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Watch That Pea
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What the administration is doing while you're watching Scooter & Sammy.

It seems interesting to me that while all of the Democratic voices have gone gaga over the indictment of Scooter Libby and the nomination to the Supreme Court of Samuel Alito, the administration is continuing to tighten its control over the national economic/political process.

On the one hand you have Democrats swooning about how this is the beginning of the end for Bush and how the white knight Fitzgerald is going to slay the Neo-Con dragon. They are ecstatic that a majority of the country now sees the war in Iraq as a tragic mistake. They feel that high gas prices, stagflation and the national deficit are winning allies from independents and moderate Republican circles every day. I saw a political cartoon today that implied Rove, Cheney and Bush were all on the run and had fled the country.

On the other hand they are gearing up for a fight over Judge Alito, even before it is clear whether there should be one. The Neo-Cons are promising the nuclear option if Alito's nomination is filibustered, while some Democrats are already promising to shut down the Senate if they can't win. Recent polls have given them hope that they will gain public support for a filibuster if Alito can be portrayed as clearly against Roe vs Wade. The Democrats can almost smell a house majority in the 2006 elections.

Hokum, they aren't watching the pea. First let's talk about the things that are being ignored that are significant and then this roll the Democrats think they are on.

Taxes

For starters the new budget bill proposes \$70 billion in new tax breaks for the rich while cutting \$10 billion in Medicare and Medicaid for the elderly and poor. A new tax code is being recommended that would tax labor more heavily than dividends or capital gains. In other words if you make money shoveling, you'll pay a higher tax rate than the guy going by in the back of his chauffeured Rolls-Royce.

The government just allowed approximately \$300 billion in offshore earnings to enter the country under a special deal that only taxes it a rate of 5%. So the government won't find itself in the embarrassing position of having to work out special deals for its campaign donors in the future, the new tax code recommends that corporations not pay any tax on money earned overseas.

Even though most corporations pay never pay any real taxes, the corporate rate would be reduced to 31.5%, cheaper than they have ever been. Most would likely increase the payment of dividends which would be tax free to individual shareholders although not to most of the

little folks who own stock through mutual funds and retirement vehicles, they would pay 15% on investments. Meanwhile the wealthy would pay a top capital gains tax on average, of 8.25%.

Setting a cap on corporate deductions for health insurance premiums would encourage more and more companies to drop their plans as health care costs continue to outpace inflation and employers squeeze for more profit. In the place of a number of current deductions for healthcare, retirement and education would be three tax exempt savings accounts for individuals which you could put up to \$20,000 a year into. Great, I always have an extra 20k that I don't need lying around to salt away in a tax free account.

In addition the abolition of certain tax breaks like the deductions for state and local taxes will hurt the little guy a lot more than the rich. The loss of the property tax deduction would wipe out any interest deduction for most small homeowners as well as increase resistance to raising local taxes at a time when the feds have shifted more of the costs to local and state governments.

While doing away with the alternative minimum tax for individuals, which at least needs to be indexed, it would also do away with the alternative minimum tax on corporations which has been virtually ignored in the press.

Media Concentration and Control

In notable but unheralded telecommunications acquisitions, SBC acquired AT&T and Verizon purchased MCI, which will yield further consolidation and concentration of telecommunication/media control. The few anti monopoly restrictions placed on them will all expire after a maximum of 30 months allowing them to raise rates, shut out competition and restrict competitive use of access.

Meanwhile over at the Corporation of Public Broadcasting Board of Directors, the new GOP fundraiser Chairperson and Kenneth Tomlinson replacement, Cheryl Halpern is fast turning public broadcasting into a pro government propaganda machine. She hired former co-chair of the Republican National Committee, Patricia de Stacy Harrison, as President. She in turn has brought along her old subordinates from the State Department Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy Division (read Ministry of Foreign Propaganda) to do their magic on the American people via public television and radio. They include Tom Igsitt, Vice President for Government Affairs; Mike Levy Vice President of Communications; and Helen Mobley, director of Corporate Communications and Planning. All three have extensive overseas propaganda experience.

The Continued Removal of Corporate Responsibility

The corporate owned congress continues to feed its contributors and give the bill to the American people. Having passed bills that relieve corporate accountability for fast food and guns they now want to help the pharmaceutical industry. Stating that limiting liability is the only way to get companies to produce avian flu vaccines it is just a foot in the door to relieve them from any liability for future development of new pharmaceuticals.

All of these laws tote personal responsibility while totally ignoring the constant marketing barrage people are subjected to, starting in childhood to buy their products, the valuing of profits before negative impacts or outright deceptive practices used to increase sales. I wonder if my heirs can sue if the weight loss medicine I am using causes me to become so depressed I shoot myself.

The Growth of the Police State

Right now the President and Vice President continue to argue for the right to torture people at their discretion. The President continues to hold American citizens in seclusion without charges, trial or access to a lawyer. He maintains that the government continues the need to secretly invade American homes, search them and not tell anyone until much later. The man who advised the administration on how it could avoid war crimes prosecution is now the Attorney General and the head of the death squads in El Salvador and Nicaragua is in charge of all intelligence foreign and domestic in the United States.

We learn that in addition to people being picked up and send to countries where they can be tortured by other governments our own government is now maintaining secret prisons abroad where they presumably are exempt from any standard of civil rights or humane treatment. In Guantanamo, 21 prisoners who have been held almost four years without charges or trial are being subjected to forced feeding through nose tubes while strapped to beds so they can't pull them out and choose death over their hopeless existence. Acts the Secretary of Defense calls "some people chose to go on diets for various reasons".

