

# From curb to college to... Congress?

■ *Last-ditch effort puts former dropout back on track to success*

**P**atrick Stupfel began skipping school in fourth grade, when his divorced parents were working long hours and he was forced to take the bus to school.

Teachers and counselors and administrators at the 13 schools he's attended over the years — a mix of public and alternative and private Catholic schools in Portland — tried to reach out and help him, but he refused.

He also paid no heed to his parents, who were struggling to put food on the table.

"I was such a stubborn kid," the 20-year-old says now. "I didn't see the relevance of school. ... I slipped through every crack possible."

By his junior year at Franklin High School, Stupfel had just five credits to his name, and he realized his days of acting like a "skater punk" were over.

He'd been skipping school for up to a month at a time, smoking marijuana and drinking, and getting into all sorts of other trouble with his friends. "I'm lucky I never got a Measure 11," he says now.

STORY BY

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Fast forward three years, and Stupfel is a high school graduate, a model student at

Portland Community College, a youth activist at City Hall and a legislative intern in Salem, with his eye on a career in politics.

"The military school's motto is 'Dream, believe, achieve' — I actually



took that to heart; I'm a testament to that," says Stupfel, who splits his time between his mom's house and dad's house, both in Southeast Portland.

Upon the advice of his administrators at Franklin when he hit his rock bottom, Stupfel signed up for the military school — the Oregon Youth Challenge Program, located in Bend.

"Think of 'Full Metal Jacket,' and it's pretty much just like that," he says, referencing the classic Vietnam War flick.

Stupfel spent six months there, earning 10 high school credits and a new work ethic. He returned to Port-

land to earn the credits he needed to graduate at the Portland Public Schools Reconnection Center and then Portland Night High School, both based at Benson Polytechnic High School.

Once back in Portland he steered clear of his old diversions by transforming himself into an overachiever. He served on not one or two, but six youth leadership committees.

They included the Multnomah Youth Commission, PPS Superintendent Carole Smith's Student Advisory Council (also known as SuperSAC), the PPS Long Range Facilities Planning committee, the PPS Citizen's Budget Review Committee, the PPS Student Union and the PPS Teacher Evaluation Committee.

The work gave him an insider's look at the way policy is shaped — and earned him a personal letter of recommendation from Superintendent Smith.

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— Patrick Stupfel

See STUPFEL / Page 2

# Stupfel: Taking classes in politics

■ From page 1

"He is assertive yet respectful, and very interested in engaging with others with the goal of learning, understanding and sharing," Smith wrote.

"His attitude, drive and commitment are focused on succeeding academically, and these are the traits that define his character; he is a remarkable young man who is bright, hardworking and determined."

Stupfel earned his long-awaited high school diploma in June 2011 in the Benson auditorium, and he already was thinking about the next diploma he'd earn.

College was just a fuzzy goal, however. It wasn't until he regis-

tered for an initiative called Future Connect that it began to take shape.

Future Connect was created by former Mayor Sam Adams as a way to connect low-income or first-generation college students with higher education.

Funded by the city and PCC, Future Connect is open to anyone with a high school diploma or GED within Multnomah County or the Hillsboro School District by the end of the year and who will be attending PCC starting this fall.

Stupfel, who's become a poster child for Future Connect, joined a group of students this month to lobby City Hall leaders to continue its \$48,000 per year investment in the program.

The initiative provides students with: scholarship money; a "college success coach;" free classes on career guidance; and access to internships, workshops and summer orientations to college.

Stupfel credits his success coach for helping him to get through the registration and financial aid processes at PCC, and being available anytime for a chat, even about his personal life. He's now one year into his

associate's degree, taking classes in politics, something he's always been interested in.

He remembers wanting to be a congressman as a young boy; now he's thinking about law school after spending some time abroad. The Semester at Sea program is a possibility; he also may head to Washington, D.C.

Last summer, Stupfel spent time there as part of the week-long Bill of Rights Institute's Constitutional Academy, where he met with members of Congress on Capitol Hill, attended lectures and networked with political leaders.

It reinforced his desire to work in government.

This year, in between his PCC course load, he's working in Salem two days per week for Democratic state Rep. Alyssa Keny-Guyer. (He gets to carpool with her in her Prius.)

Stupfel does constituent outreach, which means talking with people from various back-

grounds about public policy issues — something he feels well-versed on from his days on the youth commission and other groups.

Occasionally, his own political views differ from what he's working on, but Stupfel doesn't let that get in the way. "Politics is politics," he says. "It's not about the individual; it's about the issues."

Stupfel speaks with the confidence and poise of a politician, not to mention his voice. A natural baritone, he's lately developed an interest in being a voice actor.

As far as old habits go, Stupfel still skateboards to school when the weather allows. But he has no problem switching to his professional role for his days at the Legislature.

"When I started military school, I wasn't used to wearing a (shirt) collar," he says. "Now, I'm wearing a suit with a pocket scarf."