

**THE DRAFT**

There's a huge, hulking, hairy beast lurking in the corner that the Powers That Be don't want you to notice: The draft.

Oh, no, insists George W, "We're not going to have a draft, period."

But the situation in Iraq is getting worse by the day—and our so-called "leaders" don't have a clue what to do except send more troops. Indeed, top military analysts concede that our troops will have to occupy that country for another 10-20 years.

Meanwhile, Bush is already pushing for his next war—against Iran. There's also that boiling pot in North Korea, a nation that really does have weapons of mass destruction; we're still in Afghanistan; there's the genocide in Darfur; we're sinking more troops into the jungle of Colombia, and we're constantly told to expect yet another major hit on America by al Qaeda.

Where will the Bushites get the troops for all of this? Not by continuing to force troops to extend their stay in Iraq—there's already rebellion within the ranks against this illegal conscription. The volunteer army? Guess what—recruitment is way off now that potential volunteers see the Bushites' inept handling of their wars.

Just as George dodged the draft in his day, he's now dodging the question whether he'll impose the draft on this generation.

**KING GEORGE NIXES DISSENT**

In monarchies, the peasants aren't even supposed to speak to the royals unless they're spoken to first. In democracies, however, the folks are supposed to be free to speak their minds to those in power.

Under the reign of King George the W. and his Chief Justice Ashcroft, however, the folks are supposed to give fealty to the king—or suffer severe consequences for their disobedience. The unpatriotic Patriot Act puts this new order of things into

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The  **LOWDOWN**  
 Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer ■ Vol. 6 No. 10 ■ October 2004

Hey, there's good news at the grassroots  
**Progressive groups are busting out all over**

**H**ey, come on, progressives—buck up! There's been too much doom and gloom—especially among inside-the-belt-way progressives—about John Kerry's chances on Nov. 2. Maybe they inherited an extra dour gene, or maybe they're spending too much time listening to pollsters and pundits. Of course there's the occasional discouraging campaign news, but don't wallow in it, for there's also greatly encouraging news:

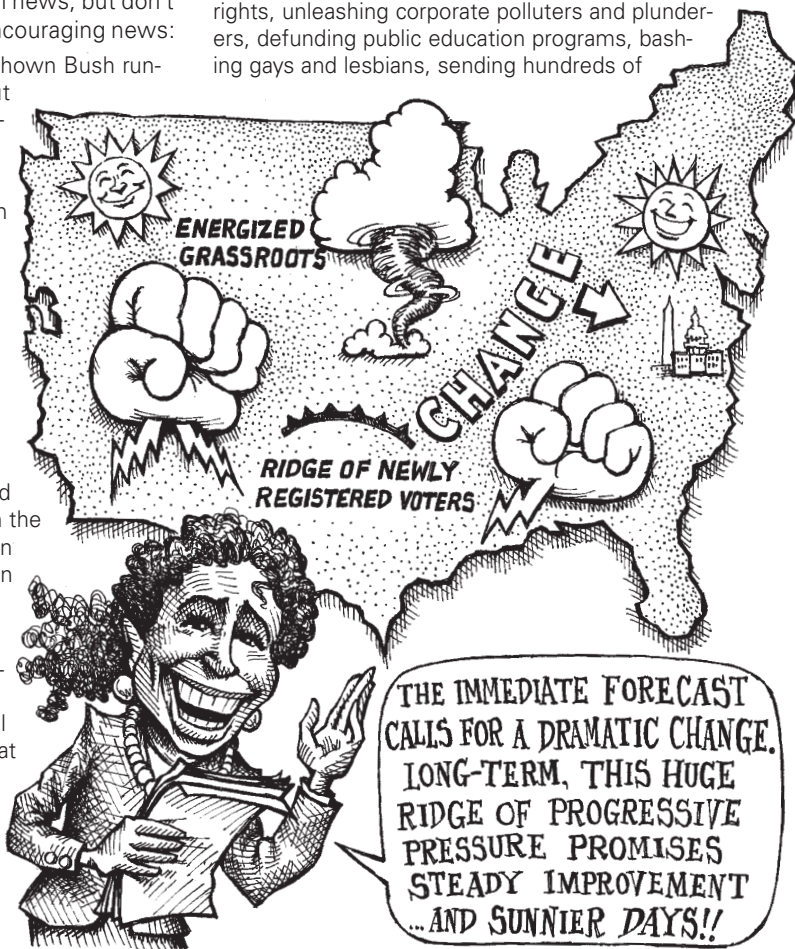
- **Yes**, I know that some polls have shown Bush running even with Kerry or ahead—but the pollsters are vastly undercounting anti-Bush votes.
- **Yes**, I know that Kerry's charisma quotient ranks somewhere between that of Al Gore and Michael Dukakis—but John's been perking up lately, showing a bit of populist passion, striking some solid blows, and winning all three debates.
- **Yes**, I know that the Bushites are creepy-scary thugs who've shown that they'll lie, cheat, and steal to win, but they've been doing such things so often that their color-coded bag of tricks has lost credibility with the general public—the curtain has been pulled back, and the wizard has been revealed to be just a spoiled, insecure, petulant little son of a Bush.