Forget the battle over Chief Justice Roberts and nominee Alito's views are on abortion. That pales next to their well-documented beliefs on the supremacy of the corporation and the total faith in the dictatorial powers of the Presidency. These are the votes that can install the Divine Right of Kings and primogeniture succession in America. Add to that the international judgment that the United States ranks 22nd in its freedom of the press and you are looking at an increasingly closed society.

Last week the President states that his plan for dealing with the avian flu was to offer more liability protection and subsidies to pharmaceutical companies to gear up vaccination production. They at their humanitarian best said they didn't think it would be worth it for a one-time disease. A projected 200 million people would die in a world wide pandemic. Anybody need another reason for a national healthcare program.

Basically, the President said his goal was to get 20 million vaccines available for first responders including the military. If you include professional healthcare workers (7 million alone), medical support staff, firemen, police, military and their families that means the other 280 million people are on their own. One public health official put it this way (I paraphrase) "local governments will primarily be on their own. A pandemic could last from 1-3 years during which time many people would be out of work, have trouble obtaining food and other basic necessities. Hospitals would be overwhelmed with schools and stadiums being used as makeshift medical facilities. Morgues would not be able to handle the numbers of dead." Estimates talk of deaths in the

millions in the U.S. alone. The Presidents plan seems to be, put federal and National Guard troops around an infected area and let them ride it out.

Bush's Alcoholic Mastery of Denial Will Not Surrender

What the Democrats don't seem to understand is that by going to the wall on the Alito nomination is they can only lose on all accounts. While both sides can fill their coffers for the 2006 elections and unify their bases by a full scale fight, a democratic filibuster in the Senate followed by a Republican nuclear option it is a self destructive strategy. Between the enmity that it will create with moderate Republicans and the filibuster gone, the Republican arm-twisting machine will move into full throttle before the next election occurs. The filibuster will be useless on every other issue that comes up.

Once used the nuclear option will push the Republican party past the point of no return. The Republicans will be faced with the prospect of a Democratic majority using it in revenge or insuring the Democrats never come to power again. Republicans will hammer them with it on every issue. The corporations, the religious right and the neo-con militarists will want to push through everything they can in case there is a public backlash against the house, and the party will want to limit the ability for Democrats to win and be willing to push through repressive changes in the Voting Rights Act before the next election. Moderates will be forced by the need for contributions and base solidification to march to the beat of the far right. It will be a scorched earth policy.

A better strategy would be to thoroughly expose all of Alito's beliefs about abortion, executive power, corporate power and other views repugnant to the citizenry. Claim the moral high ground and vote as a party against him if that is what it takes to stake out a position to move forward from. There is still a majority to protect Roe vs Wade and we won't be powerless to filibuster even more repugnant legislation that the administration surely will try to push through if the nuclear option is used. Having not used the filibuster on the supreme court nominee the Republicans will be hesitant to use the nuclear option on anything less.

Secondly, the Libby/Rove prosecution/investigation is likely to be obstructed for years (anybody remember Whitewater). Claims of Executive Privilege and Classified information will stall the investigation and trial to a crawl. Libby may finally go to jail, but certainly with a promise of a pardon on Bush's last day in office which will be about the time he actually has to show up there and for Rove, the same. The Bush family has a history of being very forgiving of those who participated with them in crimes against the country. Even if Cheney resigns, possible but doubtful, Bush will probably stumble on to the end of his term alone, isolated and paranoid. That in and of itself is a scary scenario.

Over at the U.N John Bolton is going full speed ahead to destroy any official world opposition to U.S. policy in that body. Bolton and Rice are fomenting expanding the Iraq war to Syria and have driven Iranian leaders backwards into a theocratic frenzy suggesting to them that they have nothing to lose by becoming more militant. The Iranians are angry,

paranoid and threatened. Their reactions are unifying the world along cold war lines with the U.S. again dominating the discussion and direction.

Opposite of Bush's promise, the Iranian hardliners have grown in power. They know a war with the United States involving Syria as well is their best chance of survival internally and would unite much of the Muslim war against the U.S. In response Bush has indicated a willingness to use tactical nuclear weapons. Even if used against buried military targets with limited loss of life and no collateral damage, it would outrage the world and explode the anger of a billion Muslims, many who would be willing to carry the terrorist war to America.

The history of the Bush administration is when questioned refuse to answer, when caught lie, when cornered get do something more extreme to change the subject, but never, never give up. Expanding the war to Syria and Iran, using massive bombing, nuking the Democrats in the Senate over abortion, pushing through a tax plan that favors corporations and the rich while further limiting their liability, expanding media consolidation and propaganda efforts while further crushing dissent are quite frankly all things that will gain support on the right among the radical theocratic, ideological and corporate bases.

Bush is most likely an untreated alcoholic who is either actively drinking or on a dry drunk. Alcoholics in this position resort to megalomania as long as they have the resources to maintain their illusion, and presidents have a lot of resources for self delusion at their disposal. When they become overwhelmed by the consequences of their actions they resort to blame, rage and destructive actions. Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz on the other hand are hard-core ideologues who are willing to sacrifice any number of people to execute their plans for world domination.

Given this administrations willingness to ignore public opinion and forge on in spite of its mistakes, exposed lies and corruption it is not a far stretch to imagine what kind of power it might try and seize in case of a national emergency like a flu pandemic. If you think the last two elections have been a farce, what about no election because of a pandemic, what about the suspension of congress and the prohibition of any public gathering enforced by the military. Maybe I'm just paranoid, but then again maybe anybody who believes this administration is on the run hasn't been reading past the headlines.

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