



LOWDOWN

Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer ♦ Vol 8 No.10 ♦ October 2006

"They're not political speeches
...I seriously hope that people
wouldn't politicize these issues."

GEORGE W, AUGUST 30, referring
to his cross-country speaking tour
to promote his war agenda,
castigate Democratic war critics,
and raise money for Republican
congressional candidates.

Election eve thoughts of a ramblin' man

Repubs have a rock on their back, Dems meekly mumble

A **S YOU READ THIS ISSUE OF THE *LOWDOWN*,** I'm out on the political trail, rambling back and forth across America in support of good grassroots groups, good issues, and a surprising number of good populist candidates. I spent practically all of September on the hustings, beginning with a two-day, five-city barnstorming tour across the Hawkeye State to support a savvy and scrappy coalition called Sensible Iowans (a redundancy if ever I heard one), and I ended the month at a spirited rally with a large crowd of feisty Democrats in (of all places) Kennebunkport, Maine—yes, right in the home nest of the plutocratic Bush clan! No doubt Homeland Security upped the local color code to "Bright Red" for that one!

I'll be crisscrossing the country again this month through Election day, from New Hampshire to California and all sorts of places in between. Since I'm literally a rambling man these days, this issue of the *Lowdown* is a road edition, offering some random political thoughts, observations, and tidbits from my travels.

The political climate

Among the political cognoscenti, it's fashionable these days to dis the body politic—aka, you and me. We are disparaged as being a bunch of clueless and malleable rubes who care more about who wins the latest "Survivor" matchup than who wins Congress. Of course, these pundits, consultants, lobbyists, and politicians spend way too much of their time in cocktail chit-chat rooms inhaling each others' hot breath.

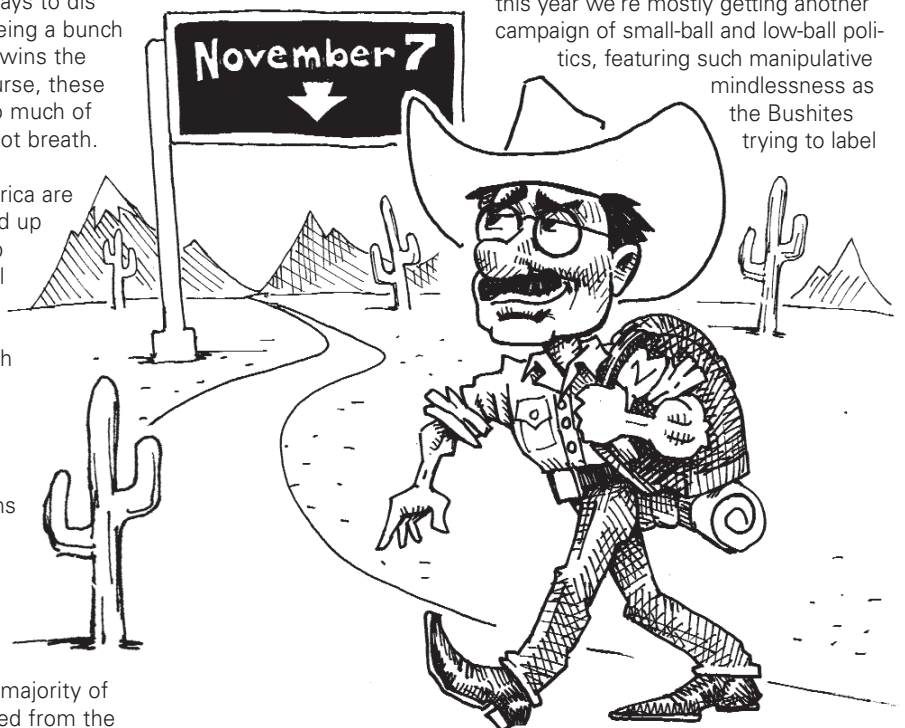
From my viewpoint out here in the hinterland, it's the cognoscenti who are the clueless ones. The people of America are soooooo much bigger than the politics that are being served up to us by the elites. I find that people everywhere are fed up with the red-state/blue-state hokum that passes for political discourse in our country, and they're in something of a purple rage about the system's abject failure to address the BIG matters that are on people's minds, particularly such populist issues as:

- **Falling wages** and falling middle-class opportunities.
- **Lousy health** care, or none at all.
- **A collapsing** national infrastructure, from water systems and roads to school buildings and parks.
- **Corporate** greed unleashed.
- **Money-corrupted** politics and government.
- **The death** of the Common Good.

