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# The Scene

*In the nation and the world*

## Still in Bush campaign, fired backer says

By David Lee Preston  
*Inquirer Staff Writer*

A week after he was removed as co-chairman of a volunteer ethnic coalition in George Bush's presidential campaign amid charges of anti-Semitism, Cleveland travel agent Jerome A. Brentar insisted yesterday that he still holds the campaign post.

Brentar said in a telephone interview from Cleveland that he is "definitely still in the campaign, still in the coalition." He said it was unfair for the Bush campaign to remove him because of his views and that Bush "should concern himself with the 25 million ethnic who he is beginning to alienate."

"The more I think of it, this is something that can take place in the Soviet Union or in Nazi Germany, but I don't think there's any place for it here in the States," he said. "This is contrary to my civil liberties. As long as I don't do anything that they can put a finger on that is related to the campaign, they have no right in going into my life. I'm not a public figure."

Brentar, a Croatian-American who was the first of seven ethnic leaders dropped from the Bush coalition following allegations of anti-Semitic activities, said, "I was asked to step down. I told them that I'll step down if they send me a letter outlining why I have to step down, what I did wrong to earn this degradation."

"Until I get such a letter, I feel I'm still part of the coalition."

Anti-Semitism became an issue in the presidential campaign last week, when the Washington Jewish Week reported that several ethnic leaders of Bush's campaign were linked to anti-Semitic or fascist organizations.

Also, Bush's choice for a top spot on the Republican National Committee, Frederic Malek, resigned last week after reports that he had tallied the number of Jews in the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the Nixon administration.

A campaign spokesman said yesterday that Brentar was dropped from the campaign because some of his positions put him "at fundamental odds" with Bush.

"Jerome Brentar and this campaign disagreed," the spokesman said. "We were at fundamental odds over some very important beliefs in this campaign toward racial and religious tolerance, and he was asked to step down. . . . As far as we're concerned he's no longer part of this campaign."

The Inquirer reported Saturday that Brentar claims to have helped hundreds of Nazis and Nazi-aligned Croats emigrate to the U.S. during 1949 and 1950, when he was an eligibility officer in Germany for the International Refugee Organization. Brentar also has been a strong supporter of John Demjanjuk, the retired Cleveland auto worker who was convicted in Israel of operating gas chambers at the Nazi death camp Treblinka, where 800,000 people were killed.

Brentar said yesterday he did not necessarily believe the stories told to him by survivors of the Nazi death camp Auschwitz whom he had processed for emigration to the U.S.

"I saw plenty of them, there were plenty and plenty of them who came through our screening center in Hanau," Brentar said. "People were coming to me with tattoos and telling me they were at Auschwitz, but I didn't know they were survivors. When I worked there, I didn't hear of anybody telling me about gassing at Auschwitz because they survived."

"To be frank with you, in Germany after the war, you were able to get any kind of identification, even an Auschwitz tattoo, for a carton of cigarettes. With an Auschwitz tattoo, you were able to go around getting more from the Germans than they already got."

Brentar denied that he is anti-Semitic. "I'm a Roman Catholic. I pray to a Jewish Jesus, a Jewish mother, and namely the 12 apostles were Jews," he said. "How could I be anti-Semitic?"

The Bush campaign now apparently is trying to deflect the anti-Semitism charges with an attack of its own.

Yesterday, Minnesota Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, a Republican and a prominent Jewish member of Congress, said he had been asked by the Bush campaign to attack Democrats for adding apparently pro-Palestinian members to the Democratic National Committee.

Boschwitz said he refused. "I don't want to do it," he said. "I don't think there's any political future in these charges and counter-charges."

Boschwitz, who would not identify the Bush aides, said he told them that the move "probably would have more negative side effects" for the Bush campaign.

Boschwitz himself said that "some of those who quit deserved to quit." He said he did not include Malek, saying he was more a victim of the Nixon White House than an anti-Semite.


The three DNC members are Ruth Ann Skiff, the Texas coordinator for the Arab American Institute, Robert Farrell, a Los Angeles City Council member, and the Rev. Willie Barrow, executive director of Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH.

Skiff said she favors an independent Palestinian state, but only "premised upon the security of Israel." She said she recognizes the Palestine Liberation Organization because Palestinians have themselves chosen the group as their representative, but that she has "always" condemned terrorism.

"Attacking individuals such as myself and Rev. Willie Barrow and Councilman Farrell is a desperate and dangerous move by the Bush campaign," she said. "Targeting me as an Arab-American and targeting my views on this issue truly endangers the political security of Americans of Arab heritage."

"Am I guilty of crime because my grandparents came from Lebanon?"

Steven Thomma and Charles Green of the Inquirer Washington Bureau contributed to this article.



Minnie Mouse gets a kiss from 4-year-old Erin Pappas of Gloucester, Va. Minnie and several other Disney characters were in Richmond on Wednesday to visit patients

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