



RAMIREZ

REINVENTING DEMOCRACY

FROM PAGE 1

millions and destroyed millions more lives directly or collaterally. The entire society is criminalized and corrupted while drugs remain illegal and thus immensely profitable, which mirrors Prohibition. Public officials, police and financial institutions are purchased by drug lords while Congress has dismantled the rights of those accused of minor drug use, inciting repressive police practices in general (while ballooning their budgets; law enforcement is the other major profiteer from illegal drugs) and overcrowds prisons with non-criminals. The supply of dangerous and addictive drugs will be considerably less when there is no longer big money in the trade. In the meantime, the rejuvenated Congress should adequately fund medical/health programs dedicated to eradicating narcotic (heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, etc.), alcohol and tobacco addiction.

Coincidental to decriminalizing illegal drugs, Congress must not only legislate lower prices for prescription drugs for seniors and other medical dependents, it should revamp the entire Medicare/Medicaid package to benefit recipients rather than drug manufacturers and suppliers and medical corporations.

Congress, if it is to be fair and represent the interests of those who voted a Democratic majority of both houses, would give a dollar for the welfare of the poor than another cent to the plutocrats who pillage the public treasury in the twin rubrics of research & development and national defense/security. Because of what President Dwight D. Eisenhower acknowledged to be a military-industrial (he left out Congressional) dominance of the nation's politics and economy, we are more insecure politically and psychologically than any time previously. Much of the nation's poverty is a result of the very few controlling most of its wealth and resources with little desire of responsibility for having nullified our Constitutional democracy and limiting the prospects for most of its people.

Congress must reverse the disparity of wealth and living standards in this country, and end the malign neglect of the huge and growing underclass that lives abandoned and without much hope in our crumbling cities and impoverished rural areas. Millions of children live in poverty in the USA, most of them not white, which significantly lessens their chances of escaping destitution due to this country's prevailing racism. Dr. Charles Wilder, former director of Clatsop County Community Action, once said the 'War on Poverty' has become war on the poor. Congress must redirect the upward flow of the nation's wealth and make the currently arid trickle-down a flood that will have the stimulating effect of a more equitably balanced prosperity.

Congress must begin eliminating the national debt with the billions of dollars of back taxes owed by corporations that have not only not paid their share of taxes but receive huge refunds of public money for taxes not paid (as well as much of the money that has indebted the nation). The burden has been on average taxpayers who receive only the bill, not the profits of the deficit, which has been explosively inflated by huge tax cuts granted to the same corporations the deficit was warped to profit. At the very least, Congress should implement a wealth tax and raise consumption taxes on high-ticket luxuries.

Congress must also rescind the concept of a corporation as a person — which corporate America has exploited for all the rights of a person in the USA but none of the obligations.

Congress must abolish its unethical practice of so-called "earmarks," the notorious habit of secretly and anonymously adding billions of dollars of pork to legislative bills, and deny the President his falsely claimed entitlement to "signings" that virtually abrogate new laws to only which parts he wishes to execute. And the Democratic majority must keep its promise to "break the link between lobbyists and legislation."

Congress might also consider implementing Thomas Paine's idea that every 20 year old citizen of the USA be given a monetary stake (women as well as men) because the very notion of democracy is rooted in the thought that everyone born into it "shall inherit some means of beginning in the world," in Paine's words. This idea is an understanding that an adequate amount, say at least \$100,000 bequeathed to every young American on their 20th birthday (albeit obvious questions of eligibility: should the already wealthy receive a stake?), would go a long way toward eradicating the inequity of opportunity in this country.

Congress should, before the next Presidential election in 2008, eliminate the Electoral College as an antiquated and unfairly tilted — and proven corrupt — process that resists the brave new world of participatory democracy made possible by the Internet. It should also change election patterns to ensure fair and honest elections, and in particular remove the corruption of money from the electoral process.