Mainline polls confirm that these are big worries for the majority of folks, and that the public is growing more and more alienated from the

economic and political elites in charge. Sixty-three percent of Americans now say that our country is "off on the wrong track" (AP-Ipsos poll), 67% are "dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S." (Gallup Poll), and 51% expect that the next generation will be worse off economically.

People are aching for a politics that matters to them and offers a path to an America in which *they* matter again. That would be Big Politics. But this year we're mostly getting another campaign of small-ball and low-ball politics, featuring such manipulative mindlessness as the Bushites trying to label



Here's some big news on the agricultural front—this year's crop has reached the highest level ever, with an increase of 49% over last year's production!

Unfortunately, we're not talking about American corn, but the opium crop in Afghanistan.

Even though the Bushites failed to find Osama bin Laden there, either "dead or alive," we were told that they had set that country on an inexorable path to democracy. Mission accomplished!

But wait—Afghanistan has now turned as messy as Iraq. The Taliban is both resurgent and insurgent, Bush's handpicked leader can't travel outside of the capital of his own country, and the poppy fields—which sustain the Taliban with millions of drug-trafficking dollars—are flourishing again. Despite the fact that poppy eradication has cost us taxpayers millions of dollars, there was a 59% hike in the acreage devoted to poppies this year. "You can say it's out of control," said the head of the UN office on drugs.

So far, Bush & Company have spent \$88.2 billion of our tax money there and lost 3338 American lives. The result is not a shining monument to democracy and peace but a country at war with itself, currently supplying 92% of the world's opium crop.

MASS KILLERS
STRIKE AGAIN

For an example of Washington pampering an "axis of evil," you need look no further than RJ Reynolds, Philip Morris, and the other members of the global tobacco cartel. For decades, these greed-heads have intentionally addicted millions of people for profit, killing some

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all of their war critics "appeasers."

War whoops

Tony Snow, Bush's PR flak, tried to do a mini-McCarthy on the war issue by declaring in September that there are "some" in the Democratic party "who say that we shouldn't fight the [terrorists]; we shouldn't apprehend al Qaeda; we shouldn't detain al Qaeda; we shouldn't question al Qaeda; and we shouldn't listen to al Qaeda." Goodness gracious, Tony, give us the names of these traitorous Democrats so we can hunt them down like the filthy varmints they are!

Alas, poor Tony could not produce a single name.

And then Dick Cheney was unleashed. Snarling and snapping at Democrats who're calling for a withdrawal of troops from Iraq, the Veep flashed his crooked sneer and barked that these dastardly Democrats are out to "validate the al Qaeda strategy and invite more terrorist attacks" on America. Thank you, Dick. Now go back to your dungeon.

Next up was Donnie Rumsfeld. What a sputtering old goose he's become! The Pentagon chief is all honked off that we plebes have dared to criticize his handling of the war on terrorism, especially his disastrous diversion into Iraq. So, he has resorted to questioning our patriotism. Last month, he petulantly referred to us dissenters as people who always "blame America."

No, Rummy, *we blame you!* Indeed, we dissenters *are* America—61% of the people now oppose your Iraq war, 58% say it has not been worth the lives we've lost, and 75% say Iraq has deteriorated into civil war. We the People blame you, George, "Buckshot" Cheney, and the entire Bushite menagerie of war-mongers, ideological nutballs, war profiteers, and chicken hawks for squandering American lives, treasury, and reputation.

It's time to say the obvious—our

so-called "leaders" are losers. **Think about it:** First they lost Osama. They almost won Afghanistan, but they got distracted and lost it, too. Then they lost Iraq to civil war and theocracy. Here at home, they lost New Orleans. Hell, they even lost Pluto—one-ninth of our solar system is gone!

The poor GOP

I'm actually feeling a twinge of compassion for the Repubs. Poor babies, they're trying to run this year with a Gibraltar of weighty political negatives piled on their backs, including Iraq, Halliburton, Iran, congressional corruption, oil profits, CEO pay, corporate scandals, minimum wage, offshored jobs, trade scams, rising poverty, Katrina, health care, prescription drugs, Social Security privatization, tax boondoggles, national debt, torture, NSA spying, secret prisons, and "signing statements."

