

Gordon Lee Baum

'Five Rules for Effective Cultural Activism'

Rule #1:

"All politics are local. Most politicians are prostitutes. And we need some of those prostitutes working for us," laughs St. Louis attorney Gordon Lee Baum, when asked to describe his organizational philosophy for political activism.

The "us" he is referring to is the fifteen thousand member strong Council of Conservative Citizens, a nationwide network of cultural conservative politicians, academics, activists and ordinary citizens who say they are fed up with the mainstream political process and are ready to organize locally to fix the problem, nationwide.

Instead of dropping out of the system, advocating radical change, or forming yet another political party, CofCC has a different approach entirely. Their outreach is locally based, their agenda is states rights, and their success in building support for their issues is turning liberal heads across America.

The organization ignores non-issues like advocating campaign finance reform or demanding much change in the system at all, said Baum, a seasoned political activist who got his start in the George Wallace for President campaign of 1968. "Politics is the art of the possible...if you want to succeed you have to accept that, at least for right now, no one in power is going to allow you to change much of the two party system, regardless of how corrupt or meaningless it becomes."

Instead, the Council's strategy is to bring their issues and agenda home to kitchen tables and restaurant counters recruiting one activist, one supporter, and one candidate at a time. Applying this local outreach approach, CofCC is slowly filling school boards, county commissions, state houses and the US Congress with some very serious, very effective "State's Rights Conservatives."

The "prostitutes," or politicians,

who get the support of CofCC should not be all that difficult to identify. They openly advocate 10th Amendment enforcement, prayer in public schools, chain gangs in prisons, Confederate battle flags over state houses and barbed wire fences around America's borders.

The Council's website, <www.cofcc.org> describes the group as "a genuinely active national organization developing unity and building a network of groups and supporters at the grass-roots level to serve as a voice and active advocate for the no-longer silent conservative majority."

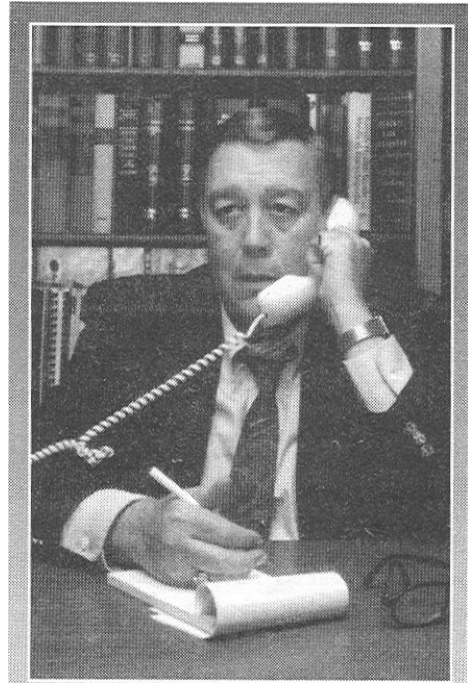
Baum, 58, serves as CEO for the 12 year-old organization. With some of the most experienced conservative activists, political leaders and intellectuals in the country on its national board of directors and advisors, "CofCC works," according to Baum, "because we focus our resources locally. Our chapters operate autonomously... we support and assist our local chapters and adopt their issues. We then bring in a national organization to help them frame the debate, build up support, handle the press and field friendly candidates."

Issues like immigration in the southwest, flying the Confederate flag in the south, and desegregation in the Midwest are all local issues the Council has successfully pushed onto the national political landscape.

The council is low-key by design. Because of an intentional focus on local based advocacy, their impact is often overlooked. With a relatively low profile on the national political scene, CofCC may be easy to miss but they are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

Rule #2:

"Let your local politicians know you can help them or hurt them," said Baum. "Our people don't just provide financial support, they are usually outgoing activists as well. They don't just get out the vote, they will also



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target officials and candidates for protest if they hurt the local cause. Our local chapters also support a number of national office holders. We reach out to those in elected office who have earned strong support from their CofCC local and state chapters, and we give them nationwide support."

That approach seems to work. The membership roster is private; however, Republican Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott is reportedly a CofCC member and supporter who also has a column published in the Council's newspaper, *The Citizens Informer*.

Kirk Fordice, the governor of Mississippi, openly credits CofCC for getting him elected. Fordice recently spoke at a Council gathering in Jackson, Mississippi. And America's outspoken "point-man" on the impeachment of Bill Clinton, Georgia congressman and conservative Republican Bob Barr spoke at their national conference this year.

The "helping" of officials and candidates is but one edge of the sword in the Council's scabbard, however. Candidates or officials who go against their local constituency of CofCC rank-and file members can feel the heat in the kitchen real fast, says Baum.

Just ask Betty Stoudemire Slusher, an active CofCC member in South Carolina. Slusher, 65, lost her husband to violence when two black

criminals if entered the family's gas station, robbed, shot and then brutally stabbed Ralph Stoudemire to death in 1977. The two were convicted and sentenced to die the same year, but a liberal federal judge overturned the conviction of both men in 1996, claiming that "improper jury instructions," resulted in an unfair verdict. Allegations of racism by the defendant's attorney further clouded the convictions.

