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SUPREME COURT

Alito '72 joined conservative alumni group

Concerned Alumni of Princeton known to be anti-coeducation

Chanakya Sethi
Princetonian Senior Writer

Clarification appended

Earlier this week, recently released documents drew attention for showing that, in a 1985 job application, Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito '72 wrote that he is "particularly proud" of his work on cases arguing that "racial and ethnic quotas should not be allowed and that the Constitution does not protect a right to an abortion."

Now, opponents to his nomination are using another piece of information from those documents to suggest he is far outside the mainstream in his political and social views: Near the end of his "Personal Qualifications Statement" for a high-level job in Ronald Reagan's Justice Department, Alito wrote that he was "a member of the Concerned Alumni of Princeton University, a conservative alumni group."

Interviews with several alumni who were students in the 1970s paint a picture of Concerned Alumni of Princeton (CAP) as a far-right organization funded by conservative alumni committed to turning back the clock on coeducation at the University.

The group, which published a magazine in which students wrote nostalgically about the days before coeducation, was frowned upon by Nassau Hall. Some alumni expressed surprise at Alito's association with CAP, but at least two suggested he might have put it on the 1985 job application to appeal to a personal connection in the Reagan administration.

See all of the 'Prince' coverage of the Alito nomination here.

The only CAP member who could be reached by The Daily Princetonian, Alito supporter and former New Jersey Superior Court judge Andrew Napolitano '72, defended the group, saying that there is "absolutely no way" it sought to protest coeducation.

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The organization, Napolitano said, was committed instead to increasing alumni involvement in Princeton and tempering "the University's anti-traditionalist leftist urges" at a sensitive time in history when the majority of students and faculty were opposed to the Nixon administration's policies, particularly the Vietnam War.

Napolitano said he never associated himself with any individual's anti-coeducation stance, adding that "Sam Alito would never associate himself with that" either.

Also, Napolitano, who served on CAP's board from its founding in 1972 until it shut down in the early 1980s, said that he has "zero recollection of Sam Alito being involved directly or indirectly" with the group.

But Marsha Levy-Warren '73, who was a member of the University's first coeducational class and student government vice president, remembers things differently. In an interview Thursday evening, she recalled Alito, Napolitano and T. Harding Jones '72, another CAP member, as "part of a group of extremely conservative undergraduates."

Though Levy-Warren did not recall Alito being involved with CAP as an undergraduate, she said the group "stated explicitly that they were not in favor of coeducation and that they weren't in favor of affirmative action. Implicitly, they were opposed to any form of diversity on campus."

The group's magazine, "Prospect," seems to support this assessment. Writing in the February 1973 issue of the magazine about the increasing number of women on campus, Jones, who served as editor of the publication, wrote: "The makeup of the Princeton student body has changed drastically for the worse."

He could not be reached for comment.

"Prospect" was founded in October 1972 by the then-newly-formed CAP, which was co-chaired by Asa Bushnell '21 and Shelby Cullom Davis '30. The latter, who was the University's largest donor at the time, was a strong traditionalist, firmly opposed to the many of the new directions Princeton was taking, including coeducation.

He wrote in "Prospect": "May I recall, and with some nostalgia, my father's 50th reunion, a body of men, relatively homogenous in interests and backgrounds, who had known and liked each other over the years during which they had contributed much in spirit and substance to the greatness of Princeton," according to an account in "The Chosen," a book by Jerome Karabel on the history of admissions at Harvard, Yale and Princeton.

"I cannot envisage a similar happening in the future," Davis added, "with an undergraduate student population of approximately 40% women and minorities, such as the Administration has proposed."

The first issues of "Prospect" ostensibly did not receive a warm reception, particularly from Nassau Hall, which viewed the magazine and its group sponsor as a barrier to the progressive agenda of President William Bowen GS '58 and the University trustees. Princeton officials were quoted criticizing the publication in the 'Prince,' Princeton Alumni Weekly and The New York Times.

Former U.S. Senator Bill Bradley '65, who served on the alumni advisory board of "Prospect," also created a stir when he quit the publication abruptly after its second issue, saying in the 'Prince' that the magazine was "filled with innuendo and unsupported allegations" about the University.

Surprise association for some

Several alumni expressed surprise when they learned that Alito associated with Davis and CAP.

"We all thought of [CAP] as the crinkly old alums," said Mark Dwyer '72, a friend of Alito's and his roommate when both of them were studying at Yale Law. "But they seemed a little far enough from the mainstream that I didn't know anybody who had much to do with them."

Diane Weeks '75, a vocal critic of CAP financier Davis and a colleague of Alito's when he was U.S. Attorney for New Jersey, did not expect Alito to publicly associate himself with the group. "I'm very surprised that he would support such an organization," Weeks said, but added, "I once joked to him that he must be very disappointed that women were admitted to Princeton and he just didn't have a response."

Some alumni have suggested, however, that Alito's association with CAP may not be exclusively about politics, but also about networking for the job market.

"Probably the most cynical view was that undergraduates [who were members of CAP] wanted to ingratiate themselves so that they had good summer jobs," Lee Kaplan '73 said. "Other people thought that they were truly committed individuals who were swimming against the prevailing political tide."

A possible networking connection involves Terry Eastland, who served in the Justice Department during the Reagan administration and was involved with CAP, according to two people familiar with the group who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue.

"That would have been a good connection for Sam," one of the individuals said.

Indeed, the mention of CAP seems out of place on a resume that discussed Alito's involvement with more prominent organizations such as the Federalist Society, a group of conservative lawyers, and the National Review and American Spectator, two national conservative publications.

Asked about his former roommate's possible intentions, Dwyer said, "I'm sure Sam had something in mind. He wouldn't have put that in his job application if he didn't have a connection."

Regardless, some alumni say Alito's association with CAP should factor into the nominee's pending hearings before the Senate.

"I don't know about his involvement in CAP," said Sally Franks '80, who sued several Prospect Avenue eating clubs for denying women membership. "But I know about CAP and what kind of an organization CAP was in the late 70s and the early 80s and how reprehensible and scary it is that someone trying to be on the Supreme Court would have touted his membership in a job application."

Weeks, Alito's former colleague said: "I think now he has completely opened up the issue about what is your current opinion about abortion, about the rights of women and minorities ... as opposed to [recent nominee and Supreme Court Chief Justice John] Roberts, Sam's going to have to answer those questions."

Indeed for some interviewed, the revelation about Alito's association with CAP has already negatively affected their perceptions of him.

"It did rearrange my view of him a little bit because these people seemed so rabid and out of control," Abigail Bok '76 said. "This wasn't a serious debate about what Princeton should be like, as far as we could tell. It was just people snarling extremist views and yapping around the edges."

— Includes reporting by Princetonian Staff Writer Aditi Eleswarapu.

Clarification and editor's note

The original version of this article did not clearly identify Marsha Levy-Warren's quote regarding Concerned Alumni of Princeton's stance on coeducation and affirmative action as relating to the organization specifically. Also, this article reflects updates not in the paper's print edition.