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20 Questions for George W. Bush: Americans Must Demand Straight Answers from Their President

by Glenn Scherer

George W. Bush's poll numbers are tumbling, his credibility crumbling, his domestic and foreign policies faltering, and our national debt soaring. Worse, many Americans fear that our nation is at far greater risk of terrorist attack today than before 9/11.

While Mr. Bush has cynically spun lies, and claims to care about America and its people, he has undermined the United States Constitution, stomped upon freedoms granted under the US Bill of Rights, attacked the bulwark of environmental laws that protects our natural resources, threatened our national security through reckless military adventures, and has savaged our economy by serving not the electorate but his campaign donors. Mr. Bush has proven repeatedly by his actions that he represents not the people, but a handful of the nation's wealthiest families, a small group of corporate special interests and right wing religious Christian zealots.

Meanwhile, the real American people, not the super rich, but those millions who form the backbone of this country -- America's middle class, the working poor, the elderly, our children, honest businesspeople, our soldiers, firefighters, police, scientists, bureaucrats and other public servants, have been callously battered by a Republican administration that is more abusive and ruthless in its wielding of power than any president, any Congress, any ruling political party in American history.

The president has, often behind our backs, made deals to sell out our public lands to multinational corporate oil drillers; sell off our national forests to corporate loggers; poison our air to benefit coal, energy and auto company CEOs; and threatened our drinking water by not prosecuting corporate polluters. His administration has rewarded corporate swindlers at Enron and other companies by failing to adequately punish those individuals responsible for massive criminal harm done to the people and the country. This administration, in league with these corporate pirates, has tarnished the image of America worldwide, and harmed the good name of those honest corporations who have

steered clear of Republican cronyism and Neoconservative global profiteering schemes.

Still, the corporate-owned mainstream media, in attendance at the President's rarely held press conferences, meekly reports the administration's false promises and lame excuses, and fails to ask the tough questions that are critical to the survival of our nation in this dark time.

In truth, this is a time made even darker not by Al Qaeda, that shadowy terrorist enemy who attacks us from without, but by a Republican President and Congress that are shattering the bedrock of democratic institutions upon which our founding fathers built our country. They are destroying America by a terror attack from within.

Americans deserve straight answers from George Bush, and they deserve them now:

1. Mr. President, as you ask us to spend \$87 billion in Iraq -- the second richest oil nation in the world -- in order to supposedly defend our national security, what do you say to the 1.7 million Americans who you have allowed to slip below the poverty line in the last 12 months, without any promise of help? What do you say to the 34.6 million Americans -- 1 in 8 of our people, including 13 million children -- who live in poverty and upon whom you, the Congress, and your party have turned your backs? We, the richest nation in all of history, have the worst child poverty rate and worst life expectancy of all the world's industrialized countries. These facts, being true, why should we believe you care about our working poor, or the "national security" of hungry American children?

2. Since January 2001, nearly 2 million US jobs have been lost, and 8.6 million Americans now are actively seeking work. Since you won election three years ago, in Ohio alone, one in six manufacturing jobs have disappeared. Hunger is epidemic there, with 2 million of that state's 11 million people forced to rely on food charities last year. This being so, why should we believe that you care about America's labor, its moderate income or working poor, those who are the driving force buoying up our battered consumer economy, but whom you ignore?

3. Will you please defend for us, Mr. President, the massive tax cuts you have engineered for the super rich, and the massive subsidies and tax breaks you have authorized to the corporations that have provided you with the biggest campaign donations ever given a president? All this at a time when our nation is at war, when all Americans, especially the wealthy, should be willing to make sacrifices to offset a staggering \$1.9 trillion national deficit over the next six years? How do you justify tax cuts to the rich when 43 million Americans cannot afford basic health insurance. That's 43 million Americans to whom you,

Congress, and your party have offered no help or hope? How can we believe you care about "national security" when none of these citizens know what will become of their families if parents or children are struck by catastrophic illness?

4. You have just approved a new rule, Mr. President, that bypasses and subverts the Clean Air Act, one of our greatest environmental achievements as a nation. Your new rule, in direct violation of that law, will allow coal burning power plants to significantly increase their rate of air pollution. Coal-fired plants already kill at least 10,000 Americans each year; that's 3 times the number of Americans who died on 9/11. The increased air pollution you have now approved will sicken and kill many more. Coal and energy companies are among the biggest campaign contributors to you and Republican members of Congress. Isn't your new air pollution rule an open act of corporate cronyism, or even worse, an act of corporate terrorism committed against America's senior citizens with respiratory illnesses and American children with asthma?

