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The real issue: Bush is incompetent
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Not up to the job

NEW YORK President George W. Bush is coming to town. You better watch out, you better not shout - unless you're a certified delegate inside Madison Square Garden. With protesters somewhere out of sight, the Republican National Convention will be a celebration of the ideology, values and interests served by this second Bush presidency.

Whether you agree or disagree with the words pouring from the podium over Americans who see reflections of themselves in George W. Bush, the real issue of this election will not be mentioned. The core issue is this: America's president is incompetent. He is not a good president.

Let me count the ways:

1. He has divided the country; we Americans are all part of a vicious little hissing match. We were united and humbled on Sept. 12, 2001. We are divided and humiliated now, telling lies about each other.
2. He has divided the world. "We are all Americans now" headlined Le Monde on that Sept. 12. Now there are days when it seems as if they are all anti-Americans.
3. He is leaving no child or grandchild without debt. He has taken the government from surplus into deficit in the name of national security and increased private investment. We can pay the debt in two ways: with more government revenues (taxation) or by borrowing - against the sweat and income of new generations. The president has chosen to borrow.
4. He campaigns as a champion of smaller government but is greatly increasing the size and role of government. Ideological conservatism, it turns out, costs just as much, or more, than ideological liberalism. Conservative and liberal politicians are both for increasing the reach and power of government. The difference between them is which parts and functions of the state are to be

empowered and financed. The choice is between military measures and order, or more redistribution of income. Money is power.

5. He is diminishing the military of which he is so proud now as commander in chief. The invasion and occupation of Iraq have obviously not worked out the way he imagined - naked torture was not the goal. But the far greater problem for the future is that America's proud commander has revealed the hollowness behind unilateral superpower. From the top down, we have not been able to win Iraq, much less the world. And going into Iraq has compromised or crippled the war on terror he declared himself.

6. He is diminishing scientific progress, the great engine of the 20th century. Only the truly ignorant can believe that the proper role of government is to hinder medical research and environmental study in the name of God.

7. He is diminishing the Constitution of the United States. Cheesy tricks like amending the great text of freedom to attack homosexuality can be dismissed as wedge politics. But it is worse to preach against an activist judiciary while appointing more activist judges who happen to hold different beliefs, particularly the idea that civil liberties are the enemies of patriotism, security and freedom itself.

8. He has surrounded himself with other incompetents. The secretary of state is presiding over the rape of diplomacy and its alliances. The secretary of defense has sent our young men and women into situations that were never meant or trained to handle, and now they are being ordered into battle by an appointed sheik in a far land. The national security adviser does not seem to know that her job description includes coordinating defense and diplomacy. And then there was our \$340,000 a month local hire, Ahmad Chalabi, sitting in the gallery of our House .

9. He has been unable or unwilling to deal with declining employment and the rising medical costs of becoming an older nation.

10. He is, as if by design, destroying the credibility of America as a force for

peace in the world - an honest broker - particularly in the Middle East.

The list is longer, miscalculation after miscalculation. President Bush has not been able to function effectively at this pay grade. He may mean well, but this has been a difficult time, and he is in over his head. We and our kids will pay the price for his blundering, blunderbuss adventure in Washington. He has been tested in a difficult time - and, unhappily for all of us and the world, he has not been up to the job.

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