

FORUM

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Remember Tillman's message on Election Day

We have entered the ugly season of the political cycle, the time when Election Day looms close enough that politicians, parties and pundits are willing to utter just about any claim, any innuendo, and libel in order to sway a vote.

Reasonable Americans are understandably inclined to shut off the noise and presume that nothing more of importance can or will be said in the final weeks before the vote.

It is precisely in such white-hot moments, however, that the statements that matter most are often made. And such is the case with a short article titled "After Pat's Birthday," which appeared Friday morning at the essential online magazine site Truthdig. Since then, the words of Kevin Tillman, the brother of perhaps the most famous casualty of the Bush administration's military adventuring, have ricocheted around the Internet faster than the speed of light — a proper rate, as what the veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts has to say is far more illuminating than anything offered by the current crop of candidates.

After Sept. 11, 2001, Pat and Kevin Tillman signed up for the U.S. Army. It was an especially dramatic sacrifice for Pat, a player with the Arizona Cardinals football team who turned down a \$3.6 million contract to play the next three years with the Cardinals in order to join the Army Rangers in Iraq and then Afghanistan.

Pat Tillman was killed in Afghanistan on April 22, 2004, and received war hero honors at a memorial service where U.S. Sen. John McCain spoke. Supporters of the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, endeavors that by the time of Tillman's death were growing increasingly controversial, sought to spin the football star's sacrifice as evidence of the nobility of the Bush administration's military adventure.

Shine patriot Sean Hannity swore his allegiance to Tillman on his television program, declaring: "I love him and admire him." Ann Coulter oozed, "Tillman was an American original: virtuous, pure and masculine like only an American male can be."

The propaganda push eventually fell apart, however, when it was learned that the Pentagon had delayed revealing to Tillman's family the circumstances of his death — he was shot three times in the head by so-

John Nichols



called "friendly fire," and U.S. troops then burned his body armor and uniform in an apparent coverup attempt — until after the memorial service, with all its patriotic flourishes and media attention, was finished.

Later still, it was revealed that Pat Tillman had during the course of his service become an outspoken critic of the war in Iraq and was in the months before his death urging fellow soldiers not to vote for President Bush's reelection.

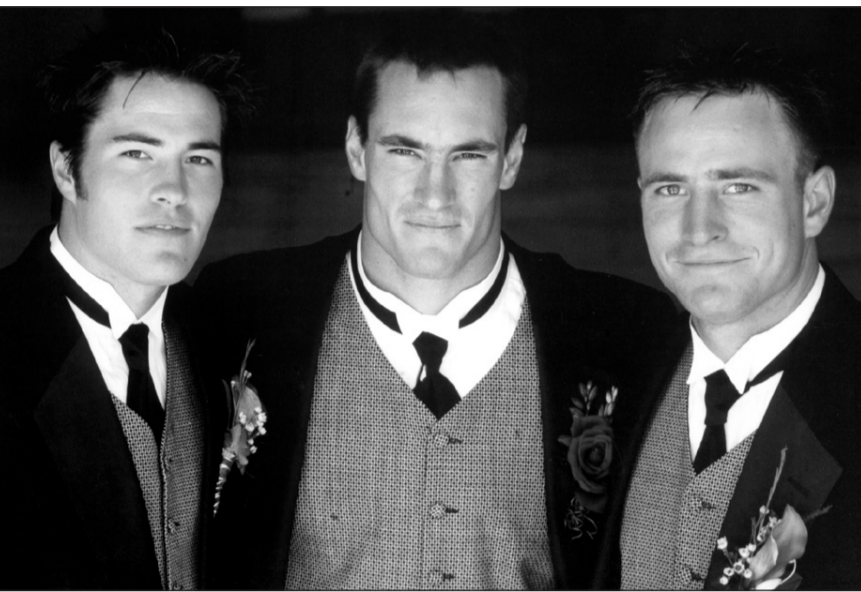
Kevin Tillman survived his deployments and was discharged from the Army in 2005. Now, on the eve of the first national election after that discharge, with "After Pat's Birthday," he has made it clear that he shares his brother's disenchantment with the armchair warriors of the Bush administration and its amen corner in the media.

In so doing, Kevin Tillman has made the most vital political statement of 2006:

"It is Pat Tillman's birthday Nov. 6, and elections are the day after. It gets me thinking about a conversation I had with Pat before we joined the military. He spoke about the risks with signing the papers. How once we committed, we were at the mercy of the American leadership and the American people. How we could be thrown in a direction not of our volition. How fighting as a soldier would leave us without a voice ... until we get out.