Most GOP congressional candidates who are in competitive races are scampering as fast as they can to get away from the Bush-CheneyRummy troika, which is about as popular this fall as E. coli spinach. Bush's approval rating is still stuck down at 37% (even after his September "Blitz of Fear" designed to spook voters into going Republican).

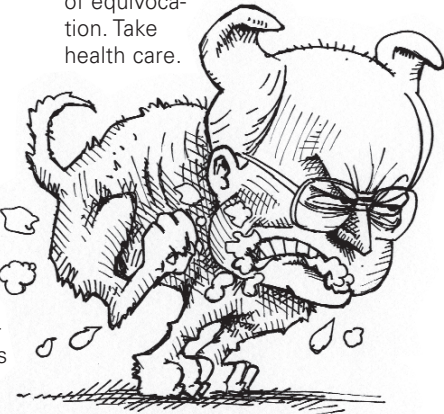
A new Associated Press-Ipsos survey of Southern women, a group that has backed George since 2000 because of his "religious values," finds that Bush's war is trumping his purported religiosity. Only 32% of women in the region still support his handling of both Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result, three out of five Southern women say they'll vote for Democrats next month. An indication of how Bush has fallen from favor with these ladies comes from a Georgia mother of three, Barbara Knight, who has been a Republican since birth. "I think history will show him to be the worst

president since Ulysses S. Grant," she said. Oh, that stings! In the deep South, you can't fall any lower than Grant.

The Republicans, however, do have one secret weapon they're counting on to maintain their control of the House and Senate: Democrats.

Where's the spark

This should be an easy year for Dems, a landslide year, but—with important exceptions—they continue to practice the politics of equivocation. Take health care.



A Zogby poll taken in May in the swing state of Pennsylvania asked if the government should assure that every working American has health coverage. Sixty-nine percent shouted "Yes!" Yet when Sen. Hillary Clinton announced in June that she was going to tackle the health-care issue, she limited her bill to a minimalist, incremental, convoluted approach that would reach only low-income children, leaving more than 40 million Americans uncovered. She meekly mumbled that she can only "do what the political reality permits me to do...what the body politic will bear."

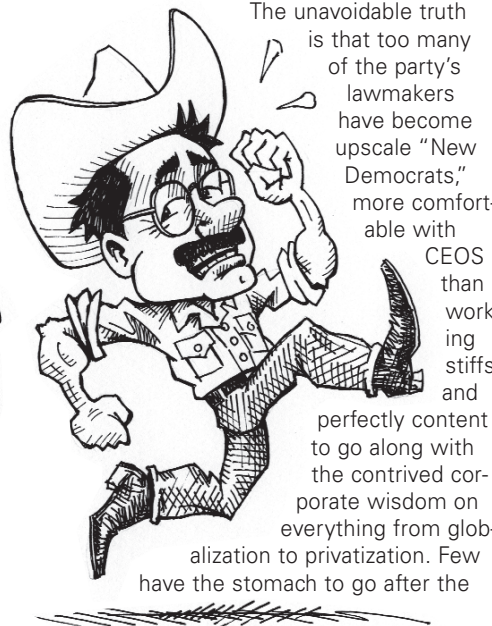
Yoo-hoo, Hillary, the body politic is so far ahead of you that it's pathetic—as is your gutless bill.

Most appalling is the overall failure of today's Democrats to claim their historic roots as the Party of the People. The issue of class makes these delicate Dems queasy, so they give up the huge political advantage that could be theirs simply by being Democrats—by taking on Bush Incorporated.

The Democratic wussiness, of course, is the direct result of their leaders' thirst for corporate campaign funds. Indeed, the party has shown little willingness to take a swing at public financing of elections—the one reform that would take the big, corrupting money out of politics, putting regular folks on a more level playing field with the special interests. Several states already

have public financing of their elections, and Zogby's Pennsylvania poll found that applying this approach to congressional elections is favored by 52 percent of Americans.

The unavoidable truth is that too many of the party's lawmakers have become upscale "New Democrats," more comfortable with CEOs than working stiff and perfectly content to go along with the contrived corporate wisdom on everything from globalization to privatization. Few have the stomach to go after the



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Scary tidbit

Florida's infamous Katherine Harris, now running for the U.S. Senate, has claimed that "God is the one who chooses our rulers." Good Lord! God chose her? And Dick Cheney? And Tom DeLay? Surely there can't be a god as mean and vindictive as that.