And caught up in a war of mixed goals and ideologies in which, as Howard Zinn says has so many civilian casualties that military deaths are collateral, Congress should provide the best

medical and psychological care for American war survivors (as well as campaign for United Nations efforts to provide medical and other necessary aid to Iraqi civilians). One very overdue act that Congress should authorize is consolidation of all discharges from the armed forces into a single category, in particular eliminating "Dishonorable," "Undesirable," and "Bad Conduct" discharges which have ruined the futures of hundreds of thousands of veterans who ran afoul of an authoritarian, anti-democratic system that demands unremitting obedience and strips its enlisted ranks of their civil rights and liberties. Only for

A NEW CIVIL WAR?

Probably unconscious of the ramifications of his words, a man who claimed leadership of the anti-abortion crusade at abortion clinics, once compared political decisions that transfer the right of abortion from women to the state to the Dred Scott decision of 1857. He said rulings to gut but preserve the façade of the 1973 abortion law (*Roe v. Wade*) are analogous to Dred Scott, which was a major factor that precipitated the Civil War.

Scott, a slave, sued the U.S. Supreme Court for his freedom. Slave owners and their political and judicial cronies insisted the Court reject Scott's claim of citizenship because he was a slave (which meant he was hardly human). Abolitionists attempted to convince the Court that all persons were human beings and entitled to citizenship and freedom.

Chief Justice Roger Taney declared that the original intent of the Constitution favored only the freedom and citizenship of white males. The general consensus among the Founding Fathers and long afterward, he said, was that Negroes were "so far inferior that they had no rights that a white man was bound to respect."

The net effect of the Dred Scott decision was to make the issue of slavery too explosive for political or judicial settlement. It was later termed a "monumental indiscretion" and a "public calamity." Justice Felix Frankfurter once remarked that Supreme Court justices never mentioned Dred Scott after the Civil War; any more, he said, than a family whose son had been hanged mentioned ropes or scaffolds.

The abortion rights issue in the United States follows the same unfortunate premise, as evidenced by the "partial birth abortion ban" championed by the Bush administration and its Congressional zealots. Women are not regarded as equal citizens. They do not have the right to make elemental choices about abortion.

The hypocrisy is that women have had to make these decisions for thousands of years. Women have been responsible for birth control or forced to be the instruments of euthanasia in regards to unwanted children in the vacuum left by irresponsible men. Abortion at least allows a woman to dispose of a surplus child before it is born. Men who abdicate the responsibility for birth control yet believe they should control a woman's options, which has less to do with concern for the unborn fetus than it does retaining supremacy over women. Women are not allowed to be free and equal citizens. For that matter, 140 years after emancipation, neither are black people who wish to be known as Afro-Americans in recognition of their long presence in this hemisphere.

Humanity is crowding itself off its home planet. Abortion is a survival mechanism that attempts (consciously or subliminally) to alleviate the ever increasing ravage of the earth and the specter of incessant poverty and starvation by an over abundant species that seldom practices successful birth control. In the bad old days children were abandoned or slaughtered when a population overran its resources. Abortion (and such abortifacants as the French pill RU486) is a more preferable option than an AIDS or ebola epidemic in stabilizing growth. (Warfare only amplifies the calamity: frenzied postwar breeding generally expands a populace beyond prewar numbers.)

Yet, as with slavery, abortion causes furious arguments and is such an emotional issue that a civil war of sorts is in the process of erupting. Like the infamous three-fifths compromise that allowed that much but no more consideration of slaves being human, the Bush administration and its allies on the religious and male supremacist right have declared that women are "so far inferior that they have no rights a...man (is) bound to respect."

This brand new Congress has a chance to take back the ground for women's rights to abortion and equality of citizenship and gender that the Bushites have misappropriated.

~MICHAEL McCUSKER

serious crimes committed while in service should a discharge be other than a "General" discharge. Veterans have fought for this single type of discharge for decades without success.

In regard to civil liberties within the military, Congress should protect the rights of dissenting servicemen and conscientious objectors in the ranks. It must also ensure such veterans' antiwar groups as the Iraqi Veterans Against the War are not harassed by either the military or law enforcement officials nor subjected to unlawful arrest or discrimination.

