



# Speaking Truth to Power

## The Alumni Working within the U.S. Government to Make “A Civilization Worthy of the Name”

The recent presidential election got us rummaging in our files for alumni who had eschewed the fame, fortune, and glory of the private sector for the relative anonymity (but for one, but she does it so altruistically that we couldn't begin to think of leaving her out) of working with elected officials to help bring about the changes Putney's founder, Carmelita Hinton, alluded to in her 1954 letter to the board of trustees in which she advises us, “To wish to live adventurously though not recklessly, willing to take risks, if need be, for moral growth, so that one definitely progresses along the long slow road toward achieving a civilization worthy of the name.” Here's what a few of the people who came after have to say.

### Kathleen Kennedy Townsend '69

Former Lieutenant Governor of Maryland

Last Monday, February 9, the Senate Caucus room was packed for a seated lunch. Senator John Kerry, in his closing remarks, explained that this was the room in which hearings were held on the Titanic and Pearl Harbor. I had been there as a four-year-old when my father Robert Kennedy, (photo, opposite page) as Chief Counsel to the Senate Rackets Committee was investigating corruption in the labor unions and heard over and over again, “I refuse to answer on the grounds that it may tend to incriminate me.” This stately room was also the setting where my uncle John Kennedy and my

father announced that they were running for president. It was a room where history had been made.

We had gathered on that cold February day in the hope of making history again. This time, the challenge was global climate change.

More specifically, we had come because of the indefatigable dedication of Jeff Horowitz. I had met Jeff at his “awakening.” We serve on the board of the Center for International Policy and had participated in a ten-day walk from the old growth forest in Honduras—which was rapidly being destroyed—to the capital Tegucigalpa. During our stay, we heard how activists had been murdered, and we heard of the slower death sentences of whole villages whose way of life was being destroyed because corrupt politics allowed forests to be harvested for profit. Appropriately, the ten-day walk was called “The March for Life” by its leader Father Tamayo.

Over the few days, Jeff talked about what he could do to really make a difference. He was a successful vintner in California, and he had learned to manage his own assets after seeing his broker's interests were not aligned with his—a painful experience, to be sure. After a year of exploring the options, he decided that deforestation, which is responsible for 20–25 percent of global warming, must be included in the cap and trade system.

So, on the February day, he brought together the heads of the largest environmental groups (NRDC, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, the National Wildlife Federation), Wangari Maathai, the first

<photo: ©2009, Stephen Shames '65/polaris>

## See More Online

We have two more essays (one from Gladys Lavine '51, the other from Katie Griffiths Cameron '63) that came to us too late in the planning phase of this pared-down issue to include here that we just can't keep to ourselves. So see them at [www.putneyschool.org/alumni/AdditionalTruth.pdf](http://www.putneyschool.org/alumni/AdditionalTruth.pdf).

## Alumni and Service

In our search for alumni in government we heard from many more than the four who've shared their stories so far. It seems you don't have to go far to find Putneyites who'll easily trade comfort for public service. Here are a few more of the government-related folks who responded.

In the late 1990s, Nancy Segal '79 worked for the Equal Employment Opportunity commissioner, specializing in disability issues. She wrote several policy guidances to protect people with disabilities in the workplace and helped draft a Clinton executive order that prohibited genetic discrimination. Nancy later worked for Senator Ted Kennedy on the Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee and drafted a bill prohibiting genetic discrimination, which passed last year.

Marion King Schlefer '41, served for twenty-five years as a member of the Washington Planning and Housing Board, founded as part of Eleanor Roosevelt's efforts to improve slum housing near the Capitol. Later she worked for the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress. With an economics degree from Swarthmore, her research focused on the economics division, namely housing, architecture, landscape architecture, design, and housing technology. CRS worked for members of Congress or Congressional Committees, particularly, in her case, the Joint Economics Committee. This work, says Marion, "had a sense of mission and service. Many of the programs I had been interested in disappeared once the Nixon administration arrived, [so] I left to pursue an M.A. in art history."

