

The



LOWDOWN

Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer ◆ Vol.9 No.12 ◆ December 2007

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Stop making war, globalizing poverty, and trashing our Constitution

America to D.C.—Democrats included: We're mad as hell and *you're not listening!*

IN A SEASON THAT SHOULD BE CONVIVIAL AND COMFORTING—filled with family, friends, fun, spiritualism, good food, song, and high spirits—what I am hearing instead from across the country is a surge of angst and discouragement. In conversations, calls, emails, and letters, people in general (and progressives in particular) are expressing profound dismay at the deterioration of America's democracy, not only because of the BushCheney regime, but also, and especially, because of the fecklessness of the Democratic Congress.

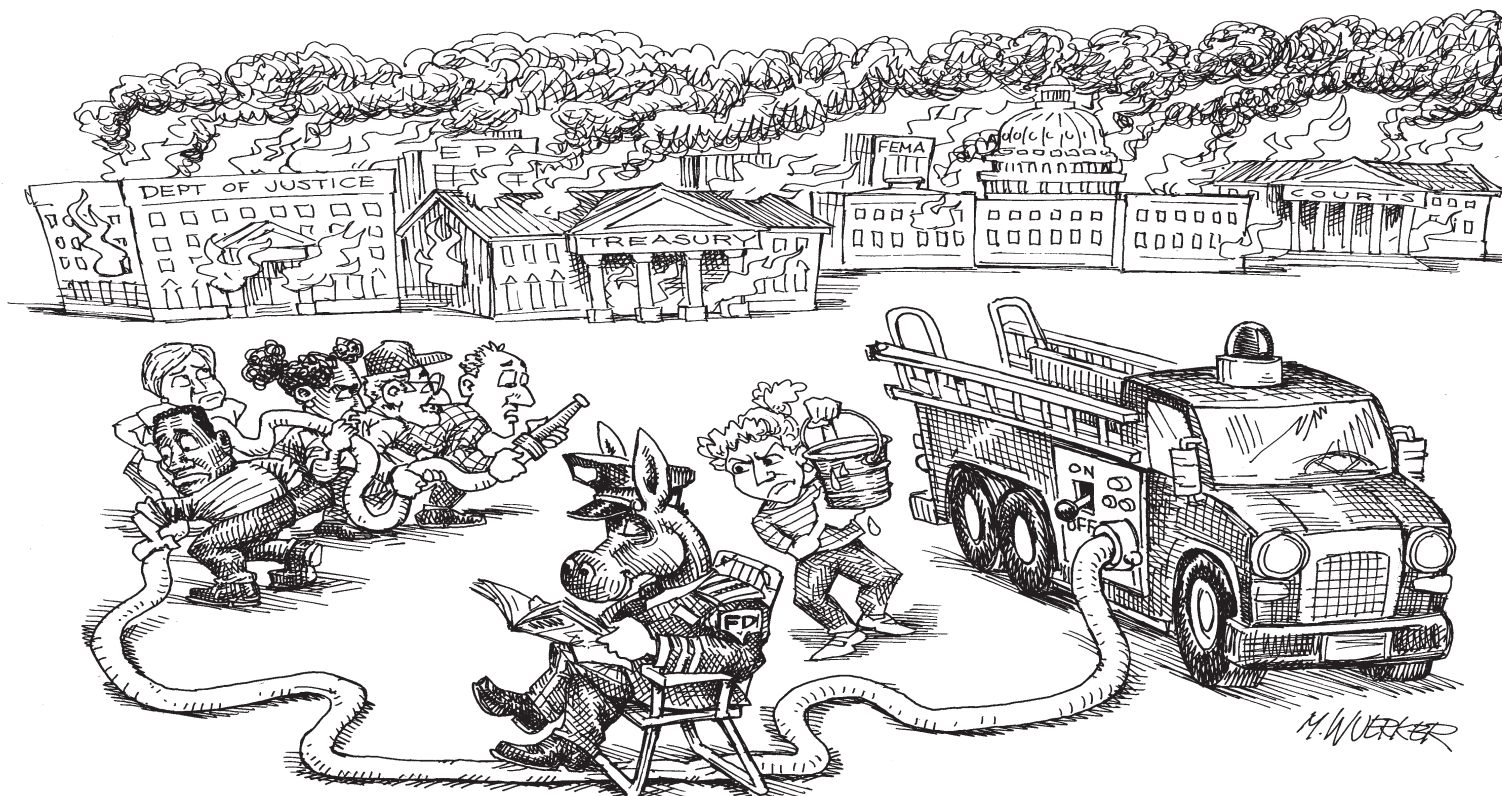
For crying out loud! Why do we even bother to have elections?" Mark wailed in an email.