Scarier tidbit

One of the most frequent questions I'm asked on the road is whether Bush/Rove will push us into a war with Iran as an "October Surprise" to goose up GOP election chances. Doing so would seem insane, since our country's military, treasury, and patience are stretched to the breaking point...but insanity is no longer out of reach for this bunch. Indeed, *Time* reported late last month that the Pentagon's chief of naval operations has asked admirals to review plans for blockading two key Iranian ports, and a covey of minesweepers and other ships have received a "Prepare to Deploy" order for the west coast of Iran. Stay tuned.

The mayor speaks

The hottest, most honest speech I've heard from a Democrat in a long time came a month ago from a place deep in the red heart of Bush country: Utah.

The day before Bush was to speak to a carefully chosen group of military officers in Salt Lake City, some 4,000 Utahans poured into that city's Washington Square for an antiwar rally. Standing with them was Salt Lake City's two-term Democratic mayor, Rocky Anderson. He delivered a stemwinder, blistering the Bushites and inspiring "litle d" democrats to stand tall:

Blind faith in bad leaders is not patriotism. A patriot does not tell people who are

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438,000 Americans every single year. Yet these humongous corporations are allowed to keep hooking kids and keep killing—and these profiteers are beyond redemption. A new study finds that they have secretly been escalating the addictive fire-power of their little weapons of mass destruction. Since 1998, they've increased the amount of nicotine delivered through their cigarettes by an average of 10%.

Of 116 brands tested, 92 had jacked up levels of nicotine. Some of the biggest increases came in brands that are pitched to young people. For example, Marlboro, the choice of two thirds of high-school smokers, had a 12% jump in nicotine. Also, 73 brands labeled "light" or "ultra-light" ranked among the highest in nicotine content.

MESSING WITH MEAT

You probably aren't aware of it, but the big meat conglomerates are now charging meat prices for water.

Up to 20% of the volume of your supermarket steak, pork chop, or drumstick is most likely H2O, plus a nice dose of salt and chemicals. The meat industry, which is injecting these ingredients into its products, has given this rip off a tasty-sounding name: "deep marination."

Believe it or not, Cargill, Wal-Mart, and the other corporate purveyors of these adulterated meats say they are doing it as a favor to you, asserting that they are "flavoring" the meat!

Well, golly, meat is supposed to have its own flavor—and there's nothing pleasurable about learning that watered-down meat can cost more than... well, meat. And, at a time when America's doctors

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Dosomething!

Here's a few of the hard-working activists I've encountered in my September ramblings:

- **Fighting Bob Fest**
608-256-1339
<http://fightingbobfest.org>
- **Institute for Washington's Future**
206-204-0404
www.forwashington.org
- **Iowans for Sensible Priorities**
515-544-1207
www.sensibleiowans.org
- **Progressive Patriots Fund**
608-831-1308
www.progressivepatriotsfund.org

- **Progressive States Network**
212-680-3116
www.progressivestates.org
- **Rush Holt, Congressional Office**
202-225-5801
<http://holt.house.gov>
- **The Secretary of State Project**
www.secstate.org

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are calling on food processors to cut the salt they've been adding to our meals, the "deep marination" process can quadruple the amount of salt in poultry, beef, and pork.

Visit your supermarket manager and demand that your meat not be watered, salted, or chemicalized. Better yet, seek out local markets or meat producers who don't shoot up their product.

SENSIBLE PRIORITIES

Next year, the Pentagon will take \$463 billion of our taxes—more than will be appropriated for the environment, education, energy, agriculture, housing, job training, poverty needs, science, national parks, and every other federal program combined. But the Pentagon's haul does not include fighting a war. War is extra! For example, the \$363 billion for Bush's war of lies in Iraq is all off-budget—he's putting that on the credit cards of our kids and grandkids.

A group called Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities wants to trim a mere \$60 billion in fat, pork, and pure lard that now goes to the likes of Boeing, Lockheed, and Halliburton for weaponry boondoggles that don't work or aren't needed. This would not take a dime from our troops in Bush's war—and it would still leave the Pentagon brass with more money than the rest of the world combined spends on their militaries.