The South Carolina chapter of CofCC began an aggressive telephone, fax, mail and media campaign to get the federal judge, C. Weston Houck, impeached. "We had protesters at the judges' home and in front of the federal courthouse for weeks," recalled Baum. CofCC also lobbied the state to appeal Houck's decision. And when they finally agreed to make the appeal, Betty brought two busloads of CofCC supporters up to the 4th Circuit Court in Richmond to "put the court on notice that there were real people involved with their decision to let two killers off on a technicality."

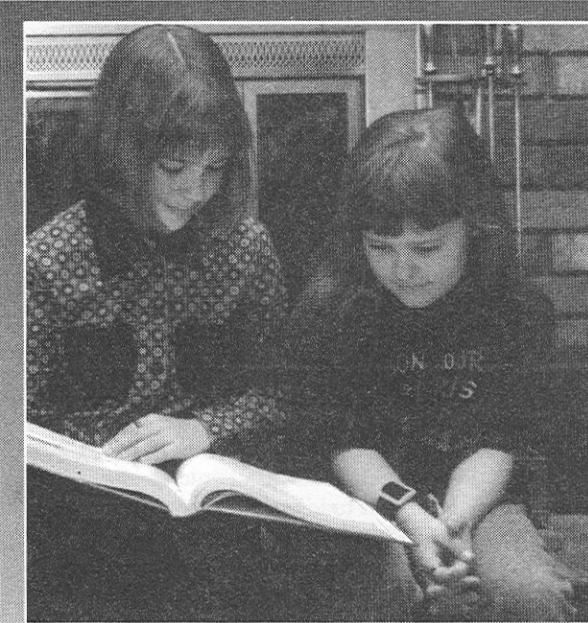
This time, CofCC's aggressive grassroots activism worked. The two convictions were upheld, and Betty Stoudemire Slusher quietly waited outside the Broad River prison complex on Friday, 4 December, 1998 as both men, Larry Gilbert and J.D. Gleason were executed, one at a time, by lethal injection.

The defendants were half brothers who had been on death row longer than any other murderers in the history of the state. "It was a long time coming," Betty said, as the hearses drove past, "Now our family can rest."

Since the CofCC has now decided to suspend protests outside his home and office, Judge C. Weston Houck can probably rest a little easier as well.

Rule #3

"Choose your issues carefully and don't pick a fight you can't win," advises Baum. "Being an effective activist organization requires cautious use of often very limited resources...In order to prevail against the status quo, an organization's leadership needs to abide by this simple philoso-



A father of five, Baum's two youngest daughters Laura (left), 11, and Renee Gabrielle (right), 8, are gifted students at a Lutheran school.

phy."

"If you stay focused on the issues that are the most important to your community, you can build a network of support for your cause." The right of a state to fly the Confederate flag is probably meaningless in Montana, but the federal land-grab issue will get them out to register voters and help candidates, says Baum. Illegal immigration does not have substantial impact in the Midwest, however, the failure of forced busing and court ordered desegregation is what really matters to parents in that area, he explains. "Even though these are mostly nationwide policy issues, immigration, for example, really hits home in southern California and Arizona," he said.

The strategy extends beyond just knowing what issue is important to your local community, however. Baum points out that certain issues that are heavily misrepresented in the media or easily manipulated by either side are usually not those the local chapters openly advocate as part of their agenda until they have an established track record for success in the community. "We are obviously not afraid of controversy, but you learn that you can't change anything if you try to change everything at

once.

There will be plenty of time for the local chapter to get certain issues out on the table once an aggressive political machine is up and running smoothly in the community. Be patient and focus on one issue at a time," he said.

Baum cites abortion as a problematic issue with excessive baggage for successful legislative reform in America today. "Let me give you an example," he said. "Activists in the state of Washington spent millions trying to put a ban on partial birth abortion this last election cycle. It failed. We focused our limited local resources on helping efforts to end institutional affirmative action and quotas in the state. Our ballot measure won...Even though most of our membership opposes abortion, we accept the reality that the political climate and the courts are not likely to stop this terrible activity any time soon."

Rule #4

"You need to control the controlled media and bypass them completely whenever you can," said Baum. "The liberal press slanders, misrepresents and marginalizes cultural conservatism...You need to be creative if you want your message out accurately and unfiltered."

First, activists need to establish their own newspapers, newsletters, talk radio shows and Internet web sites "so the public can learn about your organization from you, not from the leftist slant of the mainstream press," advises Baum. And don't expect someone else to get you publicity. Everyone in your organization has to be involved to some extent. It's hard work, but, if you are patient and realistic it will payoff."

Though a husband and father of five, active in his Lutheran church, and employed full time as a civil liability lawyer with a thriving practice in St. Louis, Baum helps to edit the CofCC's national newspaper and runs a three hour live weekly call in radio show on a popular talk station, AM 920-WGNU, in St. Louis every Friday night with Earl Holt, another senior CofCC member. "We reach several million people with this pro-

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gram," said Baum. "Again, this is applying the art of the possible. The station does not charge us to be on the air and we have quite a following in our local area each week."

