

George W. has come up with a bold idea that I enthusiastically support.

Bush says he wants to go to the moon and Mars, and I, for one, see no reason not to send him there! Who are we to stand in the way of progress?

Unfortunately, it turns out that he didn't mean that *he'd* go, but that America should launch a new mission into space—along with launching multibillions of our tax dollars out there, too. Actually, he's already taken us to the moon in terms of deficit spending: In only three short years, he's turned America's \$240 billion federal surplus into a \$530 billion budget deficit.

His aides say that Bush's proposal is about "presidential vision." Yeah, and you don't need the Hubble telescope to see where he's looking. This fuzzy-minded, big-budget Mars scheme hauls space shuttles full of our tax dollars into the vaults of some of his biggest campaign contributors. For decades into the future, corporate contractors will be fattening themselves at this trough. It will also empty our public treasury of any remaining possibility to finance the things we really need—such as good health-care for everyone, the best education for every child, and a crash program to give America energy independence by developing our country's vast alternative-energy sources.

**A LUXURIOUS
HOLIDAY**

George W.'s latest tax cuts are working! They produced a bonanza of consumer spending in the recent holiday season!

What? You say you didn't get enough of a tax cut to even notice, much less enjoy a bonanza of consumerism?

Well, bucko, that's because you don't shop at the right places! While Wal-Mart and Target had low holiday sales, Neiman Marcus, Tiffany, Saks Fifth Avenue, and other purveyors of luxury goods enjoyed booming

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The



LOWDOWN

■ Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer ■ Vol. 6 No. 2 ■ February 2004

The White House orders us to support our troops—but they don't

The Bushites' betrayal of our troops and vets

If hypocrisy were a drug, Washington would be the crack capital of the world. Congressional and White House leaders these days seem to get up every morning and inject, smoke, snort, and otherwise mainline a doozy of a dose of hypocrisy to get them through their day.

On no issue is this addiction more obvious than in their treatment of America's soldiers and veterans. Led by BushCheneyRumsfeld&Gang, politicians constantly bellow: "Support our troops!" They're particularly quick to hurl this red, white, and blue shout at any of us who dare to question the motives and rationale behind their bloody war in Iraq.

Most recently, Bush positioned himself as the soldier's president during his State of the Union speech, declaring: "Many of our troops are listening tonight. And I want you and your families to know...my administration, and this Congress, will give you the resources you need to fight and win the war on terror."

What a hypocrite!

If you want to know how the Bushites "support our troops," check with any of

the thousands of stunned military families who have learned that Bush's Pentagon has failed to provide essential equipment needed by our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan—everything from life-saving body armor to warm gloves, from rifles that work to flashlights. The families, having received desperate calls, emails and letters from the front lines, literally have had to go to their local stores, buy equipment, and ship it to their loved ones!

Yes, the same Pentagon that sops up \$400 billion of our tax dollars every year (plus the \$87 billion add-on it was given last year to pay for Bush's Iraqi occupation) is shamelessly short-changing the grunts who are putting their lives on the line every day.

Kevlar vests

One important innovation for ground troops is a simple, relatively lightweight vest that contains ceramic plates of boron carbide capable of stopping powerful AK-47 bullets and flying shrapnel. Simply put, these vests are life-savers in a firefight or a bomb blast—and they were readily available to the Pentagon from U.S. manufacturers.

This is why Joe Werfelman was dismayed to hear from his son that he and other soldiers in Iraq didn't have the vests. "He called us frantically three or four times on this," Werfelman told *The*



sales to the Cadillac and Hummer crowd.

How so? Well, while a typical family might have gotten a \$600 tax cut, the millionaire families averaged \$93,000 each. This is why the CEO of Neiman Marcus exulted that holiday shoppers in his swank stores “proved that luxury is alive.” Indeed, sales of such stocking stuffers as \$5,000-to-\$10,000 watches were up 16 percent this season over last! Neiman reported that sales of Chanel, Prada, and Gucci handbags were “absolutely miraculous.”

Actually, there’s nothing miraculous about it. When the president takes cold, hard cash out of the public treasury and hands it to the high rollers, they do what high rollers always do—roll out the Escalade and go to Neiman’s.