"I am afraid of what this country has become and that at any minute the people in charge may bomb Iran, and I have lost all hope that there will be any checks and balances," Marshaleigh wrote, adding bluntly, *"Congress doesn't work."*

"I was amazed that the Republicans in Congress were willing to

hand over their own power to the executive branch," said an email from Brian. *"But I have been incredibly disappointed that the Democrat-majority Congress has not only failed to stop Bush's power grab, but has actually continued to help him do it, even passing laws to legitimize his illegal domestic spying."*

My niece Lisa, incredulous at the Democrats' cave-in to the Mukasey nomination, left this message on my answering machine:



THE *E. COLI* LOOPHOLE

Step right up, consumers, and get your special USDA-approved beef with our secret ingredient of *E. coli* 0157:H7!

Wait. Isn't that the bacteria that lives in cow intestines and cow manure and often contaminates beef at those huge corporate slaughterhouses? A virulent strain of bacteria that causes awful problems for people who eat it—problems like screaming cramps, kidney failure, and death? Also, hasn't there been a big increase this year in *E. coli* contamination of our country's beef?

Yes, yes, and yes.

And our U.S. Agriculture Department is allowing meat companies to market beef that has been found to have *E. coli* bacteria in it? Yes, again.

It's known as the "*E. coli* loophole," and it works like this: Giant processing outfits like Tyson and Cargill conduct their own meat-safety tests, and when they find a batch with *E. coli* toxins, you would assume they'd have to throw it out. Noooo. Instead they're allowed by USDA to toss it in a "cook only" bin—to make pre-cooked hamburger patties, meat loaf, pizza toppings, taco meat, and such. Thus, contaminated meat is turned into a profit center for the industry, so processors are under no pressure to clean up their sloppy, low-cost, rush procedures.

Not to worry, say the industry and the government, for the cooking kills the deadly bacteria. In fact, USDA doesn't even track the amount of beef that goes into the "cook only" category, much less whether it's cooked properly or whether it's sickening consumers.

The *E. coli* loophole cover-up stinks. As one disgusted federal inspector put it, "Nobody would buy it if they knew."

2

"I do not understand something I just heard on the radio, and I wanted it explained to me. How is it that they are saying that they probably are going to confirm this man when he has come out and said he believes in expansive presidential powers, and basically didn't answer the question when they asked him straight out whether or not simulated drowning was torture? And they said they'll still probably support him? What! Unh! OK. That's it. Bye."

Tim sent this email: *"I grew up when we had a Congress that was not afraid to take on an out-of-control president and forced him to resign...and did not let the president shred the Constitution."*

Jay bemoaned the dismal performance of Congress in this letter to the editor: *"Despite the 2006 congressional elections and the overwhelming antiwar sentiment among our citizens...[Democrats] have become enablers of the White House's misbegotten Iraq venture."*

Susan wrote, *"What little optimism I had is vanishing. I am much more overwhelmed by the Democratic party's lack of gumption than I was by Bush's wickedness. And the small ideas offered by the presidential candidates make me cringe. I need help."*

The damage now being done to America's political psyche by the Democrats' fizzle is way out of the ordinary. These writers are smart, engaged, committed people who are not easily surprised or discouraged by negative political developments. They constitute the grassroots base of progressive activism in our country, and it is truly worrisome that even they are becoming dispirited—especially as we head into a watershed election year.

The capitulation Congress

It is not some vague funk that's afflicting the public, not some general ennui caused by seven years of Bushdom. Rather, it's a growing despair—and a rising national embarrassment—brought on by an ongoing series of specific, disheartening collapses by Democrats, who

are turning out to be weaker than Canadian hot sauce. For example:

■ **The Iraq war rages on**, and public anger over this is boiling not merely because the people's own clear opposition to the war is being dishonored, but also because congressional efforts to stop Bush are so halting and half-hearted. True, the Democrats' majority is so slim that they can't overcome a presidential veto of a withdrawal timetable, but this is only one approach. We The People want to see some real spunk, an all-out push that is equal to the seriousness of the disastrous damage being done by this war. There should be a barrage of investigative hearings, a proliferation of exposés on war profiteering, a surge of subpoenas, a hailstorm of contempt citations, a thousand specific cuts (none harming the troops) in Bush's war budget, an unleashing of Congress's "inherent contempt" power—in other words, a strategic, unrelenting antiwar offensive using all of the unique powers of the legislative branch to march right in the face of BushCheney executive arrogance, reframe the debate, and rally the people.