5. On your watch, Mr. Bush, you presided over the most private bankruptcies filed in a 12 month period (up by 23 percent since 2000), the biggest drop in the stock market in US history (a crash of 38 percent or \$6.65 trillion in a little over 18 months), the most foreclosures in a 12 month period, history's biggest deficit, and the greatest stock market fraud in history. A US budget surplus of \$236 billion bequeathed to you by Bill Clinton was squandered, and turned into a projected \$350 billion loss for 2004. Why should taxpayers rehire you Mr. Bush as America's CEO, or reelect anyone of the Congressional advocates of corporate deregulation and privatization that have allowed select Bush-favored multinationals to commit high piracy against the American nation and its people?

6. Why did you cut health care benefits for war veterans and support cuts in duty benefits for active duty troops and their families during wartime? Is how you reward the GI heroes who won your War in Iraq, especially when you have rewarded more than 70 American companies and individuals (some of your biggest campaign contributors), with \$8 billion in profiteering war contracts within Iraq and Afghanistan? Meanwhile, morale in the Iraqi war theatre is plummeting as worn out soldiers doubt the purposefulness or direction of their mission. No end is in sight in Iraq, as more American troops die every day; as under-trained reservists see their tours of duty extended, while their families wait at home with no word of relief; as more than 1,800 wounded, some with lost limbs and other horrible disfigurements go unreported, unlauded and even unvisited by their President; as the regular military is given the best

equipment, while reservists are expected to make-do with outdated night goggles, flak jackets, and other ineffectual equipment. How can our soldiers respect a Commander and Chief who is a draft dodger, a man who dares to don a Navy flight suit and declare: "The war is won!" when of course it isn't, and may never be?

7. Why has your Vice President Dick Cheney been allowed to keep his financial ties with the Halliburton Corporation? He received \$162,392 in deferred salary in 2002, and owns 433,333 stock options in the company today. He promised to end those financial ties when he took office. And why are the largest multibillion dollar post-war reconstruction contracts being awarded to Halliburton by the Pentagon with no bidding process? Why aren't Iraqi companies or other American companies being given a chance to bid? Why aren't reports of horrific price gouging by Halliburton in Iraq being investigated by you? Considering that Mr. Cheney's corporate investments are worth far more than his vice presidential salary, and considering his very suspicious actions, why should we believe he is not more loyal to Halliburton than to the American people? Under your administration, it appears that select multinational corporations have taken over the rule of our country, in utter disregard of America's long standing free enterprise system, democratic principles, and in utter disregard of our national security.

8. Mr. Bush, where are Iraq's weapons of mass destruction? Why did both you and Dick Cheney before the war repeatedly assert or imply a connection between Al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein and the terrorist horrors of 9/11, when in fact your intelligence told you then that there was absolutely no such evidence of any such connection? Did you, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Connie Rice, Paul Wolfowitz, and others in your administration exaggerate or fabricate reports of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in order to justify the invasion of Iraq, a sovereign nation that had not attacked the United States? Are you Mr. President, a liar?

9. Mr. Bush, you told the American people that you would get Osama bin Laden "dead or alive." You made the same promise concerning the ruthless despot Saddam Hussein. Both remain free and at large, and both could be plotting devastating new attacks against America and the world right now. Should a US President who fails so dismally to deliver on such huge and important promises, promises that impact the national security and well being of every American, run for a second term? Or should he instead stand aside humbly, withdraw from the office and the race, and allow another more capable citizen to take over the job?

10. What do you have to say about disturbing reports that federal public servants have been fired by you because they have demonstrated that the US nuclear industry, one of your big campaign supporters, has failed to adequately protect against mock-terrorist attacks? Nuclear plants were penetrated in 50 percent of the mock-attacks, even though the facilities knew months in advance on exactly what day those attacks would occur. And what do you say about your failure to support a Congressional bill to force America's chemical industry to better defend its factories against terror assaults? (This legislation was chiefly blocked by the chemical industry itself, another one of your big campaign donors). Isn't it true that as we spend billions to secure Iraqi oil fields, you have failed to fund key homeland security initiatives, leaving every American vulnerable to assaults on undefended industries, attacks that could be equivalent in the suffering brought by the bombing of Hiroshima or Russia's Chernobyl disaster?