"Much has happened since we handed over our voice:

"Somehow we were sent to invade a nation because it was a direct threat to the American people, or to the world, or harbored terrorists, or was involved in the Sept. 11 attacks, or received weapons-grade uranium from Niger, or had mobile weapons labs, or WMD, or had a need to be liberated, or we needed to establish a democracy, or stop an insurgency, or stop a civil war we created that can't be called a civil war even though it is. Something like that.



Cpl. Pat Tillman (center) poses with his brothers Richard (left) and Kevin in a photo from Pat's wedding. Kevin Tillman, a former Army Ranger who served in Iraq and Afghanistan with Pat, had remained silent since his brother's death in 2004, but this month he wrote a scathing indictment of the war in Iraq and the Bush administration.

"Somehow our elected leaders were subverting international law and humanity by setting up secret prisons around the world, secretly kidnapping people, secretly holding them indefinitely, secretly not charging them with anything, secretly torturing them. Somehow that overt policy of torture became the fault of a few 'bad apples' in the military.

"Somehow back at home, support for the soldiers meant having a 5-year-old kindergarten scribble a picture with crayons and send it overseas, or slapping stickers on cars, or lobbying Congress for an extra pad in a helmet. It's interesting that a soldier on his third or fourth tour should care about a drawing from a 5-year-old; or a faded sticker on a car as his friends die around him; or an extra pad in a helmet, as if it will protect him when an IED throws his vehicle 50 feet into the air as his body comes apart and his skin melts to the seat.

"Somehow the more soldiers who die, the more legitimate the illegal invasion becomes.

"Somehow American leadership, whose only credit is lying to its people and illegally invading a nation, has been allowed to steal the courage, virtue and honor of its soldiers on the

ground.

"Somehow those afraid to fight an illegal invasion decades ago are allowed to send soldiers to die for an illegal invasion they started.

"Somehow faking character, virtue and strength is tolerated.

"Somehow profiting from tragedy and horror is tolerated.

"Somehow the death of tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of people is tolerated.

"Somehow subversion of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution is tolerated.

"Somehow suspension of habeas corpus is supposed to keep this country safe.

"Somehow torture is tolerated.

"Somehow lying is tolerated.

"Somehow reason is being discarded for faith, dogma, and nonsense.

"Somehow American leadership managed to create a more dangerous world.

"Somehow a narrative is more important than reality.

"Somehow America has become a country that projects everything that it is not and condemns everything that it is.

"Somehow the most reasonable, trusted and respected country in the world has become one of the most irrational, belligerent, feared, and dis-

trusted countries in the world.

"Somehow being politically informed, diligent, and skeptical has been replaced by apathy through active ignorance.

"Somehow the same incompetent, narcissistic, virtueless, vacuous, malicious criminals are still in charge of this country.

"Somehow this is tolerated.

"Somehow nobody is accountable for this.

"In a democracy, the policy of the leaders is the policy of the people. So don't be shocked when our grandkids bury much of this generation as traitors to the nation, to the world and to humanity. Most likely, they will come to know that 'somehow' was nurtured by fear, insecurity and indifference, leaving the country vulnerable to unchecked, unchallenged parasites.

"Luckily this country is still a democracy. People still have a voice. People still can take action. It can start after Pat's birthday."

Kevin Tillman's election message — and, thankfully, with its references to Nov. 7, there can be no question that this is an election message — is not particularly long. With a little trimming, it might make a compelling radio or television commercial. After all, this is the dose of truth that needs to be administered to voters who are still searching for perspective as they prepare to cast their ballots.

But Kevin Tillman's message ought not be circulated by a campaign committee or a political party. It should be shared, citizen to citizen, first on the Internet, but then in phone calls to family members and old friends, in conversations over coffee and along the sideline at the soccer field, in leaflets slipped under the doors of neighbors and handed to one another after church.

This is the message that, unvarnished and unpackaged, can touch the hearts and the minds of voters who — if they read seriously the words of the brother who made it back — will come to understand that they can and must redeem the American experiment on the day "After Pat's Birthday."

John Nichols is associate editor of The Capital Times.
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Voice of the People

Middleton's Wexler: Falk is best choice to be next attorney general

Dear Editor: I support the campaign of Kathleen Falk to become Wisconsin's next attorney general.

It has been my good fortune to know and work with Kathleen since her days as a public intervenor with the attorney general's office. I did get to know her while I worked as a legislative aide in the state Legislature and as a member of the Middleton City Council. I have no doubt that she would serve Wisconsin well as our attorney general.