■ **A final straw for so many Americans**—conservative as well as progressive—was the Democrats' surrender on Bush's nomination of Michael Mukasey to be attorney general. At first, the media ballyhooed the nominee as a "moderate" Bushite and considered him a shoo-in. Then he stumbled in his Senate hearing by declaring (1) that he couldn't say if waterboarding of war prisoners amounts to torture, even though U.S. and international law flatly say it is; and (2) that he believes Bush has the inherent power to ignore or overrule American laws. Right then and there, the Judiciary Committee should have shown him the door. Instead, two "liberal" Democrats, Chuck Schumer and Diane Feinstein (from the

safely blue states of New York and California, respectively), betrayed us and the Constitution, leading the way to approval of Bush's bad choice. Pathetically, these two Democratic wimps claimed that Mukasey had assured them in private that if Congress passed a law outlawing waterboarding, he would enforce it. Yoo-hooooo...it's already illegal! If Congress votes to re-outlaw the practice, Bush can veto the bill or just ignore it. As for Mukasey's saying that Bush can unilaterally and autocratically negate the laws of our land, Schumer and Feinstein let this pass without so much as a whimper. Without the votes of these two Sadcrats, Mukasey's nomination would not have gotten out of committee. Now, we're stuck with him. They reduced Congress's mighty power of "advise and consent" to a rubber stamp for presidential supremacy.

■ **A big reason Democrats won control of Congress** in the '06 elections is that so many of them campaigned against the corporate-backed, NAFTA-style trade scams that are doing so much damage to workaday people, both here and abroad. Of the 30 first-term Democrats in the new Congress, 27 had put these "free trade" deals at the center of their races, promising to oppose any new ones and to fight instead for fair trade. Yet, on November 6 (almost exactly one year after the Democrats' sweep of the congressional elections), Speaker Nancy Pelosi sold out both these fair-trade newcomers and the voters who put her in power. She stood with George W to push House passage of yet another trade scam, this one with Peru. As a general rule, Pelosi does not allow issues that divide the party to come to a floor vote. But the Wall Street money boys wanted the Peru deal, so she made an unprincipled exception. Pelosi and 108 old-guard Democrats voted with nearly all House Republicans on the bill, providing the margin of victory for Bush and for Corporate America over the People of America.

On a range of other big issues—the Kyl-Lieberman amendment handing Bush a legislative okay for invading Iran; the Senate rewrite of the FISA law to allow more Bush spying on Americans without judicial safeguards, while also giving

DoSomething!

An inside group that could provide coordination for a new concerted progressive strategy is:

■ **Congressional Progressive Caucus**
Bill Goold, Policy Advisor
info@congressionalprogressivecaucus.org

An aggressive group fighting all across the country for a much more progressive Democratic party is:

■ **Progressive Democrats of America**
c/o Community Visions
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www.pdamerica.org

The Hightower LOWDOWN
 Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer • Vol. 9 No. 10 • October 2007

While most of the Democrats in Washington cover the presidency is taking over the courts and Congress

WHERE IS CONGRESS? It's way past time for members to stand up. Historic matters are at stake. The Constitution is being trampled, the very form of our government is being perverted, and nothing less than American democracy itself is endangered—a presidential coup is taking place. I think of Barbara Jordan, the late congresswoman from Houston. On July 25, 1974, she powerfully declared in her thundering voice, "And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution."

Why is congress? Separation of powers. Rule of law. Checks and balances. These are what we mean by the rule of law. It is not a set of rules that we have to follow. It is a set of principles that we have to live by. It is a set of principles that we have to stand for. It is a set of principles that we have to defend. It is a set of principles that we have to live by. It is a set of principles that we have to stand for. It is a set of principles that we have to defend.