11. Why, Mr. President, did you give \$43 million in foreign aid to the Taliban in Afghanistan less than six months before 9/11, when you knew they were the most virulent anti-American violators of human rights in the world, and also knew that they harbored the training camps of terrorist Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda? The record shows that your administration was in negotiations with the Taliban until August 2001, less than a month before the attacks on Washington and the World Trade Center. Those negotiations were for a multibillion dollar pipeline to benefit US oil giant Unocal and Halliburton (a major pipeline construction firm and a company which made huge donations to your campaign, and from which the Vice President still receives huge financial benefits). These negotiations, and the gift of \$43 million, make it appear that these companies, your administration, and your Vice President, were in bed with the very terrorists who attacked America. If this allegation is true, why should we believe that you have our best national security interests at heart, rather than the corporate interests of multinational companies? Why isn't the US Justice Department investigating Halliburton, Unocal, Dick Cheney, and other officials who may have worked closely with the Taliban within weeks of the 9/11 attacks?

12. Why did your White House Council on Environmental Quality order the Environmental Protection Agency to conceal the magnitude of the air quality health hazards of the World Trade Center Ground Zero site from the heroes of 9/11 -- the firemen, police and rescue workers -- as well as from the people of New York City? What are Americans to make of reports that this concealment was a deliberate attempt by the White House to get Wall Street up and running again as soon as possible? If this allegation is true, why should we believe you

have the health and safety of average Americans as a first priority over profit?

13. Why did your administration repeatedly resist the release of intelligence data to those in Congress investigating the FBI and CIA failings of your administration prior to the attacks of 9/11? And why have Americans been denied access to the portion of the Congressional document relating your personal and political connections with the corrupt Saudi government? Please remember, Mr. President, that most of the 20 hijackers were Saudis, and that Al Qaeda was and continues to be heavily bankrolled by Saudi princes. Such facts are owed to the American people so they can vote in the next election based on the complete story. Considering your apparent attempts to hide evidence, why should we believe that your administration is not responsible for the failure to stop 9/11, and for concealment of the Saudis continued links to terrorists?

14. Why is it that the biggest corporate swindler in US history, Kenneth Lay, the CEO of Enron who robbed his own employees of millions in retirement savings, has not been charged with any crime, remains untried, unfined, and unjailed? Does this failure on the part of John Ashcroft and your Justice Department have anything to do with the simple fact that Kenneth Lay was your biggest political campaign supporter in the year 2000 election, and that he also happens to be a close personal friend who you affectionately have nicknamed "Kenny Boy"? While your close association with Ken Lay does not on the surface make you guilty of any crime, your failure to press for his prosecution makes you appear to be complicit with corporate piracy committed against the American people. Your failure to prosecute other corporate pirates, who have committed crimes against our economy, forces many of us to assume that you can no longer govern fairly, with the best interests and the will of the American people in mind. Please tell us why we should believe otherwise.

15. Mr. Bush, you have declared yourself to be a born again fundamentalist Christian, but have never outlined your religious beliefs in public. Most Americans would agree this is your personal business. However, if you are a fundamentalist Christian in the style of many of your biggest right wing supporters such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, do you also then believe, as they do, that we are now living in the End Time described in the Bible? To be more clear, do you believe we are living in the time when Jesus Christ will return to the Earth, rescue true Christian believers, and leave the rest of the sinful world behind to suffer through ecological disaster and nuclear Armageddon? Your cavalier decisions as President concerning the destruction of the environment (approving arsenic in our water and

pushing for increases in the production of chemicals that could destroy the ozone layer), along with your decisions regarding nuclear weapons (authorizing atomic bunker busters, approving weapons delivery systems for outer space, and preemptive strikes), could lead Americans to think that your judgment is clouded by extreme religious beliefs. Do you, Mr. Bush, believe the Apocalypse, the end of the world is at hand, and the return of Jesus Christ imminent? Americans need to know your answer.

16. Why does the White House find it necessary to repeatedly censor EPA scientific reports that verify the nation's horrific danger in the face of global warming? Isn't this censorship a direct attack on freedom of speech, and the free exchange of vital scientific information? In Europe, 35,000 people -- in what some call a genocide of the elderly -- are dead as a result of one of the worst heat waves in history (a fact mostly unreported in the US press). Arctic ice has thinned by almost 50 percent in the last 50 years. Antarctic icebergs the size of Rhode Island are falling into the sea. Oceans are rising, ecosystems collapsing, plants and animals going extinct, and weather disasters worsening. All of this is happening, reputable scientists say, as the result of global climate change. And yet, secret documents leaked to the alternative press reveal that among your key advisors shaping your climate policy is ExxonMobil Corporation. Do you, like Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee Chair James Inhofe (a stalwart fundamentalist Christian), believe that global warming is the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people? Dick Cheney continues to stonewall against the release of documents revealing with whom he met to create the administration's energy plan. That plan would grossly benefit oil and coal companies, pump millions of tons of additional greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and potentially put our country and the world on a collision course with irreversible runaway climate change and a global environmental meltdown. When will you stop pretending global warming is a non-threat to America and the world, but rather the greatest looming disaster in human history?