**Prediction:** I believe George W. is a one-term president, just like his daddy was.

I don't say this glibly, nor is it wishful thinking. My prediction is based on what I've seen at the grassroots level all across the country. As many of you *Lowdowners* know, I've been traveling practically nonstop since mid-July, going to 50-some cities and towns as part of my "Show Bush the Door in '04" tour. Using my new book (*Let's*

*Stop Beating Around the Bush*) as a focal point, I've been crisscrossing America, speaking with folks in salons and saloons, labor halls and cow barns, bookstores and art museums, churches and theaters, on country fairgrounds, in civic centers, on campuses, in parks, and even inside neon-lit dance halls.

I find that people are onto the Bushites—and why wouldn't they be? Bush Inc. has spent nearly four years downsizing the middle-class, offshoring our best jobs, ignoring the growing cries for health care, gutting worker rights, unleashing corporate polluters and plunderers, defunding public education programs, bashing gays and lesbians, sending hundreds of



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law. Here are three stories that tell us how the new order works in the streets of America today:

1 Earlier this year, Sue Niederer of Hopewell, NJ, learned that her 24-year-old son Seth had been killed in Iraq while trying to defuse a roadside bomb. Enraged, she went to a Laura Bush rally wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with a picture of Seth and the words "President Bush Killed My Son." As Laura nattered on about the heroic nature of her husband's war, Ms. Niederer hollered out: "If the war is so essential to our national security, why aren't the Bush daughters enlisting in it?"

Police handcuffed her, hauled her to jail, and booked her for trespassing. The charge later had to be dropped...but the Secret Service is now hounding Sue for posting on a website that she'd like to "rip the president's head off" and "shoot him in the groin area." Of course she didn't mean that literally, but the vindictive Bushites are still out to destroy her.

To tell the monarchy of King George the W. to leave Sue Niederer alone, call the White House comment line at 202-456-1111.

2 Nicole and Jeff Rank, a young couple from Charleston, WV, were arrested on the grounds of their state capitol during a July 4 appearance by George W. for wearing hand-painted T-shirts with the "no" symbol slashed across Bush's name. That was it—they didn't shout, heckle, or disrupt anything, but two Secret Service agents demanded that they remove or cover their T-shirts. "No," they quietly said, so the agents instructed local police to arrest them. They were handcuffed, jailed, and charged with trespassing. Even more outrageously, Nicole—who works for a federal agency—was dismissed from her job.

But this arrest was also thrown out of court, and the federal agency backed down and rehired Nicole.

Jeff, a registered Republican, says: "Unless common citi-

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thousands of our loved ones into a deadly war of lies, empowering federal agents to stomp on our liberties, making wholesale arrests of peaceful dissenters...(gosh, so much to list, so little space).

Bush's policies are all big fat ugly hogs. The White House has tried to pretty them up with a coat of bright glossy lipstick—but who wants to kiss a hog? Even many of the people who voted for the "compassionate conservative" in 2000 have since found themselves up close and personal with the raw ugliness of the Bushite agenda, and they want no part of "Four More Years"—a partisan chant that most Americans now view as a direct threat.

It's no idle threat, either, for various Bushites have talked ominously of "the next" agenda, including a push to privatize Social Security, a war with Iran (while continuing to maintain our current troop levels in occupied Iraq, thus raising the stark possibility of a draft), a national sales tax that'll shift practically all federal taxation from the wealthy to the middle-class and poor people, an all-out drive for more NAFTAs, deep cuts in funding for education and other essential public needs, Patriot Act II, and much more federal debt piled on the backs of our children. There's a growing awareness among regular folks that Bush and his crowd are not your normal Republican conservatives—they're ultra-extremist, big-government corporatists, attempting to superimpose their Ayn Randian, Jerry Falwellian, Orwellian, Strangelovean ideology over our country's historic democratic values of fairness, justice, and equal opportunity for all.

This is a BIG TIME for America. It's not just another election—and I find in my travels that people not only are aware of this, but they're preparing to spring an election surprise on George W.