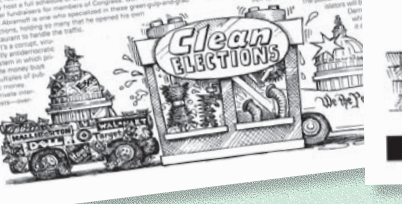
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The Hightower LOWDOWN
 Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer • Vol. 9 No. 2 • February 2007

Electoral reform isn't starry-eyed theory, it's happening! People are electing candidates who shun corporate cash

A NUMBER OF TRAVEL FIRMS OFFER "democracy tours" of Washington, DC. They'll buzz you through the marble halls of the Supreme Court, and generally introduce you to symbols of American political life—allowing the money trail through our Capital City. Unfortunately, tourists beware! Don't go there to see the money trail through our Capital City. Unfortunately, tourists beware! Don't go there to see the money trail through our Capital City. Unfortunately, tourists beware! Don't go there to see the money trail through our Capital City.



The Hightower LOWDOWN
 Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer • Vol. 9 No. 11 • November 2006

All in the name of killing government Terrorists? Nope, it's Bush & Co. who've blasted our infrastructure


CRIME RED, AMERICANS! Screaming, flashing, neon-bright, God Almighty RED!!! Not just a single disaster, but multiple, catastrophic catastrophes are being perpetrated by a diabolical, heretofore unnamed network of terrorists who're out to destroy America with an unprecedented series of attacks.



The Hightower LOWDOWN
 Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer • Vol. 9 No. 4 • April 2007

Corporations that paid-to-play the last election

LAND OF THE CLEVER AND CONNING, meet a couple of gentlemen who insist that the political funding system is working splendidly. They report that there's absolutely nothing between the money interests and our lawmakers in Washington that should trouble our minds.



Well...at least give 'em agitation—and at a hell of a bargain rate!

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The Hightower LOWDOWN
 Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer • Vol. 8 No. 5 • May 2007

Yet the war goes on...

ON EASTER MORNING, GEORGE W MADE another of his periodic shows of Staring With The Troops. He attended church services in the chapel at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas, after which he offered to the assembled media this precious little announcement: "I had a chance to reflect on the great sacrifice that our military and their families are making. I prayed for their safety. I prayed for their strength and courage. And I pray for peace."



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blanket, retroactive immunity to the giant phone companies that illegally participated in Bush's mass wire-tapping scheme; the shameful cave-in by Senate leaders to a handful of billionaire hedge-fund operators who want to keep a loophole that lets them dodge about \$12 billion a year in taxes they owe—the Democratic leadership has been dismal.

Maybe they think that people aren't noticing this. Maybe they hope that since Bush & Buckshot are so awful, Congress will get a pass. Indeed, Bush's job-approval rating is now down to an all-time low of 24% in the latest Zogby poll. But get ready for a shock, Dems—Congress's job-approval rating is 11%. Eleven! Even among Democrats, the approval rating is a mere 14%. Tellingly, only 10% of union members and 8% of liberals give Congress a positive job-performance score.

Come out, progressives

It's tempting to snicker at this. But it's too important for that. On issue after issue—war, the imperial presidency, health care, jobs, environment, unions, etc.—the public is overwhelmingly progressive and wants action. People didn't expect progress when the GOP was in charge, but they threw those bums out. What now? As a fellow once said to me, "I don't mind losing when we lose, but I hate losing when we win." People need hope that someone's on their side, that our democracy is not just a rigged game for insiders, that real change is possible.

First, the good news. There is a solid core of progressives in Congress—roughly 72 in the House and 10 in the Senate—and they are battling the bastards every day, as well as cajoling, haranguing, begging, confronting, and otherwise

pushing the leadership and the old guard of the Democratic caucus to stand with the people. These members are making a tremendous fight inside the system. In the House, for example, there's the unstinting, determined antiwar effort of Barbara Lee and Lynn Woolsey, the unrelenting investigative work of Henry Waxman, the insistent pressure by Jan Schakowsky to stop the outsourcing of military functions to private contractors, and the general inside work of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

The bad news is that practically no one outside Washington knows about these legislators' inside work. Nor are we outsiders connected to (much less enlisted in) their insider efforts.

The public invisibility of most progressive lawmakers is a failure of America's conglomerated, celebrity-riveted media, of course, but it's also a glaring failure of the progressive movement's strategy. The focus of these stalwart Congress members and the Washington organizations that surround and support them is locked on the inside fight. Simply put, they don't play to the outside.

As a result, millions of progressive souls in the countryside are not seeing, hearing, or feeling this inside effort. More importantly, those progressives struggling on the inside are not valuing or using our movement's outside troops. At best, we get the perfunctory request to "write your congressman" (and we all know how effective that is).

This is a bizarre, self-defeating approach to winning political change, since outside is where genuine progressive power resides!

