nation's leadership,' Fenton wrote." (Emphasis added).

Billed as an Internet-based grass-roots group boasting a membership of 1.7 million, MoveOn.org nonetheless has relied heavily on major donors. Billionaire George Soros and Progressive Insurance Company founder Peter Lewis each pledged \$2.5 million to fund the MoveOn.org Voter Education Fund, the 527 that paid for the Bush-bashing commercials and oversaw the get-out-the-vote effort. Soros also contributed \$7.5 million to support America Coming Together, a 527 organized by a coalition of liberal special interest groups.

About Fenton's tactics, a Hudson Institute report concluded, "The scares just don't ever stop. But they all have one thing in common—a lack of evidence and abundance of deceit. The claims involved in the scares have all been refuted in public. By the time the scares have been debunked, however, the campaigns have taken such a strong hold that the truth usually is irrelevant."

(Continued from page 4)

The premier public relations man for environmental causes is unrepentant. Responding to Vines, Fenton says, "Our clients are the ones who should speak about the campaigns. We're not the story."

Alar and bovine hormones. Swordfish and SUVs. David Fenton and his clients are in search of new targets. In each case, they come up with a similar offensive strategy: Gin up dubious research and make hair-raising claims to frighten consumers and hurt businesses.

David Fenton played a big role in these efforts. As veteran investigative reporter John Berlau wrote in *Insight* magazine:

"... Fenton Communications has been listed as MoveOn.org's public relations firm on press releases for the group and its affiliates since 2001. Indeed, MoveOn.org's Washington mailing address is on the same floor of the same building as that of the Washington office of Fenton Communications, and to reach a MoveOn.org employee in Washington, it's necessary to call the Fenton phone number. Fenton

Fenton won't say precisely which commercials he wrote and produced for MoveOn. But journalistic sleuth Berlau connected the dots. Newspaper ads demanding that "Congress must censure the president" for allegedly misleading the American public about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction—run in newspapers and posted in Washington's tourist-attracting Union Station—were "co-signed with Win Without War, a coalition that, like MoveOn.org, shares Fenton's mailing address." Along with the Natural Resources Defense Council, another long-standing

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in your will and
estate planning.
And thank you for your
generous support.*

Fenton client, MoveOn.org co-signed an ad denouncing the Bush Administration's mercury regulatory policy.

In fact, Trevor Fitzgibbon, Fenton's director of media communications, helped develop the strategies used by MoveOn.org, the legally separate MoveOn.org Voter Fund and Win Without War. Fenton Communications' own publicity blurb boasted, "Fitzgibbon's messaging and PR efforts on behalf of MoveOn.org have helped position the online advocacy group as a national political force in America."

MoveOn.Org paid its media maestro well. According to the Center for Public Integrity, which monitors 527s, Fenton Communications has received from the MoveOn.org Voter Fund since December 2003 retainers totaling more than \$750,000.

Critics of the liberal 527s charge that they are not genuinely independent, but coordinated their campaigns with the national Democratic Party and the Kerry-for-President campaign. Whether David Fenton was in any way a conduit for this activity is unclear.

What is clear, however, is that Fenton now has a prominent seat at the table whenever the Democratic Party's premier financial backers gather. For instance, trial lawyers are increasingly large donors to the Democratic National Committee (see Robert Bidinotto, "Kerry, Edwards and 'the Lawsuit Lobby,'" *Organization Trends*, October 2004). It's unsurprising therefore that Fenton clients include the Association of Trial Lawyers of America as well as such law firms Milberg, Weiss, Bershad, Hynes and Lerach, which have backed Democratic candidates.

Fenton clients also have included the Heinz Family Foundation (controlled by Teresa Heinz Kerry) and the Open Society Institute (a creation of George Soros)—both of which have been generous backers of other David Fenton environmental clients—and the Turner Foundation, created by CNN founder Ted Turner (see Sally Torbert, "Ted Turner: Down, But Not Out," *Foundation Watch*, November 2004).

"Truth Usually Is Irrelevant"

Public relations in the nation's capital has a checkered history.

In the 1960's Charles Patrick Clark was a swashbuckling lobbyist for Franco's Spain. His notorious client raised a few eyebrows, but did not stop the flow of dinner party invitations or attractive escorts to grace Clark's arm. Similarly, no one held much against former Rep. Michael Barnes (D., Md.) for being the Washington representative for Jean Bertrand Aristide when the Haitian president was driven into U.S. exile.

Some may disapprove of David Fenton's clientele, but these groups have just as much right as anyone to retain a public relations firm. When Fenton and his company make contact with editors, arrange profiles in major publications or on television and prepare clients to meet the press, they are providing a valuable service.