POSTURING AT KING’S GRAVE

Preachers talk about the “Sunday saints” in their congregations—those people who make sure to sit in the front-row pews on Sunday mornings, but spend the other six days of the week wantonly violating commandments and ignoring the ethical teachings of the church.

I thought of Sunday saints when I saw that George W. Bush made a conspicuous, 15-minute stop to lay a wreath at the tomb of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Atlanta on the birthday of the great civil-rights leader. It was a carefully staged effort intended to suggest that George is a devotee of Dr. King’s teachings and his historic fight for justice.

But within hours of leaving the wreath, Bush used a sneaky maneuver to appoint someone whom NAACP leader Julian Bond calls a “segregationist judge” to the federal appeals court—Mississippi’s Charles Pickering, who has twice been rejected by the Senate Judiciary Committee for being “insensitive” on racial issues.

The disparity between George’s posturing and his policies wasn’t lost on the people of Atlanta. Bush had

Washington Post. Instead, the troops had been issued Vietnam-era flak jackets that, as one soldier put it, “couldn’t stop a rock.” So Werfelman scrambled, found a New Jersey company that makes the ceramic gear, paid \$660 of his own money, and shipped it off to Iraq.

“If the Army is not going to protect him, we’ve got to do it,” says Joe.

Enraged military families later learned that even the small contingent of troops that Mongolia sent to Iraq came with the life-saving vests. Hauled before a House committee, General John Abizaid, the head of U.S. forces in Iraq, said he couldn’t “answer for the record why we started this war with protective vests that were in short supply.”

Thanks to the howl and heat from the grass-roots, Congress added money to the Pentagon’s already bloated budget last fall, requiring body armor for all soldiers in Iraq. Finally, nearly a year after Bush started his war—and after an untold number of unnecessary deaths—our troops are receiving the vests.

Pentagon budgeteers are quietly skimping on even the small stuff for our soldiers. A Houston father visited his Marine son at Camp Pendleton a year ago, just before the son shipped out to Iraq. “I was shocked and outraged to hear the list of items the Marine Corps was NOT going to provide,” he reported. The father rushed to a surplus store and bought his son \$250 worth of essentials—mosquito netting, a flashlight, a canteen, undershirts, assorted hitches and straps, and so on.

The Pentagon, the White House, and Congress should have known that our ground troops would be ill-equipped, because the infantry they sent into Afghanistan in 2002 in search of Al Qaeda and Taliban forces was likewise short

on supplies. Families of these GIs were forced to buy gloves, cushioned socks, cargo belts, flashlights, padded rucksack straps, hydration systems, satellite position-finders, and other basics to send to the troops—things the Pentagon chose not to provide, even though it spent some \$690 million that same year just on the cost-overrun charged by Lockheed-Martin for the unnecessary F-22 jet fighter it is developing.

Washington lavishes billions on fat-cat weapons-makers (whose sons and daughters mostly don’t go to war), while it tells our troops on the ground to send their military-shopping lists home to their families.

Stuff happens

Speaking of weapons-makers, our troops have also found that many of their weapons don’t work. In the Pentagon’s hype of the Jessica Lynch story, for example, the drama was placed on her rescue, but the real drama happened just prior to her capture. Here’s an excerpt from her recent ABC interview with Diane Sawyer:

SAWYER: “How did you find out your gun was jammed?”

LYNCH: “When we were told to lock and load, that’s when my weapon jammed. I mean, all the bullets and stuff just jammed up inside.”

The M-16 rifle that “jammed up” on Lynch was infamous for having the exact same problem in the Vietnam War, 35 years before. Back then, the complaints from the field were so many and so angry that Congress held hearings, concluding that the gun had “serious and excessive malfunctions” and that the Army’s behavior in sending soldiers into combat with a weapon that had such known defects “border[ed] on criminal negligence.”

Isn’t the same true now?