By focusing almost solely on inside struggles, progressives are playing to the strength of the

establishment's forces—money, lobbyists, and the corporate media. At the same time, progressives are ignoring and alienating their own troops. And they are losing.

We need an outside-in strategy that solicits, rallies, listens to, and deploys our tremendous grassroots strength, bringing it to bear inside Washington. There's a vast army out here that is ready, willing, able, and eager—but it's not being used. Ben Cohen, cofounder of Ben & Jerry's ice cream and longtime progressive leader, tells me that he has told members of Congress time after time, "We're out here in big numbers, we're organized and we're ready—just tell us what to do and we'll do it." He says he's never gotten a call to action.

I think of Abraham Lincoln's frustration in 1862 with his top commander, Gen. George McClellan. In April of that year, the general and his Army of the Potomac had the Confederate forces outnumbered and outmaneuvered in Virginia. A decisive victory was at hand...yet McClellan would not move his troops. Lincoln sent message after message alternately ordering and beseeching his general to attack and win the war. But nothing. The head of the army wouldn't budge. Finally, after the Confederate soldiers had been allowed to slip away and avert certain defeat, Lincoln removed McClellan from command with a letter that said, "If you don't want to use the army, I should like to borrow it for a while."

Learn from the past

Rather than thinking of themselves as lone rangers fighting in Washington on our behalf, congressional progressives need to act like leaders of a mass movement, mobilizing and targeting us to be ground troops in a fight that

WHY NOT HEALTH CARE FOR ALL?

Sergio Olaya is a 21-year-old college student who has had to drop out of school because of our country's messed-up health-insurance system.

Actually, Olaya has health coverage, for he's a government employee. But his mother wasn't covered when she was suddenly diagnosed with an aggressive cancer this year. She died, and her son is now grappling with \$255,000 in medical bills for her treatment. The hospital has sicced its collection agency on him, so he had to quit college and is now selling the house where he and his mother lived.

Ironically, Mr. Olaya's job is in the U.S. Senate, where he runs an elevator. Our honorable senators share a ride with him every day, but they share none of the health-care anxieties and financial burden that millions of Americans like Olaya carry. Members of Congress, you see, are fully covered by us taxpayers.

Well, gosh, we don't want any special coverage—we'll be happy with what Congress gives itself.

Not all senators are boneheads about this. Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio deserves special praise for refusing to accept the congressional coverage for himself, saying he won't take it until every American is covered.

Presidential contender John Edwards has made a strong, universal health-care plan a centerpiece of his campaign. Edwards intends not only to push his plan in Congress but also to strip lawmakers of their coverage if they fail to provide for everyone else.

Edwards' proposal for universal coverage also includes a single-payer alternative to compete with profiteering insurance corporations. See it all at www.johnedwards.com/issues/health-care/.

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The Hightower Lowdown (ISSN 1524-4881) is published monthly by Public Intelligence Inc., 375 South End Ave #14P New York NY 10280. ©2007 in the United States. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY. Subscriptions: 1 year, \$15; 2 years, \$27. Add \$8/year for Mexico or Canada; add \$12/year for overseas airmail. Back issues \$2 postpaid. Allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of first issue and for all subscription transactions. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: *The Hightower Lowdown*, P.O. Box 20596, New York, NY 10011.

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Printed with 100% union labor on 100% recycled paper.

BOOTING BUSH'S BUDDIES

Whew—it's getting lonelier and lonelier at the top for George W, as his "Coalition of the Willing" buddies keep getting bumped off.

In country after country, warmongering heads of state who joined in Bush's Iraq disaster are being rejected by the home folks. Jose Maria Aznar lost in Spain, Silvio Berlusconi was defeated in Italy, Tony Blair was booted in England, and now John Howard has been tossed out as prime minister of Australia. The Coalition of the Willing has become a Coalition of the Defeated!

Howard's loss was especially galling for Bush, for he had traveled all the way down under in September to campaign for the Aussie PM. Calling Howard a "man of steel," George tried to bolster his campaign with rosy reports of progress in their shared war, even declaring at one point, "We're kicking [butt] in Iraq."

Apparently, Bush is even less credible there than he is here, for it was Howard's butt that got kicked. His Liberal party received its worst election thrashing in its 63-year history, and Howard suffered the added humiliation of losing his own district—the first time since 1929 that an Australian PM has been voted out both as head of state and as a member of Parliament. It was a total meltdown for the man of steel.