Although we certainly don't agree on every issue facing our constituents (I'd be suspicious if we did), I have always found Kathleen to be straightforward and committed to representing Dane County to the best of her ability. Without question, she would bring an unparalleled level of integrity to the attorney general's office that is so vitally needed.

In this day and age when many political leaders are held in such low regard (many with very good reason), Kathleen Falk would lead our state's Justice Department to new levels of

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credibility and respect.

As a longtime legislative aide, I know just how much the attorney general can influence state legal policy and advocate for important legal issues. The last thing we need in that office at this time is a drastic shift to the right to match the unresponsive and highly questionable priorities being promoted by the current legislative leadership.

I strongly urge readers of The Capital Times to vote for Kathleen Falk for attorney general on Nov. 7. With her election, we will all be winners in the years ahead.

Jim Wexler, president
Middleton City Council

Baldwin votes right but bad laws win

Dear Editor: On international issues U.S. Rep. Tammy Baldwin consistently stands up and is counted for the cause of decency, respect for human life, and the rule of law in the world community. She presents her ideas clearly and with style. In fact I have never been so well represented in the U.S. House of Representatives as I have since 1999 living here in the 2nd District of Wisconsin.

Baldwin opposed the Enemy Combatant Military Commissions Act of 2006, which defies the Geneva Conventions. But the bill passed and now the U.S. is on record giving President Bush the power to decide who is an "enemy combatant," and denying that person a writ of habeas corpus.

Baldwin voted against the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery be-

cause two-thirds of the money went to fund the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Out of the \$94.5 billion that the bill provided, \$65.8 billion went to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the bill passed and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq go on with daily reports of more carnage.

Baldwin was one of 24 Congress members co-sponsoring the House Resolution for a cease-fire to stop the bombing of Lebanon. But the resolution was not supported by enough House members so the bombing of Lebanon went on for 34 days, leaving Lebanon with billions of dollars of damage.

It is very stressful seeing harmful legislation passed and our country going in the wrong direction in spite of all Baldwin's efforts. Nevertheless she stands tall upholding our values.

Lee Brown
Madison

DOONESBURY by Garry Trudeau

Don't listen to bishop on amendment

Dear Editor: Recently at Sunday Mass, motivated by the readings of the day from Scripture, our pastor warmly spoke of the ideal Christian marriage and family and then concluded with our bishop's advice to vote for the so-called marriage amendment on the Nov. 7 ballot.

I do not see the connection, and I object to being told from the pulpit how to vote.

Christian marriage and family life are not threatened, but this proposed amendment aims to deny basic human rights to those many in our society who are not of the strictly Catholic persuasion. It is undemocratic and uncharitable. Please, my fellow Catholics, do not listen to your bishop in this matter.

Sophie K. Zermuehlen
Madison

Equal rights are meant for everyone

Dear Editor: Please vote no on the same-sex marriage ban amendment.

I am a Christian mom/grandma who believes in separation of church and state. Equal rights are for all,

even those who are not like you. "Judge not ..."

Georgianna Stebnitz
Madison

In our elections, recounts must be transparent

Dear Editor: For Rob Zaleski's front page article on alleged massive election fraud in Ohio in 2004, he interviewed a man who offered evidence of fraud and also those who tried to debunk that evidence.

Perhaps he should have asked a more basic question. Is it the job of critics to produce airtight evidence of massive vote stealing, or should it be the responsibility of election administrators to offer convincing evidence that the votes have been counted correctly?

Transparent recounts are essential to voter confidence. In Ohio, three people have been indicted for rigging the 2004 recount. Instead of randomly selecting precincts for a manual recount, they are accused of secretly pre-selecting precincts that they knew would match election night results.

In Milwaukee in September, election officials admitted they made a programming error, but insisted it didn't affect the vote count for candidates. But they offered no evidence, since they did not manually tally any ballots. The declared loser of the sheriff's race declined to ask for a recount, since the recount would have been done by machines.

In Wisconsin, as voters are becoming more concerned about the accuracy of the vote count, our Legislature inexplicably removed transparency from recounts. Manual recounts in Wisconsin are a thing of the past, as the new law effective July 1 requires all machine-readable ballots to be recounted by machine.

During this campaign season, let's ask our legislators where they stand on the transparency of recounts. Why place blind faith in the machines? If machines are used for recounts, it should be required that at least 10 percent of the wards are manually recounted.

Paul Malischke
Madison