"Should the mainstream press ever misrepresent your organization or agenda, it is also important to call them on it," said Baum. "You have to understand the way the media works. If they can't put a negative spin on a conservative message, they will at least try and take cheap shots at the messenger, or consult some so-called civil rights or non-profit group to slander you. Don't take the hit. Call them on it."

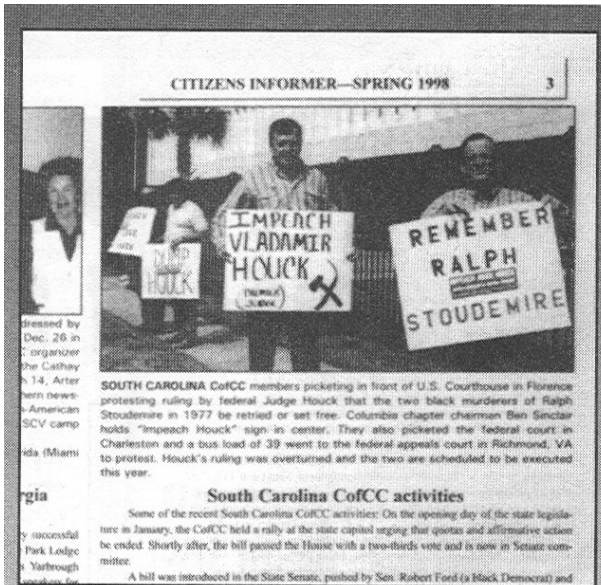
For example, in April of 1997, CofCC's Alabama chapter helped sponsor a rally in support of District Judge Roy Moore of Etowah. Moore was refusing to comply with a court order at that time to remove a wood carving depicting the 10 Commandments from the wall of his courtroom.

In a 15 April, 1997 editorial, *USA Today* put its own slant on the story calling the judges refusal "dangerous." Further, the paper called the rally in support of Moore "silliness." And, in reference to the 10 Commandments and the CofCC's presence, the paper said, "one of the groups leaping to "save" this great Jewish contribution to civilization is the notoriously anti-Semitic Council of Conservative Citizens."

"We have a number of conservative Jewish members," said Baum. "The CofCC contracted *USA Today* and got them to retract the statement and we also got the paper to print a 359 word editorial from us on the same editorial page where the original article appeared... our standing up to *USA Today* earned us several thousand membership inquiries and letters of support."

Local chapters also need to be encouraged to become experts on their issues and take on the national media, said Baum. One of CofCC's leaders from South Carolina, for example, has appeared on ABC News' *Nightline*, defending the right of the state to fly the Confederate Battle Flag.

"You have to remember that the



"Judge's worst nightmare." CofCC members protest outside a federal courthouse in South Carolina demanding the impeachment of a federal judge.

leftist press has to attack the messenger when they can't find fault with the message," said Baum. "Congressman [Bob] Barr is currently being attacked by the news media and this liberal attorney Alan Dershowitz because he is intent on impeaching Bill Clinton. Trying to associate Barr with us has back fired, however. He spoke at our national conference in June, but he is not a member. And, once again, the press trivializes itself when they try to attack the messenger instead of accurately reporting the news."

Rule # 5

"Get the best people you can to support you. Quality people attract quality members," advises Baum. "The single biggest reason why people won't become involved in an organization is they are afraid of the consequences. It has nothing to do with cowardice, they are afraid of their position in the community or their job or their reputation being jeopardized, because of their association or activism...If they see that important people are involved, speakers or writers or members who are risking more than the average person to take a controversial stand, then ordinary people are more apt to join in as well."

High quality, experienced people like columnist Sam Francis, author Jared Taylor and hundreds of lesser known but locally influential leaders in CofCC attract other strong leaders to join, said Baum. "And it is important that you show everyone in your organization how those quality people are shaking things up in their local area. The main editorial focus of our newspapers and newsletters, for example, is to explain how the individual state chapters are getting the job done in their communities. When they succeed, using a new approach to cultural activism, we let everyone else know about it. We make certain they get positive press from the national newspaper. CofCC encourages intelligent, aggressive activism and we publish dozens of pictures every month from and about our local chapters as they hold gatherings, protests and public debates."

Although the national media, as of late, has begun to take notice and regularly attacks the organization, Baum said, "We can handle the mainstream press, but it does take vigilance." He also pointed out that he is "only a small part of the picture" in the leadership that makes up CofCC. "The Council has a national board of directors of 29, and a board of advisors of 69. We meet with our rank and file and state leadership twice a year. We also respect our members' opinions. We poll them regularly to learn where they stand on issues and we keep our membership roles private."

All in all, a refreshing, innovative and highly effective approach to grass roots organizing can be accomplished by following Baum's "five rules for effective cultural activism" in America. You can learn even more through contact and membership with the CofCC, which has members in every state and 6 foreign countries. There are active chapters in 23 states. Tom Dover, an Atlanta businessman is their national president and William Lord, Jr., the Carroll County, Mississippi Coroner is their senior field coordinator. For more information about the Council of Conservative Citizens, write to them at P. O. Box 221683, St. Louis, MO 63122.

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