African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize; Michael Morris, chairman, president and CEO of American Electric Power who claims that his company has the largest carbon footprint of any company in the U.S.; Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union for Concerned Scientists; and the heads of Oxfam and CARE.

And, in that room of two hundred, three of us had gone to Putney: Tim Rieser '70, the big honcho on the Appropriations Committee, Lisa Merton '70, who had just completed a stunning film about Wangari, and me. As the lunch finished, and the presidents and CEOs were discussing how the legislation would have to be finalized by the fall in time for the next Kyoto round, the three of us gathered to the side, and gave each other a group hug. As I looked around, I wondered what other tiny school could have produced three grads at such an event.

But I also realized that of course it made sense that Putney would produce people who were engaged in the actions and passions of politics, particularly the politics of the environment. Those fall and spring camping trips in the wilds of Vermont and New Hampshire introduced us to the sport of bending birches, the skill of making pancakes over fires, and the challenge of balancing the athleticism of twenty-mile hikers with those city dwellers more adept at buses and metro or hailing a cab. I loved walking to class and seeing Mount Monadnock rising above the morning mists. I still remember riding my horse through the woods wondering what could have possessed those colonists to construct those endless rows of stone fences. I remain spoiled for real maple syrup and Mac apples fresh from the Darrows' orchards.

But even more than the outdoors itself, was the Putney way. We were to care for our environs. We each had responsibility—sweeping the classrooms, mending fences, washing dishes and pots and pans, mucking out the cow barn, even if it meant waking before dawn. Mrs. Hinton came from a leftist bent which preached the primacy of community. Our individual talents would flourish best where the community was strong and where no job was viewed as lowly or unimportant.

The outside world often disagreed. Unfettered individualism was the mantra that made our

country great, so said some. But now at the dawn of the 21st century as the unregulated markets have collapsed and the world is heating up, the Putney idea is making a rightful comeback.

Politics is the way to make the impact felt. No amount of individual saving, of turning down the thermostat, of taking trash to the dump will save our planet. Only politics with its wide sweep, its large vision, and the incentives it can use, will shape our habits for the better. Putney taught us what a community could be, politics helps us to make those largest and most important decisions that affect the commons and the common good. So, in the caucus room that had seen the disasters and hope, these three Putney grads are doing our part to make politics work.

## Tim Rieser '70

### Democratic Clerk, Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, Foreign Policy Aide to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)

As a Putney student in the 1960s when the government sent thousands of Americans just one or two years older than I was to fight and die in a pointless war in Vietnam and lied about it, I had no thought of ever working in Washington. It seemed like a place to avoid, except when taking part in demonstrations against the government.

I graduated and spent time in and out of college, traveled and went to law school and worked four years as a public defender in Vermont. But eventually—and there were several reasons including my three years at Putney—I ended up in Washington.

I had no idea what it would be like to work in the Congress. In fact, I don't think I'd ever set foot in the place before. But I was drawn to the idea of working where you could be part of debating big issues about the use of government power and making decisions that really matter to people.

At Putney we debated most things—some that just concerned us, others that concerned the world. I learned that everyone's opinion mattered; that questioning authority is essential

and so is what you do afterwards; that art is an indispensable form of human expression; that work, even the most rudimentary physical type, can be fun; and that friends are what matter most. After 23 years working in the Senate where the daily frustrations could discourage anyone, I know these things have helped me. Here are some examples:

Since 50 states are represented in the Congress you are regularly confronted with opinions that are different, sometimes polar opposites, from your own. As much as you'd like to ignore them, you usually can't. So you have to try to find points of common interest, and often it's possible. The key is getting along with people you disagree with, as well as those who are disagreeable. I learned from Kathleen, either before or when she was lieutenant governor, that you've got to stand up for what you believe but it feels better when you're nice to people.

**TIM RIESER '70**



The last eight years have shown, probably more than any time in recent memory, why questioning authority should be taught in every school. I consider it a key part of my job. The government has lots of hard-working people who are here for good reasons. But it also has lots of other people, and mediocrity and the abuse of government power seem to know no bounds.

If it weren't for the National Gallery of Art and the paintings of Jefferson, Madison and Lincoln that I pass by in the Capitol Building day and night, I might have given up on Washington long ago.