Guns aren’t the only danger posed to our troops by their leaders in the Pentagon. Last November 2, 16 American soldiers were killed and 20 wounded when a missile

hit their Chinook helicopter. Missing from that Chinook, and many other helicopters under fire in this war, was an “aircraft survivability” package that includes an infrared jammer and flare dispenser to decoy heat-seeking missiles. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Illinois) learned that copter crews had been beseeching higher-ups for months to get these packages, to no avail. In an email to Durbin, one of the copter pilots said: “So we were essentially flying around for five months with no anti-missile equipment. For the life of me, I cannot understand what goes through the head of commanders that would load 30 soldiers into an aircraft with no protection against a credible threat.”

Wouldn’t it be interesting to ask the Commander in Chief that question?

A Pentagon spokesman says it doesn’t require manufacturers to provide the systems as standard equipment, instead leaving it up to unit commanders to install them... if the commanders can find any.

The wounded

It’s been fairly widely reported that the White House won’t allow the media to cover the arrival at a Delaware Air Force base of coffins from Iraq and Afghanistan, and that Bush’s handlers have insisted that he not attend the funeral of even a single one of the 500-plus soldiers who’ve come home in those coffins. Bad political image, they say, preferring to push an upbeat message of the “progress” being made in both countries. Their attitude is best summed up by Rep. George Nethercutt (R-Washington), who made a four-day jaunt to Iraq and concluded: “The story of what we’ve done in Iraq is remarkable. It is a better and more important story than losing a couple of soldiers every day.”

Less coverage, however, has been given to the nearly 3,000 soldiers who’ve been wounded by gunfire, mortars, car bombs,

Do something!

Information: Military Families Speak Out (www.mfso.org); Disabled American Veterans (www.dav.org) Veterans for Peace (www.veteransforpeace.org)

Legislation: Rep. Lane Evans. A Vietnam Vet who is the ranking Dem of the veterans committee.

Agitation: MFSO.org

There is also www.anysoldier.us. This website allow folks to directly help our soldiers by sending them things that U.S. troops in Iraq have requested. Although the website doesn’t say this, many of the items soldiers have asked for should have been provided by the Pentagon.

Halliburton's Kitchen

Halliburton, Dick Cheney's former employer and still his financial benefactor, has gotten lots of bad ink for gouging us taxpayers on the price of gasoline that it's delivering to Iraq, charging more than twice as much as other providers.

Less known is another Halliburton contract with the Pentagon, this one to serve hot meals to 110,000 of our troops in Iraq at the cost of \$28 a day for each person — about \$3 million a day to Halliburton.

The food is bad. I don't mean untasty: It's "dirty," according to a Pentagon inspection team that found "blood all over the floor... dirty salad bar... rotting meats ...

and vegetables" and other nastiness in four of the military messes Halliburton is paid to operate.

Included among Halliburton's dirty-food eateries was the Baghdad mess hall that Bush used for his Thanksgiving publicity stunt, flying in and out of Iraq for a quickie photo-op. The event produced a news photo of the President holding a beautifully cooked turkey as though presenting it to the troops at the mess hall. But Bush's turkey was just a prop; the troops weren't served it, instead getting some pre-sliced turkey-like product from Halliburton's kitchen. Wonder if George bothered to take a peek back there?

crashes, and other accidents. Initially, the wounded are taken to the 28th Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad. The doctors and nurses there are excellent—but, again, they are short-handed and often short on supplies. CSH Commander Beverly Pritchett says: "It's very frustrating when a physician or surgeon comes to me and says, 'I need this,' and eight weeks later I still can't give him that. I know if I got on the phone and used my own credit card, I could get it here."

In the best can-do spirit of the U.S. military, the CSH staff is creative: For example, after soldiers go through surgery, their bodies can become dangerously cold, sometimes resulting in death. Having been issued no equipment to deal with this, a nurse set up a cardboard box big enough to hold a person (like the homeless use on the streets), went out and bought a hair dryer, and rigged it to blow warm air on the patient. Dubbed the "Chief Cuddler," it has saved more than 50 lives. While proud of such innovations, Commander Pritchett is angry that her staff has to resort to them.

