

"America is the only country that has gone from barbarism to decadence without the slightest trace of civilization in between."—Oscar Wilde

The Paper Reduction Act

An editorial by Bill Reichenbach



Today the White House confirmed plans to implement the *Paper Reduction Act of 2006* by eliminating sections of the US Constitution that have been deemed "archaic" and therefore unusable. White House spokesman Tony Snow was quoted as saying "The President has spent much time deciding which sections of the Constitution need to be 'disappeared' and sees no reason to drag this process out any longer." Most of the sections to be "retired" have to do with things such as *habeas corpus* and the right to a trial by jury. Snow continued, "The President has always felt that putting words on paper is a big waste. And nobody really likes to do jury duty either."

In a related story, after a heated bidding war between the Kleenex Co. and Charmin Bath Tissue, the Charmin Co. emerged today victorious in its bid to buy up all of the existing copies of the US Constitution (including the original). "We plan to process it into bath tissue," Mr. Whipple, a company spokesman, said today.

"The seed of this idea came to us a few years ago after we saw the way the Bush Administration was using the Constitution. He certainly was doing more than simply blowing his nose on it. With the ratification of the *Military Commissions Act of 2006* (see below), the door was clearly open for the acquisition of this valuable natural resource. This act basically negates several articles from the old 'quaint' US Constitution turning it into an untapped new source of blank paper." The company specifically mentioned the original Constitution. "Did you know the original Constitution was written on hemp paper? That's some real high quality stuff. We haven't had the opportunity to work with hemp since Charles Foster Kane, I mean William Randolph Hearst demonized it so that he could sell his forest holdings for wood pulp paper." Mr. Whipple continued, "Of course, we will have to test the hemp paper for 'squeezeability' and assuming it passes, we'll blend it into large

batches of our premium Charmin *A More Perfect Union* Bath Tissue. If it doesn't pass the test, maybe we'll just smoke it." The agency creating the ad campaign gave us a brief taste of the tag line for

the TV spots: "Take your morning constitutional with the real Constitution. It's your Civic Duty." Charmin also has plans to buy up all copies of the now useless *Geneva Conventions*.

On A Serious Note...

I made up the *Paper Reduction Act of 2006* but the *Military Commissions Act of 2006* is real and very scary. Here are parts of a brief explanation of some of the elements of the Act from Amnesty International -*Turning bad policy into bad law* (September 2006).

- Strip the US courts of jurisdiction to hear or consider *habeas corpus* appeals challenging the lawfulness or conditions of detention of anyone held in US custody as an "enemy combatant." Judicial review of cases would be severely limited.
- Prohibit any person from invoking the Geneva Conventions or their protocols as a source of rights in any action in any US court.
- Permit civilians captured far from any battlefield to be tried by military commission rather than civilian courts, contradicting international standards and case law.
- Permit, in violation of international law, the use of evidence extracted under cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Permit the use of classified evidence against a defendant, without the defendant necessarily being able effectively to challenge the "sources, methods or activities" by which the government acquired the evidence.
- Give the military commissions the power to hand down death sentences, in contravention of international standards which only permit capital punishment after trials affording "all possible safeguards to ensure a fair trial." The sole clemency authority would be the President.
- Limit the right of detainees to be represented by counsel of their choosing.
- Fail to provide any guarantee that trials will be conducted within a reasonable time.
- Permit the executive to determine who is an "enemy combatant" under any "competent tribunal" established by the executive, and endorse the Combatant Status Review Tribunal (CSRT), the wholly inadequate administrative procedure that has been employed in Guantanamo to review individual detentions.

We can only hope that the current efforts by the new Democratic majority to undo this assault on our Constitution are successful.

A MODEST PROPOSAL

An editorial by Larry Markes

A Debate with Myself

Ever since the Shrub was selected President, Republicans have frequently responded to criticism of the feckless nincompoop and his corrupt, morally bankrupt Administration by accusing liberals of flip-flopping and having no constructive solution for whatever problems the neo-cons' greed or incompetence have created.

The conservatives counter with, "The War On Iraq is a catastrophe? Well, how would you liberals get us out of this mess? See? You have no plan." Generally, the mainstream media is taken in by this misdirection, but I can usually stick to the point. But this time, they got me.

I confess I can't help flip-flopping over one of their latest "talking points": Iraq Isn't Bush's War, It's America's War. For the life of me, I can't decide whether to laugh or cry, or which side to come down on.

On the one hand, I want to say "Yes, it's our war too," that we bear just as much responsibility for the misery created as our leaders. This war was made in our name, to advance our purported interests. The fact that those interests were horribly misstated from the start—this war was sold to us on false pretenses as a counterattack on Saddam Hussein and Al Qaida and a crusade to spread our brand of democracy—is irrelevant now. To borrow a favorite excuse of the incompetent when their mistakes are exposed, "We are where we are. It's our war now, and we have to shoulder the burden of it," the burden of the thousands dead and wounded including our own young men and women and the shattered families left behind. The burden of the billions of dollars wasted we could have better spent elsewhere on education, on health care and insurance, on the homeless, on crime and the thousands of other things we really need to support; and last but not least, the burden of our diminished reputation

elsewhere and the increased stature of terrorists and religious fanatics everywhere. Yes, it's our war now, and our shame, and our responsibility to start setting things right.

But then the historian in me takes over and I say, No, this isn't our war, and if we don't learn that lesson, we are in danger of making the same mistake again. This war was wrong from the start because it was sold to us with deceit, by liars whose primary aim was to further their own goals at the expense not only of others' interests but also the American people's. Warmongers and war profiteers who knew what they were doing was wrong misled us into this

war, and for that, our Democratic Party leadership bears almost as much blame as the neo-cons and simple cons. Okay, we shouldn't have let Bush and his bullies deceive us. But instead of berating ourselves for the sin of believing our leaders who had sworn to tell us the truth and to uphold the Constitution, we should gather ourselves up now and say, "No more. This is Bush's War, not America's, and we're not going to let it continue."

I don't care if they call me a flip-flopper because the bottom line is this: whichever side you're on, or I'm on, it's our America and we have to start moving forward again.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."—Martin Luther King Jr.

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