Washington's not much like Vermont, but on days off I'm usually splitting or piling wood, raking leaves or doing some other work job type activity, often at the home of Derry Noyes (also Class of 1970) and her family.

Many of my best friends are people I met at Putney. None of them works in the government. Most have only a vague idea of what my days are like but it doesn't make any difference.

We've been through a bad time in Washington, when the rights and principles the country stands for were trampled on. With the economy crumbling and millions of people losing their jobs and life savings we're seeing that it's even worse than we thought. But I've been here with Democratic presidents and congresses, and Republican presidents and congresses. Each made lots of mistakes. I've learned that even in this imperfect place which so often seems to fall far short of what the country should be capable of, you can accomplish things.

I work on foreign policy issues that concern Senator Leahy, Vermonters, and people everywhere. Usually it's in response to a problem brought to our attention by the public or the media. Often it deals with poverty and war, human rights, the environment, global health, or trying to convince other governments to listen to the people they profess to represent. The best part is I get to meet people of all types from all over the world.

It's never easy, even if you work for a senior senator on the Appropriations Committee who supports the right things, because you need 51 votes to pass anything and 60 to end a filibuster. I haven't stopped taking part in demonstrations and don't ever expect to. But whether it's funding to prevent malaria, dig wells or train judges, scholarships for students in the Middle East, protecting forests in Indonesia, or stopping aid to abusive militaries, each day we chip away at the world's problems and over the years it adds up.

Also with a start in urban housing and community building, **Rebecca Black '75** learned from those early years that, in government, "too often the loudest voice, not the fairest, gets attention," and funding doesn't always go to the most needy recipients. Eventually Rebecca turned to international work, realizing that affecting social change outside of the U.S. was equally important. For the past 17 years, Rebecca has worked for USAID, with 16 of those years spent working to help countries on water, sanitation, urban housing, climate change, and other key issues. Last year, her role shifted to the internal operations of USAID. She has now moved "from what we do to how we do it. After many years of focusing on the 'what,' I have come to realize that just as important, maybe more, is 'who' implements and with what resources. And this is maybe a parable for working in government generally—how a policy is carried out depends on who does it, and with what real resources."

In 1964, President Johnson launched his War on Poverty. Taking up the call to begin a pre-school program for poor children, Johnson pulled together a team that included pediatricians, social workers, advisors, and **Marie Wasserman Ridder '42**, then a Capitol Hill journalist who had previously reported on, and befriended, the Johnsons. Working together, they launched the Head Start program, which to this day provides critical early intervention nationwide. Marie, who also worked as special assistant to Lady Bird Johnson and as the commissioner on the environment under three Virginia governors, says that her work at Head Start, both in its founding and as deputy to the director, was the most rewarding she has done, specifically the work for children on Native American reservations, and had the most profound impact on the lives of others.

Other alumni contribute to our future by helping the people who will shape it—children and teenagers. In nearly 30 years working for UNESCO, Art Gillette '56 promoted adult literacy, youth exchange, cultural heritage, and youth sports. Art secured literally tons of donated sports equipment and vehicles. In Africa and El Salvador, Art's work promoted peace through sport. In Uzbekistan and the ravaged Bosnia-Herzegovina, Art aided juvenile delinquents and landmine amputees, respectively. Art wrote, "a minibus donated to an Austrian foundation rehabilitating young amputees in Bosnia-Herzegovina was stopped at the Croatian frontier. With its original military gray paint, it alarmed the border guards—the Yugoslav civil war was still roiling. The Austrian foundation driver wondered what to do. Then, light bulb! He returned to the first pre-frontier town and, during the night, painted the vehicle white. The next morning he crossed with no problem!"

In Denmark, Ray Andres '86 founded FutureKulture ([www.futurekulture.com](http://www.futurekulture.com)), a youth exchange program that motivates youth to initiate their own ideas. This year, the young people in his program will focus on combating violence against women, inclusion of people with disabilities, intercultural dialogue, and the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. Ray calls his 14 years with FutureKulture the most rewarding of his life.