### The polls

OK, I'm out on a limb here, but I daresay that this won't be that close

of an election: Kerry will win going away. This has little to do with our boy John—and everything to do with an electorate that is fired up and on the move.

Lest you think I'm juiced up on jimson weed, let me make three points about the conventional wisdom of the pollsters, who (as of mid-October) assert that it's a nip-and-tuck race. First, pollsters are like cats watching the wrong mousehole, for they're only telephoning "likely voters"—those who've been voting consistently in past presidential elections. This leaves out half of America's eligible voters. This time—surprise, George!—a substantial number of the other half, the "unlikely voters," are going to show up at the polls, eager to punch out the Bushites who have been running roughshod over them.

A big indicator of this is the massive surge in voter registration. Election boards are swamped with new registrants, particularly in the so-called battleground states, where they're having to add staff and work around the clock to absorb the influx. For example, Philadelphia has had the highest number of new registrations in 21 years, Cleveland has more than doubled the number of new voters it had in 2000, St. Louis says it'll have the largest number of registered voters in its history...etc., etc. Even in supposedly Bush-safe "red states," the surge is phenomenal—in my Democratic town of Austin, new voters are up 64 percent over 2000.

What's going on? People are realizing that it matters. Bush's loss of the popular vote and his enthrone-ment by the Supreme Court last time around—combined with the extremist agenda he's pushed since then—has motivated folks to believe that they can make a difference this time...and must. "I've been too lazy," says Kurt Saukatis, a 43-year-old Pennsylvanian who did not go to the polls in 2000. He has

two 16-year-old sons. "The thought of a draft is scary," he says. Plus, he's worried about his job and the middle-class possibilities for his family: "All that money spent on Iraq, then old people can't buy medicine. Figure that out!"

Second, there's not only a tsunami of new voters, but also an intensity of opposition to BushCheney AshcroftRumsfeld & Gang that the pollsters can't measure. This intensity translates into real political action—people willing to volunteer, give money, argue with their ditto-head brothers-in-law, talk to their family and friends, and otherwise reach out personally to others.

Third—and this is a giant one—the pollsters are almost completely missing the coming youth vote. Since 1972, there's been a precipitous decline in turnout by the under-26 voter. Only about a third of these young folks have been voting, with the result that presidential campaigns have ignored them on the grounds that kids "don't do politics" anymore. Yoo-hoo...the kids are back, registering in record numbers! A March poll of college students found that 62 percent definitely plan to vote in November. "I am determined that my vote will be counted this year," says 25-year-old Rachele Reposa of Oakland, who didn't vote in 2000. "I do not want to go into war with other countries and waste billions of dollars when we need it over here."

There are 24 million of these 18-to-25-year-olds—yet few ever get a call from a pollster. This is because most of them don't use regular phones, relying instead on their cell phones. It's estimated that 21 million of them own cell phones. Pollsters can't reach them, so their voting preferences are simply not being counted. "The people who are using telephone surveys are in denial," says noted pollster John Zogby. "They try not to mention cell phones. They go ahead with a method that is old and wrong."

## Do something!

To get involved in your state check out the following organizations:

Public Interest Research Group: [www.pirg.org](http://www.pirg.org), 202-546-9707

ACORN: [www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org)

Voter Virgin: [www.votervirgin.com](http://www.votervirgin.com)

Indy Voter: [www.indyvoter.org](http://www.indyvoter.org) 212-283-8879

New Voters Project: [www.newvotersproject.org](http://www.newvotersproject.org)

## DIY politics

Harrell's hardware store, near my home in Austin, is a terrific place that'll not only sell you the one hinge you need rather than making you buy a whole box, but also offers free how-to advice and will even lend you a tool to do a particular job. Harrell's slogan is "Together, we can do-it-yourself."

This could well be the motto of the scores of scrappy and savvy political organizations that have popped up like beautiful weeds in this electoral season.

Their impact will reach way beyond this election, for nearly all of them are committed to creating an independent, progressive, web-connected, democratic base that will change American politics over the long haul, transforming it from the ground up. Toward that end, these groups are determinedly independent, purposely organized outside the Kerry campaign and the Democratic Party—indeed, most understand clearly that once the inaugural cheering is over next January, they will have to be in the face of a Kerry-Edwards administration.

**League of Pissed Off Voters.** What a great group this is! Organized in 70 cities in 26 states, these are young folks committed to educating, organizing, and mobilizing 18-to-35-year-olds into a unified, progressive political bloc. Conceived, founded, and implemented by and for young people, LoPOV comes with an anti-establishment attitude and a strong sense of sass and fun—but also a very serious purpose.