Then the wounded are sent back

to the U.S., supposedly for the expert care they so obviously deserve. They arrive, however, to no fanfare, no greetings by the politicians who sent them to war. The White House has decreed that the huge transport planes bringing the wounded home must arrive at Andrews Air Force Base in the dark of night, off-limits to the media as the wounded are offloaded into ambulances.

Then they are handed off from the Pentagon to the Department of Veterans Affairs, where they are often wounded anew by dismal treatment. Last fall, Bill Moyers' *Now* program reported on the case of Billy Bisel.

Under mortar fire in Afghanistan, Billy dove for cover and broke his neck. He required two surgeries to install a metal plate, and was left so debilitated that he couldn't return to his carpentry and welding work. Seeking rehab and the disability benefits he was due, Billy started calling up the VA's bureaucracy. He says they told him to "shut up." Here's an excerpt from his *Now* interview:

NOW: "They didn't say, 'Shut up'."

BISEL: "Yes, they did."

NOW: "They said, 'Shut up'?"

BISEL: "Literally, yes. I needed to quite bitchin', I needed to quit complainin', I needed to just go home and wait until the paper-work comes in."

Now went on to report: "Nineteen months after he got back from Afghanistan, Billy Bisel was still waiting."

Indeed, the average wait that a vet endures to get a medical appointment at a VA hospital is seven months. Welcome home, soldier.

A helping hand

Since 1920, the Disabled American Veterans group has been a lifeline to wounded vets, sending its trained people into military hospitals to tell the wounded about their rights, benefits, and options and to help guide them through the bureaucratic maze back into civilian life.

This relationship has gone smoothly for 83 years... until now. Citing "security" concerns, the Pentagon recently has severely restricted the DAV's work. At the Army's Walter Reed hospital, for example, requests to visit a patient must now be made through headquarters, which then selects

actually flown there for a million-dollar fund-raiser, but hundreds of King's faithful greeted him with a cascade of boos and protest chants. George's handlers put police in riot gear atop a row of buses to keep the people in their place—a perfect example of the kind of establishment show of force against common folks that Dr. King would have recognized and rebelled against.

THE BLOODY LIES OF GEORGE W. BUSH

More than 500 American soldiers have now died in Bush's ongoing Iraqi war. Untold thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians have also died.

Why? Because, Bush said, Saddam Hussein posed a "mortal threat" that we had to "pre-empt" before "mushroom clouds" rose over our country.

Now the Bushites' chief weapons inspector, David Kay, says there were no such WMD, and the Army's own War College says the invasion "was a war-of-choice," not of necessity.

These are the exact words the Bushites used to persuade us:

George Bush: There is "no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised."

Dick Cheney: "There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction."

Donald Rumsfeld: "We know where they are."

Colin Powell: "Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option."

THE CORPORATE ABANDONMENT OF AMERICA

For years now, American blue-collar jobs have been hauled offshore to faraway havens of low-wage production. Now hundreds of thousands (and soon to be millions) of well-paying white-collar and high-tech jobs are

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being shipped overseas.

IBM, which is leading the way, even has coined a corporate euphemism for moving white-collar jobs out of the country: "Global sourcing." A Microsoft executive has instructed department heads to "Think India" and to "pick something to move offshore today."

OK, if CEOs have no obligation to us, why should we feel any obligation to them? As they separate their corporate fortunes from the well-being of our families, communities, and country, we should separate them from the tax breaks, subsidies, regulatory favors, and political privileges they've gotten from us.

GOING AFTER FDR'S HEAD

Anyone who still thinks there's not a dime's worth of difference between the two parties should take a look at a current Washington squabble over the dime itself.

A gaggle of top Republican leaders in Congress—including the legislative thug, Tom DeLay—are furiously pushing a bill to remove the likeness of Franklin D. Roosevelt from the coin and replace it with Ronald Reagan!

Democrats in Congress point out that FDR's face was put on the coin not merely because he was president, but especially because he founded the March of Dimes organization, through which America's children collected the dimes that funded research which rid the world of polio, the awful disease that had put Roosevelt himself in a wheelchair.