**LEAD UGANDA STUDENTS KATONGOLE GODFREY AND KAMOGA MOSES TRY CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING FOR THE FIRST TIME AT THE PUTNEY SCHOOL.**

## Kuna Tavalin '99

### Lobbyist and Former Senate Aide

I stumbled into politics in an atypical way. I was never a news junkie, didn't identify with a political party, and rarely engaged in political dialogues with my peers. Then I found myself at Brandeis University, scrambling to choose an area of concentration, when something hit me—here I am at a liberal arts college, getting a well-rounded education to become a well-rounded citizen, and I don't know the first thing about civics. I chose to be a politics major because I figured it would prepare me to be a better citizen. I look back at that rationale and chuckle at my idealistic notion. But despite my reasoning, I'm thankful for where I've been since.

My first politics course in college was Wealth and Poverty, instructed by Robert Reich, the former secretary of labor for the Clinton administration. His stories of touring and shutting down sweat shops in New York City and Los Angeles, and of the factors he believed separated the rich from the poor, fascinated me.

A couple years later, in May of 2001, Senator Jim Jeffords left the Republican Party, and I discovered C-SPAN. I stayed glued to C-SPAN for the next few days. It was the first time I'd been truly inspired by a politician. Jeffords had challenged the partisan role of Congressmen and ultimately rejected it for his true values when his party no longer reflected his agenda.

In my final year of college I was an assistant on a federally-funded project at the Heller School for Social Policy to analyze the efficacy of the welfare system. As I sat compiling data for Welfare, Children, and Families, I was exposed to highly technical analysis. Experts invited me into discussions, used me as a sounding board, and asked for my opinion. If their goal was to suck me into the public policy world, they succeeded.

A year after I graduated from Brandeis, I decided to move to Washington, DC. I envisioned myself at a non-profit. Before I moved, I researched countless organizations, but there was an enormous gap in my knowledge of the Inside-the-Beltway culture. Every non-profit had a seemingly credible mission

statement, and I was frustrated that I could not distinguish their political agendas and reputations on my own.

As Robert Reich told me in an e-mail before I moved to DC, networking is everything. So, and at the urging of my mother, I set up a meeting with the deputy chief of staff in Senator Jeffords' office. I presented myself as a Vermont girl completely overwhelmed by the DC culture and sought insight into how I could maneuver in this new system.

After a two-hour meeting in Senator Jeffords' office, I was offered a position. I had only been in DC for four days, and was completely shocked and accepted on the spot. At the time I accepted a position, the office was not actually hiring. So I was not calculated into their budget. The salary they offered me was so low that I had to work three to four shifts a week at a restaurant to make ends meet. That was unimportant. I was working for a man who had been an inspiration to me.

“A CIVILIZATION WORTHY OF THE NAME”

During my first summer working in the Senate, I learned more about American politics than any course could have ever taught me. I worked for Jim for nearly three years, and held a variety of positions. He set a light tone for his office. He had doorways cut into all the internal walls so his staff could be more connected. He liked to walk through the office and see what his staff was working on, and he loved to joke. Working for Jim was a joy, and equally meaningful was working for Vermonters. I was able to maintain a connection to my home state and work on issues important to me, such as education, immigration, and child welfare.

When Jim retired, I went on to work for Senator Brown of Ohio in his freshman term. His office mirrored the TV-inspired reputation of a Congressional office—it was fast-paced

and dynamic, and I frequently worked late. My Blackberry buzzed all night and on the weekends, and followed me on vacations across the globe. The senator was young and ambitious, and a sponge for information. I was thrown a curveball—my new portfolio included issues I'd never been exposed to, including transportation. I spent a lot of time researching federal transportation policy and quickly discovered its humanitarian connections. I also surprised myself by finding interest in its technical side.

Senator Brown's office was particularly tasking because Ohio was at the forefront of the foreclosure crisis, and slipped into a recession long before the rest of the country followed. But it also gave me the opportunity to work on legislation that was highly meaningful to me. One morning during the holiday season in 2007, I read an article in the *New York Times* about the food bank crisis. By that afternoon, Senator Brown was on the Senate floor speaking about the need to increase funding to starving Americans. Hunger is now a major part of his policy agenda.

