# For Money or Office: Bayh Prostitution in America

May 19, 2010 By Sean Strub

Indiana's legendary Bayh family has fallen far from the days when Birch Bayh, who served in the Senate from 1963 to 1981 and was one of the great pro-worker, progressive leaders in the nation, to the contemporary service of his son, Evan Bayh, who was elected to the US Senate in 1999 and chose this year not to run for reelection.

Bayh the younger puts a terrible stain on his family's proud record of service, demonstrating a craven ambition for office that has been greased by his support of corporate interests. Most recently he made an incredibly insulting AIDS joke at a political event that is indicative of how clueless he truly is.

Thirty five years ago, Evan Bayh's father, Senator Birch Bayh, was a pioneering national advocate for runaways, homeless youth engaged in survival sex, school violence and other issues that were relatively marginal at the time (in the early 1970s). He held hearings on federal juvenile delinquency programs and wrote extensively about "Safe Schools" and school violence. In 1976, he even wrote a preface for a then-NBC journalist's 1976 illuminating book: For Money Or Love: Boy Prostitution in America .

The senior Senator Bayh was the chief Senate sponsor of the 26th Amendment to the US Constitution, which gave voting rights to those 18 to 21. He was the chief sponsor of Equal Rights Amendment. A great advocate, a great leader, a great man.

But son Evan's decade in the Senate doesn't show either accomplishment or further promise and it is a relief he's leaving office. His wife is a high-powered corporate lobbyist; a newspaper in Indiana estimated the Senator has cast 3,000 votes on issues directly affecting his wife's clients.

Bayh the younger has made a political career by riding the populist wave of tax-cutting, budget-slashing with the insensitivity and fury that propels great dimwits and demagogues into public office. His career has been a prostitution of the political process.

The latest insight into Evan Bayh's priorities, personality and sense of humor came last Friday night at the Indiana Democratic Party's Jefferson-Jackson day fundraising dinner. The story was broken and well-covered by Bil Browning and is posted at The Bilerico Report.

The following is Bil's transcript of Bayh's "joke": "So I'm walking through the airport and people were kinda being nice and making eye contact and a couple come up and say hello. This one person runs up all excited and I'm prepared to say "Hello," and he says, "Senator Bayh! Senator Bayh!" I said "Well, yes?" and he looked at me and said, "Do you have AIDS?"

[audible gasps]

He said, "I've got a letter I want to give you, do you have someone I can hand this to? Do you have an aide with you?"

[laughter]

When Bil Browning caught up with Bayh, the Senator claimed he didn't think the comment was offensive and besides, "I've voted for all sorts of things in terms of equality and lifestyle and that sort of thing."

Yeah, right. Maybe he thinks AIDS is a "lifestyle"? He thinks the idea that a heterosexual white guy in a suit might have AIDS is so absurd as to be humorous?  Bayh doesn't understand that his sense of humor displays an attitude that powerfully drives stigma and discourages people at risk from getting tested and treated for HIV.

Kudos to the Indiana Stonewall Democrats for having the gumption to stand up and walk out after Bayh's offensive slap at people with HIV. And kudos for Bil Browning, for bringing this incident to light.

Just prior to the 1976 Iowa precinct caucuses, I spent a day driving Birch Bayh around Iowa City, including to a Johnson County Democratic Party fundraiser at the Izaac Walton League Clubhouse. He was one of the great ones, authentic, committed, well-informed and sympathetic.

This is a case where the apple not only fell far from the tree, but it is in an entirely different orchard. I wonder if Evan Bayh is as great a disappointment to his father as he is to people with HIV?

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