OPINION

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What the President Didn't Say

BY TRACY L. DUCKETT

In his State of the Union speech, President Bush pledged that his administration would not pass our country's current problems on to the next generation of Americans. But that is precisely what his administration is preparing to do with a set of policies that will drastically undermine Americans' rights and freedoms and radically restrict the federal government's ability to deal with a range of urgent issues from strengthening schools to protecting the environment to saving Social Security and Medicare.

There are a lot of things President Bush didn't tell Americans in his State of the Union speech. He didn't say that the trillions of dollars in new and permanent tax cuts he is seeking are directed overwhelmingly to prosperous Americans who are in the least need of help, or that they would make it nearly impossible for the government to deal effectively with national priorities like education and health care for years to come.

He didn't talk about the disastrous consequences his tax cuts would have on the states, which are already struggling to maintain vital services in the face of severe budget deficits.

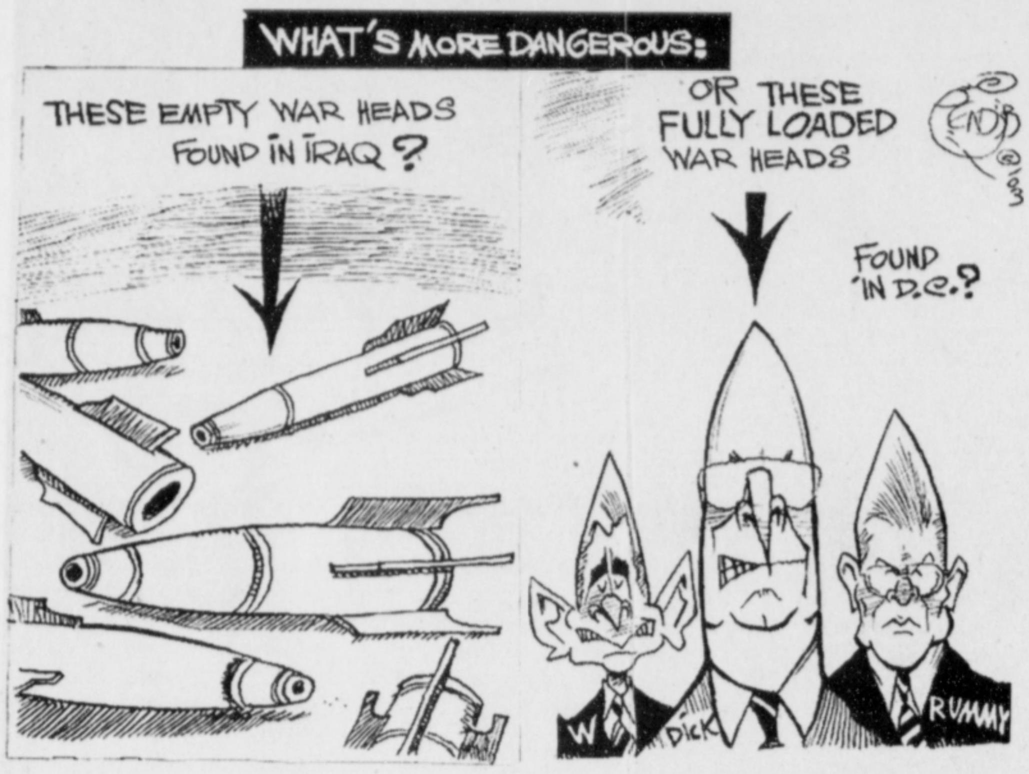
He didn't say that his faith-based initiative, which he praised with warm words but few details, undermines the wall between church and state, sets a dangerous precedent of allowing federally funded religious discrimination in hiring and requires little accountability.

Remarkably, President Bush didn't say anything at all about his judicial nominees, who could have a longer-term impact on Americans than anything else he does as president. He didn't tell Americans that if the Senate allows him to fill the federal judiciary with judges who embrace a radical states' rights approach to the Constitution, the next generation of Americans will suffer the loss of fundamental rights, liberties and protections that they have enjoyed for decades.

And the president had nothing to say about Americans' constitutional liberties, which have been steadily undermined by his administration's policies, such as secret and indefinite detentions and denial of the right to counsel.

The president's State of the Union speech did not address the state of the courts or the state of the Constitution. But the nation urgently needs a real debate about the future of our constitutional liberties and the future of reproductive rights, civil rights, environmental protection, religious liberty, worker safety and health and more. President Bush wants to avoid that conversation, but the American people must demand it. There is too much at stake to remain silent.

Tracy L. Duckett is a communications specialist at the People For the American Way Foundation.



BY BEN DIB/MINUTEMAN MEDIA

Predictable, but Unnecessary, Failure

BY JEFF THOMPSON

Gov. Ted Kulongoski recently unveiled his budget plan - deep cuts to most state services and no new revenues. Defending the spartan and shrinking budget, Kulongoski argued, "We can't solve our state budget crisis if we can't get the economy moving again."

Since nothing he or his administration does can "get the economy moving again," the new Governor has inadvertently, but unnecessarily, resigned himself to failure before he starts.

Kulongoski cannot alter the international economic trends that threw Oregon and the rest of the country into recession. Oregon's economy is already recovering, and when it hits full stride Kulongoski will not be responsible for its success. If Kulongoski pursues a program of tax cuts and other special incentives for businesses, he will leave Oregon less able to provide key public services once the economy does recover.

Like many in the business lobby, Kulongoski and his staff seem convinced that Oregon is not "friendly to business." The record suggests otherwise: between 1989 and 2000 Oregon experienced more than 30,000 new businesses (38 percent growth) and 415,000 new jobs (35 percent growth

Oregon fell into recession because of international economic factors, not because of its taxes or regulations.

Oregon already has the lowest business taxes among Western states, and further cuts won't generate significant new jobs or investment. A big corporate tax cut from the last legislature will cost the state $31 million per year, but is expected to generate fewer than 100 jobs.

Ironically, by pledging not to pursue additional funding for education, public safety and other state services, Kulongoski is rejecting the only thing the state can do that actually matters for business decision making. Time after time, research literature and business location professionals have confirmed that tax cuts and incentives matter little. Workforce quality and transportation costs, and the public services that impact these costs, matter a great deal.

Oregon is already a low tax state, with an economy that has massive excess production capacity, depressed demand for output, hundreds of crumbling bridges and soon the shortest school year in the country. More tax cuts and corporate incentives won't put Oregonians back to work if the demand is not there. Businesses won't consider Oregon if we can't provide quality public services.

Jeff Thompson is a policy analyst and economist at the Oregon Center for Public Policy.