They've registered thousands of young voters, but they're going much deeper by training organizers, rallying young people to dig into the issues and candidates, teaching people how to hold the candidates they elect accountable, putting up their own members as candidates for local offices, and generally

teaching the young how to take charge of their own democracy. National league leader Adrienne Maree Brown, 25, says: "Folks get cast as apathetic when they just don't know the process for getting power in this country. We are the demystification league."

The league is big on the concept of do-it-yourself democracy, offering all sorts of how-to guidance for local chapters on such matters as holding your own strategy sessions, writing your own voters' guides ("You don't have to be a brain surgeon to know who sucks," they point out), throwing your own Politics 'n' Pizza fest (or 'n' Pina Coladas... 'n' Pierogies... 'n' Punk... 'n' whatever), hosting your own Slam Bush poetry slams, and organizing your own Party Squad.

Declaring that their goal is nothing less than "to build a progressive governing majority in our lifetime," LoPOV has already set Nov. 13-14 for local "Debrief and Next Steps" meetings nationwide, and it's planning to organize itself as a bottom-up national council controlled by representatives from each local chapter.

**ACORN.** This excellent organization of low-income folks, now organized in 35 states, has long been known for its grassroots ingenuity in mobilizing previously powerless people into potent players in local politics—and this year it has become the national champion of new voter registration. In a phenomenal organizing feat, ACORN has enlisted more than a million low-income working people onto America's voter rolls.

Going door to door—as well as to working-class shopping centers, street festivals, hip-hop concerts, naturalization ceremonies, and other high-traffic areas—ACORN members have taken their clipboards into communities that have traditionally been left out of the process and

ignored by both major parties. Its effort is particularly significant in the battleground states—for example, more than 187,000 new registrants in Florida, 158,000 in Ohio, and 120,000 in Pennsylvania.

**Leave No Voter Behind.** This is a dramatic electoral project by the MoveOn PAC, which has trained a skilled democratic army of 500 organizers to go into the key battleground states, working with 10,000 MoveOn precinct leaders to recruit tens of thousands of local volunteers. All of this to reach out—neighbor-to-neighbor, the most effective voter contact there is—to people in their communities who otherwise are not likely to vote.

Their goal is not merely registration and get-out-the-vote efforts, but specifically to produce 440,000 new voters for Kerry—votes he otherwise wouldn't get!

MoveOn is also pioneering a revolution in phone banking: Instead of gathering callers into a room with banks of phones, anyone can play at any time. From your home phone or your cell phone, if you've got a free moment, you can call an 800 number, enter an ID, hear the message of the day, and be connected to a potential undecided voter in a given state within seconds. "There is a feeling you have to tie people's shoes for them," says MoveOn's 24-year-old director, Eli Pariser. "But, in fact, politics does not require any special skill aside from those required in any social engagement."

**Music Row Democrats.** George W. and the GOP have generally tried to make themselves look populist by surrounding themselves with country musicians, claiming that Nashville is red-white-and-blue Republican Land. But hold your sorry horse right there, says a rowdy group of Nashville stars, songwriters, managers, and others—the majority of music-

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zens like ourselves are willing to stand and fight for their civil liberties, those very liberties that our nation was founded upon... will wither and erode until they are gone forever."

3 New York's billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg got into the act during the Republican National Convention. Bloomberg used the New York police as a bludgeon to crack down on dissenters.

Citizen Alex Pincus wasn't even a protestor—just a city resident who went out to a deli and innocently walked into a police dragnet. Pincus asked an officer how to get out of the way, was told "follow me"—then was grabbed by cops, handcuffed and forced to kneel for an hour before being tossed into a filthy makeshift cage topped with razor wire, where he was held for 25 hours without access to a lawyer. Bloomberg's police kept saying to him and all the others, "This is what you get for protesting."

The mayor later admitted that innocent citizens were abused, but the Gooberhead blamed the victims themselves: "If you go to where people are protesting and don't want to be part of the protest," he haughtily sniffed, "you're always going to run the risk that maybe you'll be tied up with it." Yeah—literally tied up!

Our liberties are not taken from us in one big bang of a coup d'etat, but rather slipped out from under us inch by inch by autocratic Goobers like Bloomberg.

## CONGRESS RAISES ITS OWN PAY

I bring you tidings of great joy! At last, our Congress critters have raised wages in America!

You're not silly enough to think for a moment that Congress would raise your wages, are you? For the past several years, they've kept the minimum wage in our country stuck at the paltry poverty level of \$5.15 an hour. It's their wages that they've just raised.