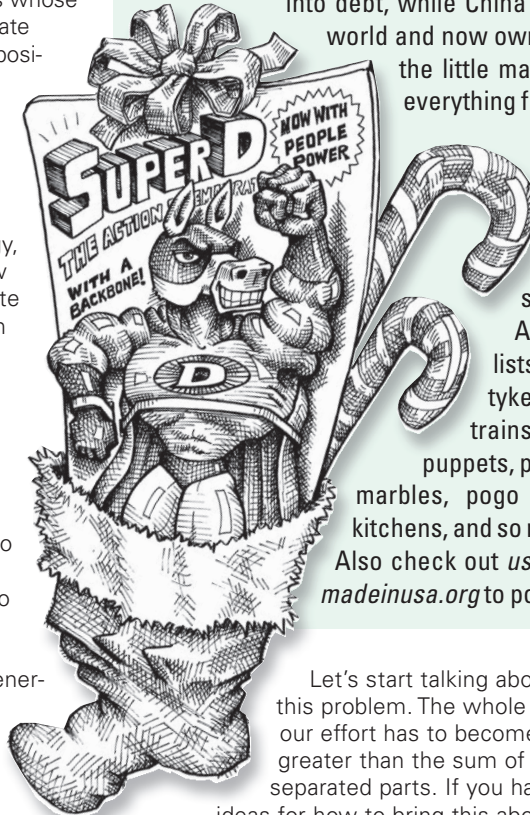
To add to Bush's pain at losing his "steadfast" ally, the guy who administered the butt-kicking, Labor party leader Kevin Rudd, not only campaigned against the war but also announced that he would withdraw all Australian troops from Iraq by July of next year.

That's four heads of state down—and Bush to go—before we bring all of the troops home.

belongs not just to them but to all of us.

This collaborative approach has proven highly effective in the past. As a young antiwar activist in 1970, I was part of one such outside-in effort. Sen. George McGovern and Rep. Al Lowenstein created the Committee for a Vote on the War, headquartered in two townhouses on Capitol Hill. I was among the staffers whose job was to coordinate grassroots war opposition with the legislative actions of anti-Vietnam lawmakers. The insiders and leading outsiders jointly developed strategy, with a steady flow of information, vote checks, and action items going both ways. The local forces could not only move at a moment's notice to approach a targeted lawmaker, but they could also deploy members of Congress out to the hustings to bring information, rally the forces, generate media coverage, and unify the effort.

I don't know how to recreate something like this, but I believe it must happen. We can't have a successful progressive movement if our elected officials are disjoined from the movement.



Let's start talking about this problem. The whole of our effort has to become greater than the sum of its separated parts. If you have ideas for how to bring this about, share them on our website (hightowerlowdown.org), in blogs, in meet-ups, and in every forum you can think of. If your own members of Congress are progressive, urge

Voting with your dollars

HEY, IT'S THE HOLIDAY SEASON—time to go out there and do your part for our American economy by buying tons of cheap stuff made in China!

Wait—that doesn't make sense, does it? First, you'll notice that most of those "cheap" goods from China aren't that cheap by the time they're on the shelves of Wal-Mart, Neiman Marcus, and other U.S. retailers. Yes, they're produced by cheap labor, but this cost-cut is pocketed by the brand names who get their stuff made there.

Second, how does it help our economy to shift America's manufacturing to China? Our middle-class jobs are disappearing and our country is falling deeper into debt, while China has the fastest-growing economy in the world and now owns a huge chunk of our debt. Then there's the little matter of toxic Chinese products, including everything from food to toys.

Isn't there a better way to spend our consumer dollars? Yes. Buy

Made-in-the-USA products this holiday season... and throughout the year! You won't find many at your local MegaMart, so try local stores and internet shops.

A website called toysmadeinamerica.com lists dozens of sites where you can buy for the tykes on your list—dolls, dollhouses, wooden trains, space-age action toys, playscapes, puppets, puzzles, banjos, books, board games, tutus, marbles, pogo sticks, skateboards, wiffle balls, play kitchens, and so much more, made right here by Americans. Also check out usmadetoys.com, shopforamerica.com and madeinusa.org to point you in the right direction.

them to take a lead in uniting the inside with the outside for concerted action. Also, push the Congressional Progressive Caucus (see *Do Something* box) to provide leadership. By connecting with each other, using the unique strengths of insiders and outsiders, we can raise our spirits... and start winning.

Here's to a happier New Year.

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9:12 December 2007

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