As is typical of DC, my network of past colleagues and acquaintances landed me into my new position, as the Public Policy Analyst for the National Disability Rights Network. Shy of tutoring an elementary school student with autism, I knew absolutely nothing about disabilities before taking my current job. I've learned that in politics, it's easy to learn new issues if you understand the system, and anything can be interesting and fulfilling if you give it a chance.

<from left> **LIZ PARDUE WITH NIEGEL BARKER, A PHOTOGRAPHY AND JUDGE ON AMERICA'S NEXT TOP MODEL IN DC TO SPEAK AGAINST THE CANADIAN SEAL HUNT, AND A FORMER CO-WORKER FROM THE HUMANE SOCIETY.**



On a recent trip to Florida, passengers had to walk onto the tarmac and up the steps of our small plane to board. There were eight people with limited mobility on that flight, and I watched them suffering up the steps of the plane and was outraged. "That can't possibly be ADA-compliant," I thought. My focus has changed once again, but politics remains constant.

## Liz Pardue '01

### Assistant Counsel for the House Rules Committee

Almost eight years after graduating I still keep Putney hours, rising before dawn during the work week. But instead of throwing on my barn clothes and trudging out to milk cows, I don a conservative suit, smear on a little makeup, toss my high heels into my comically large purse, and take the metro to my office in the U.S. Capitol. The Capitol building is a far cry from the barn at Putney, and most of my high school classmates probably wouldn't even recognize me in my work attire, but my transition from life on the Putney hill to life on Capitol Hill was surprisingly smooth.

In February, for example, Congress passed a bill to stimulate the economy. The legislation included provisions to increase renewable energy production, to fund clean water and environmental restoration projects, and to make buildings more energy efficient. How many of my co-workers at the House Rules Committee could say that they attended a school where the dining hall runs on wind and solar power? How about a school that produces its own bio-diesel fuel? Or a school where students spend a night every year carefully ferrying migrating salamanders across a busy road?

My time at Putney subtly colors the way I look at much of the legislation we handle here at the Rules Committee, where we serve as the final stop for all major bills before they reach the House floor for a vote. The long debates at all-school meetings about how to live out our values (local and organic food, environmentally friendly construction, socially responsible investments) while keeping Putney on solid fiscal ground prepared me for identical debates—if on a rather larger scale—in Congress.



**ELIZABETH STEVENS '74**

<pictured> **AND COCO**

**MCCABE '74 TRAVEL TO**

**DISASTER-AFFECTED PARTS**

**OF THE WORLD WITH**

**THEIR WORK FOR OXFAM**

**INTERNATIONAL.**

**WWW.OXFAM.ORG.**

**Stephen Shames '65** is perhaps best known for his photography of the Black Panthers. In recent years, the passionate photographer has turned his lens, his energy and his time eastward, to Uganda, where an assignment to photograph AIDS orphans led eventually to Stephen founding LEAD Uganda ([www.stephen-shames.org](http://www.stephen-shames.org)). LEAD Uganda changes the lives of Uganda's poor, bright, almost-forgotten youngsters, including AIDS orphans and former child soldiers. With the organization's support, these children attend the country's best schools, and have access to college scholarships. The program builds confidence, community, a strong work ethic, and a brighter future for Uganda's next generation of leaders.

And what about the election? **Jen Just '77** attended the Democratic convention as a Connecticut delegate, after working as the only paid Obama staff member in that state.

**Gabe Lifton-Zoline '00** organized for Obama in four different states, in the primaries and the general election.

**Skip Snaith '61**, a self-proclaimed "political dropout," started a Ron Paul meet-up organization in western Washington. His group "seemed to threaten local status quo," shaking up the conversation, getting involved in precinct work and sending a delegate to the state convention.

Mary Breasted Smyth '61 wrote of an Obama rally in western Texas, where “veterans wept as they talked about the kind of world they wanted, versus the kind of world they had lived in. It wasn’t clear where anybody was going to go [after the rally], but dogs wandered in and out in the dust and sunbeams, and I just wished Obama could have been there to hear them and see them, his people worn down and leathery and prone to forgetting things with a beer, just weeping at the thought that he might become president.”