Again. This is the sixth pay hike that our lawmakers have bestowed upon themselves in the past six years. This time it's an extra \$4,000 each, boosting

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10/04

## The LOWDOWN

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their gross pay to about \$162,000 a year.

Congressional leaders sneak these steady increases through without a vote (a \$25,000 total over those six years) by making them automatic—but Rep. Jim Matheson, Democrat of Utah, keeps calling for a vote anyway. This year his colleagues again refused, 235 to 170, to cast a direct public vote on their money grab.

To learn how your member of Congress voted on Matheson's attempt at honesty, call Taxpayers for Common Sense at 1-800-TAXPAYER.

### HUMMER STUNNER

General Motors, the manufacturer of that ultimate in automotive macho, the Hummer, has licensed a new Hummer cologne selling for \$52 per (Hummer-shaped) bottle. GM says the scent is "masculine, with rugged and adventurous attributes," and "embodies all that Hummer is."

Hmmm. The Hummer is an absurdly expensive, gas-guzzling, low-performance, high-polluting, gussied-up chunk of automotive junk. What would that smell like? Lately I've seen more women driving these behemoths than men. Forget the masculinity pitch, this thing has turned into a girly car! I suggest they'd do better with a perfume than a cologne—preferably one with the alluring scent of money.

### NICKNAMING BUSH

Last issue of *The Lowdown* we asked for suggestions for a nickname for George W. Bush—and our email logjam tells us that two out of three *Lowdowners* would like to call him a lot of names. We'll do a complete report next issue but here's a few that are popular thus far—mostly in the form George "[blank]" Bush (which was itself a popular option): George Weasel Bush, WMD, Dumbya, Pinocchio, aWol, Witless, Whopper and Boy George. A couple of originals that caught our eye: George Orwellian Bush, George WTF Bush, POTUS DUFUS and Spurious George.

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industry people are Democrats.

They founded MRD to promote Democratic values and candidates, and to defend the First Amendment rights of music-row progressives to criticize the president whenever they feel the need. They have more than 1,500 members and are holding a series of "Kerry-glee" fundraisers, focusing especially on musical events in rural areas.

**Unions.** There's been a sea change in the union approach to presidential campaigns. Rather than simply sending money to the parties and accepting marching orders from the candidates, unions like AFSCME, SEIU, UNITE, HERE, the steelworkers and the AFL-CIO have been training their members and dispersing them into battleground states.

They go with many specific goals and are held accountable for them.

SEIU alone has 50,000 members volunteering a million hours to knock on 10 million doors and make 7 million phone calls. It has tapped more than 2,000 of its members from California and other "safe states" to work full-time in the swing states.

More than a quarter of all voters in 2000 came from union households.

### Grassroots galore

There are so many more efforts, nearly all of them unnoticed by the media powers. There's the League of Rural Voters (especially active in Iowa and Minnesota, going farm-to-farm), Voter Virgin (targeting first-time young voters with the slogan "Everybody's Doing It in '04" and advising them to practice safe voting), Wellstone Action (conducting a terrific series of trainings for grassroots organizers and candidates), Punkvoter, MustVote, Next Wave of

Women in Power, and on and on.

The grassroots are aflame with organizing, and the organizing is not merely about Kerry and '04.

Various groups are recruiting, training, and backing strong progressives running for local, state, and national offices. Howard Dean's new Democracy for America organization has more than 200 former Deaniacs running for office this year, and it's also backing "Dean's Dozens," including U.S. House and Senate candidates who've been endorsed by DFA and are receiving financial and organizational support from Dean's network. Many are expected to win this time, while many of the others are part of a long-term effort to develop grassroots political talent (both candidates and campaign organizers) and to build a progressive base.

Two other groups are focused on creating a "farm team" of "movement progressives." **Progressive Majority** is currently working with about 100 candidates that it has recruited and trained to run for state and local offices in '04 and '06. One of its primary goals is to build progressive majorities in 15 state legislatures by 2011, when those states will redraw the lines for congressional districts. "We're investing in people as opposed to specific races for offices," says one of PM's state directors.

Likewise, **21st Century Democrats** is out there building the political infrastructure to elect true progressives. It has trained 2,200 campaign organizers this year. The director of 21st Century Dems says, "We are focused on what really wins elections—direct personal contact with voters, front-porch politicking."

Not only is there good reason to be optimistic about Nov. 2: Over the long haul it's only going to get better, for people are on the move at America's grassroots.

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#### PROGRESSIVE GROUPS ARE BUSTING OUT ALL OVER

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- 3 Pissed-off voters
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