17. You say you are the education President, Mr. Bush, and the mainstream corporate media records and applauds your every pronouncement on the issue. Only they fail to report that you yourself sliced \$90 million from your "No Child Left Behind" Act after it was passed. Also, your primary program targeting aid to disadvantaged children is expected to fall \$6 billion short in 2004 of what was promised by your new education law. You also wish to abandon any federal role in the highly successful Head Start early childhood program for the underprivileged. However, your \$87 billion Iraq military and reconstruction expenditure will be 87 times what the federal

government annually spends on after-school programs; 7 times what you proposed to spend on education for low-income schools in 2004; nine times what the federal government spends on special education each year; and 8 times what the federal government spends to help middle- and low-income students go to college. Should Americans be sending their children to Iraq for schooling?

18. Please outline for us, Mr. President, your family's connection with the bin Laden family. Why were rich members of the Saudi bin Laden family flown out of the United States without questioning within days after 9/11, as meanwhile, poor Islamic people, who had committed no crime other than minor violations of US immigration laws, were held in cruel and illegal solitary confinement without charges made against them for many months? Why do you and Attorney General John Ashcroft continue to press for the extension of Patriot Act I and the passage of Patriot Act II, which both contain numerous flagrant violations of the US Bill of Rights? Considering this evidence, should Americans not wonder whether you value the freedom of your corporate friends in Saudi Arabia more than your country or its freedoms?

19. During your run for President in 2000, what part did your brother, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, play in assuring that 94,000 blacks, many of them legally registered to vote, were expunged from the voter roles? Why did the US Justice Department not investigate these serious election irregularities once they came to light after the US Supreme Court dubbed you President? If these allegations are true concerning your brother, why should we accept you as the legitimate leader of our nation? Should we demand an unbiased investigation?

20. Mr. Bush, as president, just before 9/11, you took a month vacation for rest and relaxation, setting the all-time record for most vacation days taken by any president in any one year period in office. You did so despite intelligence briefings that Osama bin Laden might be planning massive attacks within the borders of the United States. Mr. President, why not go on a permanent vacation so that hard working Americans can begin recovering from the most politically corrupt, the most economically, environmentally, and socially destructive, and most militarily inept presidency in our country's history?

Mr. President, the answers to these 20 questions and countless others concerning your wrong doing, and potentially illegal actions, should not come from your handlers or spokespeople, not from Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Paul Wolfowitz, or anyone else. Harry Truman said about the presidency, "the buck stops here." So sir, it stops with you.

As our President, you must come clean and answer for your

actions. You need to stand before the American people at a town meeting and tell them why, for example, you haven't asked for an investigation of the White House leak that recently exposed a CIA agent to exposure in the press and put her life at risk. That act (probably committed or aided by your 2000 campaign mastermind Karl Rove) is a federal offense and felony. Why haven't you asked every White House staffer to sign sworn affidavits that they did not commit this crime? Why haven't you launched an investigation? More than 70 percent of Americans say a special counsel should be appointed; why are you and John Ashcroft doing nothing? Isn't this considerably more important than covering up the bare breasts of statues in the Justice Department? Mr. Ashcroft needs to act now.

Mr. President, an activist from India recently spoke eloquently and simply about the painful reality of George W. Bush's America. He asked:

"Why is it that a candidate in your country is allowed to accept vast sums of money from corporations and multimillionaires as gifts, then once elected president can offer those same companies and individuals generous government contracts, freedom from regulation, and freedom from prosecution for illegal activities? We in India have a name for such dealings. We don't call such influence pedaling "campaign contributions," we call it "bribery" and "political corruption." And in our country leaders who do such things go to jail. In America, such misdeeds go largely unreported, and officials are rewarded with reelection. It is madness and will ruin your country."

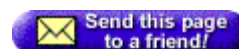
Mr. President, you must stop dodging questions about your actions, and you must stop wrapping your administration in the flag of patriotism, the last refuge of a scoundrel. You must stop spinning lies. You must stop defending graft, influence peddling, war profiteering and the other high crimes of your Vice President, Attorney General, and Secretary of Defense.

Americans must have the truth from you, Mr., President. We deserve it. It is time for you to speak to us directly and with total honesty.

And should you, Mr. President, refuse to tell us the truth, then we must demand your resignation. Failing that, we must ask Congress to go forward with the impeachment of George W. Bush for selling out our nation to multinational corporations, and for committing treason against the Constitution of the United States.

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