But Democrats are not alone in opposing this effort to scrape FDR off the dime. None other than Nancy Reagan opposes it. Ronald Reagan was proud to say he voted for Roosevelt in all four of his presidential elections, and that Democrat FDR was the greatest president of the century.

To help stop this silliness on the dime, call the office of Rep. Jim McGovern at 202-225-6101.

which patients the DAV can see. A military escort accompanies the DAV representatives and closely monitors their conversations. As DAV director David Gorman said in a hot letter to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld last month, this surveillance "is particularly unnerving and inappropriate," for these conversations need to be confidential.

One reason the Pentagon might not want the wounded to get the help they need is that the Bushites have been relentlessly trying to cut back on benefits to the very veterans they praise so loudly in public. The White House and Congress have just refused a \$30 billion budget request that the VA says is necessary merely to maintain its current inadequate level of services, leaving the agency nearly \$4 billion short. Remember, the Bushites got \$20 billion from Congress to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, including hospitals—but they're taking \$4 billion from America's hospitalized vets.

And they're ripping off retired, disabled vets as well. In his 2000 campaign, George W. solemnly pledged to fix a gross unfairness that for decades has required 20-year military veterans who were injured in wars to deduct their disability compensation from their retirement pay. Dubbed the "disabled veterans tax," this practice both injures and insults our vets, and Bush's promise to kill it was a big reason he won the military vote in '00.

But last year, as a large, bipartisan majority of Congress was moving to provide full retirement and disability pay for the nearly 600,000 people who qualify, Bush suddenly double-crossed the vets.

He dispatched Rummy himself to tell Congress that it was too costly and that Bush would veto the change.

With cries of "betrayal," the vets put the heat on GOP Congressional leaders, who passed a provision they said would provide some "special compensation" to these retirees. But this is a cynical political hoax. The Republican scheme leaves out two-thirds of the disabled and creates a convoluted bureaucratic process that will effectively shut out the rest.

Get ready to upchuck

This White House also tried to hold down the combat pay of soldiers serving in Bush's wars, and it opposed an increase in the \$6,000 one-time payment made to families of troops killed on duty (Congress later ignored Bush and doubled this amount).

But, to plumb the depths of Bushite hypocrisy, check out their sickening treatment of 17 American prisoners of war from the first Gulf War in 1991.

These men were brutally tortured by Saddam's henchmen—punched, kicked, clubbed, burned, electrically shocked, starved, you name it. But they endured, returning home in '91, where they were welcomed by then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney. "Your country is opening its arms to greet you," he gushed.

A decade later, the POWs found some measure of justice in a law that allowed them to sue the Iraqi government for the physical and psychological damage they

had suffered, with payments to be made from frozen Iraqi assets that the country's ruling elites had stashed in foreign banks. In 2002, a judge awarded these 17 POWs nearly \$1 billion in damages.

Good! But wait—Bush's Justice Department rushed in to stop that payout and to wipe the case from the books, as though the torture never happened!

Their rationale? They said that Bush had confiscated these frozen assets last March when he launched his war on Iraq, so the money was no longer an Iraqi asset, but rather U.S. government property.

The White House said that, although it could choose to use the money to pay the POWs, it had decided not to, claiming that the money was needed "for the urgent national-security needs of rebuilding Iraq." Said POW Jeff Fox: "It sends a very bad message that a Commander in Chief would place veterans and prisoners of war second behind a foreign nation."

Asked last fall by CBS to comment, Dick Cheney's aide said he was "too busy." The White House has not even had a low-level staffer—much less the president—give these 17 POWs the courtesy of a phone call.

However you feel about the war and the occupation of Iraq, it's time to stop the hypocrisy. I dare say that if the loved ones of Bush and Cheney, or Halliburton executives, or Congressional leaders, or the media warmongers and other elites, had to put their butts on the line as our soldiers and veterans have done, our government would "support the troops" not just in rhetoric, but in deed.

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THE WHITE HOUSE BETRAYS OUR TROOPS AND VETS

- 1 A shortage of bullet-proof vests
- 2 Jessica Lynch's gun jammed
- 3 Hiding the dead and wounded
- 4 Vets tortured, then robbed