With this \$60 billion slice, we could provide Head Start for every child in America, guarantee health care for every child, rebuild every single American school, establish energy independence for our country through renewable fuels...and so much more.

To support Sensible Priorities, call 212-243-3416.

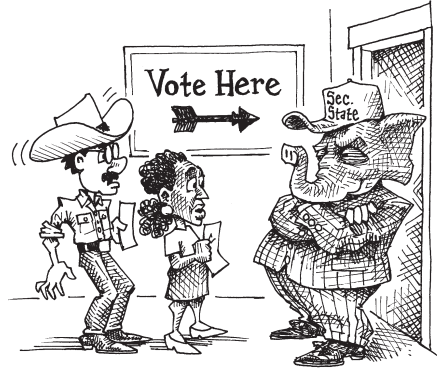
intensely concerned about their country to just sit down and be quiet; to refrain from speaking out in the name of politeness or for the sake of being a good host; to show slavish, blind obedience and deference to a dishonest, war-mongering, human-rights-violating president. That is not a patriot. Rather, that person is a sycophant. That person is a member of a frightening culture of obedience—a culture where falling in line with authority is more important than choosing what is right, even if it is not easy, safe, or popular. And, I suspect, that person is afraid—afraid we are right, afraid of the truth (even to the point of denying it), afraid he or she has put in with an oppressive, inhumane regime that does not respect the laws and traditions of our country, and that history will rank as the worst presidency our nation has ever had to endure.

And that was just for openers! You can read the whole speech on our website: www.hightowerlowdown.org

Making votes count

In my rambling around, I've noticed a positive electoral phenomenon: In several states, including Minnesota, Ohio, Colorado, and Nevada, progressives are running for secretary of state, the office that runs the election process.

Nothing is more basic to democracy than the vote itself. Yet the unchecked spread of corporate-owned machines has reduced the ballot in many places to a "faith-based" exercise! Also, there are organized campaigns to intimidate and harass voters and to create



needless legal barriers to voter participation. All this in a country with a president piously preaching democracy to others around the world.

So the race is on! Reformers are vying to bring these offices back to their nonpartisan function of enhancing voter registration and participation while instilling confidence in the accuracy and fairness of the results. In each case, the reformers are promising a verifiable paper trail for all voting machines, public access to the computer programs that control the machines, and audits of the results posted by the machines. They also support aggressive efforts to assure maximum civic participation in our elections, including putting a stop to voter intimidation.

To learn more about the issues and candidates in these races, visit the independent Secretary of State Project at www.secstateproject.org.

Fighting Bob

On September 9, I took part in what I think is the Best Little Political Event In America—though it's no longer little. It's the annual "Fighting Bob Fest," named for the old-time progressive leader, Fighting Bob LaFollette, and held at the county fairgrounds in Baraboo, Wisconsin. It's a day-long, family-

friendly mix of hell-raising speeches, foot-stomping music, hands-on political workshops, savory food, grassroots-organizing sessions, great local beer (it always helps to lubricate the movement!), some 100 activist organizations...and just plain fun.

Organized by Ed Garvey—a dynamic and jocular prairie populist from Madison—Bob Fest drew some 6,000 people from a four-state area. Among the speakers were Granny D, Tom Harkin, Amy Goodman, John Nichols, Tammy Baldwin, John Stauber, and Greg Palast. Plus a few words from your humble Lowdowner, me.

There have now been five Bob Fests, and I've been to four. I go because it's thoroughly enjoyable, engaging, and energizing. People love it because it "puts the party back in politics" and is a highly productive day of down-home democracy in action.

The beauty of Bob Fest is that it's a moveable feast—you can team up with others to create your own version of it in your state or city. Go to www.fightingbobfest.org to learn about it. If you get serious about putting together such a "county fair" of activism and fun in your area, the good folks at Bob Fest are willing to give you some tips and to share their experiences. Let the good times roll...and let democracy flow!

Final tidbit

The latest *New York Times*/CBS poll of registered voters finds that Americans have an overwhelmingly negative view of the Republican-led Congress, with only 25% approving of the way it is doing its job. Seventy-seven percent (including 65% of Republicans!) say that Congress members do not deserve re-election and that it's "time for new people" to be in charge.

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REPUBS HAVE A ROCK ON THEIR BACK, DEMS MEETLY MUMBLE

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