And while Congress is at it, it should overturn the Energy Act to allow state and local governments the power to determine if Liquefied Natural Gas terminals be sited within their boundaries, since they will have immense cultural and environmental impact. An essential part of that process must insure that the public be involved in the decisions.

There are multitudes of other issues and problems that need attention: reestablishing domestic social programs that have been axed for "homeland security" and corporate socialism; trimming of (corporate) farm subsidies; instituting a successful and long belated national public health care system; care and support for AIDS (and future epidemic) victims; reconstruction of the disintegrating transportation network, with special emphasis on mass transit; preservation and renewal of wetlands and wildlands; retaining public support of the arts; revitalization of a national public service organization for young people that would be a combination of VISTA and the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s (ditto for elderly volunteers) — an endless list never satisfied, always in conflict.

For the past six years the worst President in American history has attempted to strip power from the other branches of government and limit the rights and freedoms of the people. Why he has been tolerated, even popular among many of those he hurts most, is left to history and psychology to fathom. He attempted to fool all of the people all of the time, which the first Republican President thought an impossibility. But the nation was ripe for the pillaging. It was conditioned by more than half a century of commercial and political falsehoods that coerced the American people to buy and believe, and in particular susceptible to the contemptible strategy that lies told often enough to enough people are regarded as truth.

The four-letter word of the past few decades of America's persistent turn to the right has been the designation of being a "Liberal." However, liberalism has not caused the shocking cultural and economic decline of especially the last six years — the increasing homelessness within the world's richest ever nation, the political and corporate corruption and resultant scandals, Pentagon empiricism, Wall Street greed and fraud, deterioration of public education, increased racial hostility, theological purges of religions other than evangelical Christianity (in particular Muslim/Americans), unaffordable medical/health care, the growing separation between rich and poor that has put most of the nation's net-worth into the hands of the nation's richest 10% while the bottom half of society is left with less than zilch. It is convenient to fault fuzzy-headed liberals for once embracing communism (false) and aiding "Islamofascist terrorists" (also false), but it should be fair to also mention that many upright "conservatives" sympathized with Nazism and continue to feel nostalgic for its domestic policies, which the past six years have shown.

Democrats are ambitious, greedy and crooked, as well as being egregiously chickenhearted since at least 2000. Their history, particularly involving apartheid in the South, is hardly glorious. But "radical" Republicans act mean-spirited. Instead of wanting to help the disadvantaged or accept diverse ideas, they attack and purge. Republicans lay claim to a political aristocracy in which they believe themselves to be the elite. They speak the platitudes of democracy while subverting any resistance to their authority nor do they tolerate opposition to their transactions with power.

Is it possible to separate conservatism from rightwing politics? The question is pertinent because what is being considered the political center in the USA was not so long ago the position of the rightwing. The country has moved consistently rightward the past few decades, which fogs the term "centrist," especially after this latest election in which "conservative" or "centrist" Democrats have taken control of both houses of Congress.

A second question is whether there is any room or tolerance for so-called leftist positions in American politics. Pundits claim that Democrats will defeat the victories of this past election in 2008 if they give in to the "left wing" of their party.

A definition of the left makes it the opposition: once in power, in this theory, the left automatically becomes the right, more concerned with protecting power than reforming it.

At any rate, this article is a wish list of poliantasy that is most likely to be problematical if not radically impractical to implement. Yet in its defense it broadens the playing field rather than constricting it as has so drastically been the situation of the past few decades. Freedom only survives through its expansion rather than its inhibition.

The neocons have come closer to destroying this nation than any terrorist. "They hate democracy," G.W. Bush says of terrorists — but he and his ilk are the true haters of democracy, and they have spent six years attempting to subvert it into a "unitary executive" autocracy.

They arrogantly and clumsily fixed at least three elections, but voters got mad and overwhelmed whatever extent of corruption surrounded the November 7 election and perhaps salvaged at least the prospects of remaining democratic for the near future.

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