However, that record of service has also earned Fenton Communications a well-deserved reputation for what more than one critic has labeled "fearmongering."

"Who are the fearmongers?" asked the Lexington Institute's Bonner Cohen. "They are self-proclaimed 'public interest' organizations that team up with public relations specialists to manipulate a gullible populace into doing their bidding."

The Fear Profiteers, a study by the Hudson Institute's Center for Global Food Issues, reached this conclusion about Fenton's tactics:

"The scares just don't ever stop. But they all have one thing in common—a lack of evidence and abundance of deceit. The claims involved in the scares have all been refuted in public. By the time the scares have been debunked, however, the campaigns have taken such a strong hold that the truth usually is irrelevant."

Put it another way: Clients on the left have every right to choose David Fenton as their public relations agent. The real issue is whether he uses honest tactics. **OT**

John Gizzi is the political editor for Human Events, a weekly Washington news journal.

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BrieflyNoted

The results of the 2004 national election defied the expectations of many pollsters and pundits, and dashed the hopes of many liberal organizations that had worked to depose the Bush Administration. In an e-mail message to supporters co-signed by his staff, **Eli Pariser**, executive director of the **MoveOn.org Political Action Committee**, expressed “heartbreak” over **President George W. Bush’s** re-election, calling it “a dark day” in America. “Obviously, I am distressed at the outcome of the election,” added billionaire liberal financier **George Soros** on his website. Soros had spent over \$25 million of his own fortune in the failed attempt to unseat the President. Especially depressed were the many John Kerry backers among the “Hollywood Left” (see CRC’s *Foundation Watch*, September 2004). “There’s a lot of disappointment out here. A lot of apprehension,” said **Robert Dowling**, editor in chief of the *Hollywood Reporter*. “People are comatose.” In fact, vitriolic celebrity hostility to the President apparently backfired against Kerry. A Reuters story reported that “polarizing figures such as **Michael Moore**—whose ‘Fahrenheit 9/11’ documentary bitterly attacked President Bush—alienated Middle America as much as they galvanized the faithful.”

Other big losers in the elections were organized environmentalists. In election post-mortem commentaries for **Grist**, an online environmentalist magazine, leaders of green groups such as **Carl Pope** of the **Sierra Club** and **Deb Callahan** of the **League of Conservation Voters** tried to put a brave face on the outcome, focusing on how many new activists they had mobilized during the campaign. Others were less Pollyanna-ish. Well-known environmentalist author **Bill McKibben** stated bluntly, “There is nothing but discouragement in these election results.” On November 15 former **Sierra Club** president **Adam Werbach** led demonstrators to **Democratic National Committee** headquarters in Washington, DC, where they posted a list of 19 “November 3rd Theses on the Failure of the Democrats” on the office doors. The gist of their complaints: “Only the breath of a serious and new moral-intellectual vision (*sic*) will be sufficient to resuscitate the Democratic Party.”

Also in the aftermath of the election, attorneys for the **National Right to Work Foundation (NRWF)** asked the **Federal Election Commission** to obtain a federal court injunction to halt what the group called rampant document destruction by the staff of the Soros-funded “527” group **America Coming Together (ACT)**. The NRWF complaint alleged that **Service Employees International Union** officials gave tens of millions of dollars of workers’ compulsory union dues to ACT, and that some of these funds were spent illegally on political campaigns via the **Democratic National Committee**. Police officer **Jeffery A. Williams**, president of **Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 25** in Orlando, Fla., supplied NRWF with photos and a sworn statement concerning the alleged document destruction.

According to the **Center for Public Integrity**, “527” groups backing President Bush bought nearly \$30 million worth of media ads during the closing three weeks of the campaign—three times what Democratic 527s spent. This reversed the ratio during the spring and summer, when liberal 527s such as the **Media Fund**, **MoveOn.org** and organized labor spent over \$60 million at a time when no pro-Bush 527s were on the air. In addition, two anti-Kerry 527 groups, the **Swift Boat Veterans for Truth** and **Progress for America**, ran ads that made the strongest impressions on voters in battleground states, according to polls. The Swift Boat group spent less than either of the top two liberal 527s, but its ads attacking Kerry’s record in Vietnam had the most viewer impact. The next most persuasive ad was a Progress for America pro-Bush commercial showing the President comforting a 16-year-old girl, Ashley, whose mother was killed during the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Another commercial ranked as memorable by voters was “Wolves,” produced by the Bush campaign. It depicted a wolf pack to convey the threat of terrorism. In all, 527 groups involved in the presidential race raised at least \$175 million, the Center for Public Integrity reported.

