

WHY I AM NOT PRESIDENT

SPARROW



JENNIFER ESPERANZA

Sparrow has run for president of the United States four times. This is the third of his campaigns to be documented in The Sun. His 1992 run resulted in "My Campaign Diary" [September 1992], and his 1996 foray was chronicled in "Why Didn't You Vote for Me?" [May 1997] and in his book Republican like Me (Soft Skull Press). Below is the record of Sparrow's 2004 effort. In keeping with modern life, he campaigned almost entirely by e-mail (although he did make a rare live political speech at The Sun's thirtieth-anniversary gathering in Chapel Hill, North Carolina).

Sparrow's take on Republicanism is inspired by a book he read as a youth, titled Abraham Lincoln: Selections from His Writings and published by the Communist Party. In the book, Sparrow says, the famous Republican president "sounds like an Illinois version of Karl Marx."

— Ed.

On January 19, 2004, the day of the Iowa caucus, I decided to run for president. *Perhaps, in my tiny way,* I reasoned, *I can prevent America from becoming a Jesus-flavored neofascist empire.* So I announced to the world (or, at least, to the portion of it that is on my e-mail address list) my candidacy for the Republican nomination. My campaign had begun.

JANUARY 23, 2004

Dear Sister and Fellow Republicans,

We must free ourselves from chicken, Christianity, and commerce, by which I mean chicken dinners, the worship of Jesus Christ, and overlarge, unaesthetic corporations.

As for poultry, I pledge: No animals will be hurt in the making of my presidency.

And as for the supposed "Christianity" that now rules the Republican Party: why this strange obsession with homosexuality and prayer? I am the first presidential candidate to clearly state that homosexuality and prayer are not opposites. In fact, they are identical: every gay act is an act of prayer, and every prayer is gay.

"It's gay to pray!" will be the first — and most important — of my campaign slogans.

Note: Under no circumstances should anyone vote for me in the national election (unless you would vote for Bush otherwise)! If a Democrat were to vote for me, it would be a charmless and fatalistic act.

FEBRUARY 17

We Republicans must preserve our proud symbol: the elephant. This majestic, sage creature has been ignored — except by political cartoonists — for decades. Let us return this cautious yet massive animal to our political campaigns! I propose we hold the 2004 Republican National Convention in India, where actual elephants may surround our podium and trumpet dur-

ing poignant moments.

We must also strive to free our party from capitalysticism — the monstrous offspring of capitalism and mysticism. Clearly God is not a capitalist. God has never set up a corporation, and he has no interest in making a profit. In fact, the Godhead loses money year after year.

MARCH 1

Have you noticed how presidential candidates always seem so certain of everything they say? Even Dennis Kucinich will boldly declare, "Solar power is a valid energy commodity." But how does he *know*? How do they all — especially George W. Bush — know?

The answer is that they don't. They are unknowing, like everyone else. They only appear wise due to fakery and theater.

I am the only candidate to proudly announce, "I don't know!" I speak for a new America, which embraces the politics of doubt. Let me express myself in a poem:

Hymn To Doubt

O Doubt,
begetter
of all
science,
Zen
Buddhism,
and the
poems
of Emily
Dickinson,

bless
my campaign,
and save
me from
the clutches
of fake
faith.

Inspire me
to offer
a newer
message
to America. . . .

[I cannot figure out how to end this poem, as I have begun to doubt the poem itself.]

Let us reconsider many of our national slogans. For example, "America: we're number 1" could be replaced with "America: perhaps we're number 37?" And let us change the motto on our dollar bills to "In doubt we trust."

MARCH 19

Since taking office in 2001, George W. Bush has been praying to God for guidance. Almost all this administration's policies have been dictated by the Almighty. And we have discovered this: that God has awful politics. He is to the right of Richard Nixon! All his policies have a primal and archaic brutality.

That's why a growing number of concerned citizens are saying: "Impeach God! Vote for Sparrow!"

APRIL 6

Our nation, unfortunately, is now ruled by tyrants and belligerent liars. It is time for us (or, at least, for me) to announce, in the spirit of Patrick Henry: "Give me liberty, or give me a good slap on the backside!"

(I wish I had Henry's eagerness to give his life for the cause of liberty, but I do not. I am, however, willing to risk a sound spanking.)

APRIL 7

Yesterday I noticed that the *New York Times* never mentioned that the Republicans were campaigning. The thought struck me: *Perhaps there is no Republican primary! Perhaps I am campaigning for an election that does not exist! What a wholesale embarrassment that would be!*

Then I read in today's *Times* that John McCain is campaigning for Bush in New Hampshire. Apparently there is a primary — just a very quiet one. This fits my campaign, which is extremely hushed.

APRIL 24

When I become president, I will immediately issue a decree abolishing capitalism. (Admittedly this decree will not be law, but it will carry the moral weight of the presidency.) And what will I replace capitalism with? I'm glad you asked. I will replace capitalism with the opposite of capitalism: leisureism. Under capitalism, people are paid for working. Under leisureism, idleness is rewarded: people receive paychecks for whitening, sitting on porches, and gossiping.

Don't worry: the work of the world will still be done. People just won't be *paid* for it — the way, under capitalism, we are not paid to read novels.

But we will be richer than ever, because we'll be getting lots of money for talking on the telephone!

MAY 3

In bringing up President George W. Bush's past addictions, I fear we contenders are catering to Puritan morals. I am the only presidential candidate to proudly say, "George, God bless you for snorting cocaine! I'm glad you spent three years drunk off your ass! What I dislike about you is that you're an autocrat who will dangerously extend the American empire

into oil-producing regions and put everyone under surveillance — all with my Social Security money. That's my only quarrel with you!"

MAY 11

I am willing to debate George W. Bush in the Republican primary. In fact, I'm more than willing — I am insistent on a debate! If Bush will not debate me, I will refuse to take out the garbage for two weeks! I won't eat my carrots!

Not only that, but I promise to debate him on more than just politics. I will debate him on hair grooming, Palatine history, and the photovoltaic resonance of mercury atoms.

Come on, W., let us go mouth to mouth and grapple with one another's syntax!

MAY 20

I am running for president, but I demand: Do not vote for me! Some observers find this strange.

Consider this, however: Many people go running every morning to improve their leg muscles and respiration. Similarly, I am running for president to strengthen my political muscles and inspiration.

If we do not exercise our rights, they grow flaccid. Our body politic is now covered with cellulite. Let us establish a series of political health clubs and struggle-spas, where we can work our ideological muscles!

JUNE 1

My fellow listeners (for, unlike some speakers, I listen to myself while I speak), let me ask, "What is spoiling American politics?" And let me answer myself: "The stump speech."

Candidates travel from town to town delivering the same speech over and over, four times a day. We demand that John Kerry discuss his heroic battles in Vietnam at every public appearance the same way we insist Celine Dion perform her well-known hits at every concert. Political advisors invariably tell candidates to "stay on message." Oy! If Charlie Parker had stayed "on message," bebop would never have been born!

I am the only candidate to go defiantly *way off message*. No other candidate will say (as I am about to):

"Let hot dogs consume themselves!"

In fact, I will say it again:

"Let hot dogs consume themselves!"

I am also the only presidential seeker who will shout to George W. Bush: "Hey, Anglo Muttonpuff! Vacate the White House right now and let me sleep in the Oval Bed, beneath the mirrored ceiling (a gift from Cyprus)!"

Other candidates claim to speak the truth. I go beyond the truth, to speak the unknown.

(end of excerpt)