Another largely unseen battle involves the fight to ensure fair voting practices and the investigation of suspicious election activity. **Harriet Crosby '64** has devoted the last four years to the controversy around electronic voting machines. Velvet Revolution (VR, [www.velvetrevolution.us](http://www.velvetrevolution.us)), with which Harriet is active, has focused primarily on Ohio in the '04 presidential election. VR brought the battle to court and increased public awareness of the vulnerabilities inherent in, and the alleged deliberate manipulation of, electronic voting. As a result of VR’s work, on the eve of the 2008 election, Ohio courts compelled the testimony of Michael Connell, a top Republican Internet consultant, in the case of Ohio vote tampering in 2004. Harriet states “our work to bring Connell into the light of legal scrutiny the day before the election was critical to protect the integrity of this election at a time of consequence for the nation.”

—Alison Frye,  
Alumni Relations Manager



**HARRIET CROSBY '64**

The experience of working on the farm with Pete and Margie instilled in me an enormous respect for small farmers, and so gave me a valuable personal perspective on the dangers of subsidizing big agribusiness at the expense of the small farmer—one of the central issues of the Farm Bill, which directs government spending on agriculture.

Although I never envisioned myself making big bucks in corporate America, neither did I initially intend to work in politics. At Putney, I embraced Carmelita Hinton’s principle “to want to lend a hand to the community at large.” So I chose community service as an afternoon activity every trimester (though, to be honest, I did it perhaps as much to avoid physical activity as to serve the community). More importantly, I vowed to pursue a career where I could make a positive impact on the world. In my mind, this meant being an activist—pushing for change from the outside. Perhaps I’d be a campaigner at an animal rights organization; perhaps a lobbyist for an environmental group.

In college, I applied for summer internships at several environmental non-profits in Washington, DC, but didn’t hear back from any of them. Instead, I landed an internship in a Senate office. It wasn’t exactly what I was looking for, but I bought a couple of suits and decided to make the best of the opportunity. Once there (in between answering constituent letters and giving extremely ill-informed tours of the Capitol), I saw the impact a single staffer—or even, frighteningly enough, an intern—can have on legislation.

The legislative aide with whom I worked gave me the opportunity to convince our boss, the senator, to support a bill that would strengthen penalties against cockfighting and dog fighting. After reading my extensively researched, over-long memo, the Senator added his name to the bill’s list of supporters, unknowingly inspiring me into a new career path. (By the time the bill was signed into law, I had graduated from college and was working for Congress full-time.)

Laws get the job done. That, more than anything else, is what I took away from my internship that summer. Petitions, protests,

and consumer education are all pieces of the puzzle, but getting a law on the books ensures immediate, concrete change. And since a single staffer’s interest can influence whether a bill passes or languishes unnoticed, it made sense to me that Congress needs all the activists it can get. Pressure from the outside is important, but someone on the inside needs to be listening and responding for it to work. I enjoy the wonky life, diving into legislative language and parliamentary procedure. So why shouldn’t that someone on the inside be me?

Since taking a job with the House Rules Committee after college (with a detour working for the Humane Society of the United States’ government affairs office in 2008 before returning to Rules this year), I’ve been privileged enough to work on an incredible array of major legislation moving through our committee. After the Democratic Party won a majority in the House, we’ve done everything from raising the minimum wage, to providing more money for disadvantaged students to attend college, to raising fuel efficiency standards for the first time in 32 years. These laws will have a real impact, and I’m proud to have been able to do my part. And with a new administration in the White House, those bills are just the beginning.

Although putting on a suit every day and working at a desk may not seem, at first glance, to be a very “Putney” career, government service embodies Carmelita’s philosophy not only of lending a hand to the community at large, but also of working toward “achieving a civilization worthy of the name.” And Putney students—smart, idealistic, compassionate, and above all unafraid to speak truth to power—are exactly the type of people I want running our government. Even if they do have to wear a suit to do it.

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