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Christine O'Donnell's Claremont Class: A Dentist, A Felon, A Libertarian Who Called Her 'Susie Homemaker'

Christina Bellantoni and Jon Terbush | October 14, 2010, 8:47AM [Recommend](#) 2

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Delaware GOP Senate Candidate Christine O'Donnell

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Christine O'Donnell (R-DE) believes her participation in an eight-day conservative think tank fellowship is the "number one" thing qualifying her for service in the U.S. Senate. O'Donnell says the "deep analysis of the constitution" taught at Claremont Institute's competitive Lincoln Fellowship program would help her make sound decisions in the Senate, but the teachings couldn't keep one of the other fellows from facing jail time.

Among the 10 fellows awarded the fellowship with O'Donnell in 2002 was Scott Bloch -- the "Geeks on Call" guy who headed the Office of Special Counsel under President George W. Bush who **pled guilty** this April to criminal contempt of Congress for withholding information from a House oversight committee.

Other fellows included the chief counsel for the Judiciary Republicans; former top Republican Congressional aide Paula Steiner; Melissa Seckora Anderson, a former National Review writer who worked with Rick Santorum; an OMB staffer; a Boeing lobbyist; a banking vice president; and Colorado dentist Matt Dunn.

TPM obtained a copy of the program's syllabus, which included discussion of Robert Bork's "Slouching towards Gomorrah," Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History" and Edward Eler's "The Affirmative Action Trainwreck."

O'Donnell told a group of Delaware voters last week that the fellowship has given her the insight to "be able to determine that our leaders in Washington have lost their way and no longer follow the constitutional principles otherwise we wouldn't have 'Obamacare' we wouldn't have these massive bailouts we wouldn't be taking over GM." She said it was the "number one" thing on her resume that makes her qualified to be elected over Chris Coons (D) next month.

The year was 2002, less than 12 months after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and before the start of the Iraq war. The fellows read plenty, though a count based on the syllabus suggests there were somewhere between 147 and 466 pages of material to read over the eight days the group gathered in Southern California.

While California state representative Chuck DeVore told TPM his 2004 fellowship gave him "a deeper understanding" of whether laws he is voting for on the floor of the assembly are "really appropriate" or constitutional, others questioned whether it was adequate training for the Senate.

One of the fellows remembers O'Donnell as being more interested in everyone's dating status than constitutional issues.

2002 fellow Timothy Sandefur, an attorney at the Pacific Legal Foundation and adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, agrees with DeVore that it was a "very serious program" but scoffed at O'Donnell's comments. "It was only a week. It certainly does not substitute for a profound knowledge of the law of the United States," he said.

Sandefur told TPM he and another fellow "spent the week making fun of Ms. O'Donnell."

"I don't remember her saying much in the sessions but during the social hour she quizzed us on our relationships," Sandefur said. "It was very domestic. Most of my time I was rolling my eyes at her."

"An atheist libertarian like myself had rather little in common with a conservative activist like her," he said,

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calling her "Miss Susie Homemaker Christian Conservative."

But 2002 fellow Michael Toth appreciated O'Donnell's domestic side. In fact, what he most remembered about her was a reunion dinner she threw for the fellows.

Toth brought his mom along to the dinner, and O'Donnell served pasta. "It was very good Italian cuisine," he said. "It was such a nice gesture, I thought, for Christine to open her home to us."

But he also recalls being "impressed" by her academic acumen.

"While we were Lincoln fellows, Christine always came to the sessions prepared. She was always able to articulate her positions clearly and confidently," Toth, serving abroad in the military, told TPM in an email interview.

During the fellowship, Toth was a press aide in President Bush's Office of Management and Budget.

The Lincoln Fellows in 2002 heard lectures on Leo Straus and from Thomas West and Harry Jaffa, who talked about his "New Birth of Freedom" and "The Speech that Changed The World."

The fellows reviewed *The Federalist*, Lincoln's 1865 inaugural address, speeches by Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" speech and took part in a unit called False Prophets of American Conservatism.

A unit called "Three Waves of Liberalism" lasted from 8:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. on day four.

As for Bloch, his tenure in the Bush administration was fraught with complaints of mismanagement and ethics violations from the outset. In 2005, officials were **investigating allegations** that Bloch -- whose duties include protecting whistle blowers -- intimidated and retaliated against employees who disagreed with him by transferring them out of state or forcing them to resign, and that he threw out hundreds of whistle-blower cases without investigating them to reduce backlog.

In October 2008 **Bloch announced he would resign the following January**. The White House **fired** him two days later. (He's awaiting sentencing.)

Sandefur told TPM that he found Bloch at the time to be a "crackpot scary lunatic oddball weirdo theocrat. Just the worst. Every time he opened his mouth he said something that was horrifying."

At one point some of the 2002 fellows used an email listserv set up to stay in touch to try to raise money for a Bloch defense fund, Sandefur said.

TPM has reported quite a bit about the program, which accepted O'Donnell in 2002 without getting an educational transcript beyond her resume. At the time, O'Donnell **had not received her bachelor's degree due to unpaid student loans**. She also **claimed on her resume** that she'd attended a program at University of Oxford after completing a program sponsored by the Phoenix Institute that rented space from Oxford. **Phoenix has said such a claim is "misleading."**

It's an 8-day program that receives hundreds of applications. Just a handful are chosen and they receive a stipend and free coursework.

Fellows were encouraged to come for breakfast socializing, but the official program kicked off every day with morning lecture and discussion.

The Nation recently took a look at some of the Claremont Institute's "homophobic" teachings, an interesting read but two fellows that we talked spoke with said social issues like gay rights were not discussed during the fellowship.

Read the syllabus [here](#). All of the Claremont fellows are listed [here](#).

[Ed note: this entry was edited after publication]

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