

# "A Republic, if you can keep it"

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If, as seem increasingly likely, America's centuries-long run as a constitutional democracy is in its last throes, so to speak, the blame for its ultimate demise will belong not just to its actual executioners in the Republican Reich but also to the Quisling Democrats who were too timid, and too short-sightedly self-serving, to lift a finger to save it.

With the Republicans marching in lockstep with their would-be Fuehrer in their glory days before the '06 elections (treating the minority Democrats with amused contempt when they weren't ignoring them altogether), the hapless Democrats were down to the last tool in their emergency kit-the filibuster. But when the Democrats threatened to use it, the Republicans responded with a threat of their own: if the Democrats didn't continue to allow the Republicans to have their way without interference, the Republicans would simply changes the rules of the Senate (an action which itself required only a simple majority vote and was thus filibuster-proof) and eliminate the filibuster altogether.

The Democrats, as usual, backed down, essentially agreeing that their party would not use the filibuster if the Republicans would refrain from eliminating it! Which, ironically, left the filibuster in place for well-nigh daily use by the Republicans as soon as the '06 elections left them in the minority. Showing absolutely no shame for their bald-faced hypocrisy, the Republicans overnight made 60 votes the automatic minimum for any legislation not approved by the Republican Reich.

Now think what this means. Had the Democrats stood firm in the face of the Reich's threat to change the rules, either the Republicans would have backed down or they would have gone ahead and changed the rules. If the former, then some of the excesses of the Bush administration would have been prevented. If the latter-which the Reich almost certainly would have chosen, given their belief that the glory days of one-party rule had arrived-then the Republicans would not have been able throughout 2007 to routinely block bill after bill which had the support of a clear majority in the Senate. (And, to add insult to injury, the Reich has used the results of its own obstructionism to tag the Democrats with the "do-nothing" label.)

In fact, though, the threat to change the rules was a pretty good bet for the Republicans either way, because even had the Republicans eliminated it the Democratic propensity for "reasonableness" and compromise probably would have led the Democrats to reinstate the cloture rule once they gained the majority. That's the problem: Democrats try to be reasonable and fair, while Republicans simply play to win. Republicans see fairness as a Democratic weakness, to be exploited at every turn. And the Democrats just roll over every time it happens.

**"Can't we all get along?" is the plaintive cry of the Democrats, who persist in thinking the Republicans will play by the rules. "We don't want to start any unpleasantness," the Democrats say, as they once again take impeachment off the table-just as they previously**

**declined to pursue it over Arms-for-Hostages and Iran-Contra-while the Republicans gleefully use it as a political weapon as they impeach Bill Clinton for lying about his inability to keep his pants zipped up.**

**The answer is "No, goddamn it, we can't all get along." Not when one side is determined to win by any means, fair or foul, and the other dithers about like a bunch of effete debate-society wusses. There's no point in bleating about the Marquis of Queensbury's Rules when the other guy is beating the hell out of you with a tire iron.**

**As long as the Democrats persist in playing Little Miss Goodie Two-Shoes to the Republicans' Schoolyard Bully, the Republicans are going to eat our lunch every day.**

**We don't deserve to win if we don't want to win, and if we want to win we ought to be willing to stand up for the things we believe in, instead of running off and wetting ourselves every time a Republican says "Boo!"**

And we start by pursuing impeachment against both Bush and Cheney. The case for the impeachment of each of them is as clear as the smirk on Bush's face (and the sneer on Cheney's), and if we don't pursue it we will be giving the next Republican president a blank check to complete the corporatization of America.

We have been ratcheting our way toward tyranny ever since Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon, signaling that subversion of the Constitution is not something that any Republican president should ever be held accountable for.

Perhaps this trend can be reversed, but not if we don't do something and do it now. If we don't, then subsequent presidents will lay claim to all the powers Bush has usurped without challenge from Congress, not even from this Democratic Congress. And who will oppose their claim then, if we do nothing now? Doing nothing is simply no longer an option. Even something as simple as going to <http://wexlerwantshearings.com/> and adding your voice to Rep. Robert Wexler's call for hearings is a step in the right direction.

The stakes are simply too high for us to dither any longer. We dodged the bullet in '06. No rational observer of the way things were trending before that election can have held much hope for the survival of democracy in America had that election gone the other way. But '06 was a respite, not a rescue, and the Democratic Party seems determined to blow this last chance, as it has blown so many others, by its blithe indifference to the fact that the drowning man that is Democracy in America is going down for the third time.

As he was leaving Independence Hall on the last day of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Benjamin Franklin was asked, "Well, Doctor, what have we got-A Republic or a Monarchy?" Franklin replied, "A Republic, if you can keep it."

If we can keep it, indeed.

# Progressive Challenge 2008

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## **1) End Imperial Foreign Policy, Redirect Funding**

All U.S. troops and military contractors must be safely withdrawn from Iraq now – with war funding redirected toward social needs at home, and humanitarian and reconstruction aid to the Iraqi people. Under our Constitution, Congress has the “power of the purse” to cut off funding that prolongs the occupation of Iraq. The disastrous war in Iraq must not be extended into an even more disastrous attack on Iran.

U.S. foreign policy must be fact-based, committed to international law and respect for the sovereignty of other nations, and aimed at intelligently countering real threats, such as weapons proliferation and transnational terrorism. Instead of producing more advanced nuclear warheads and promoting weapons into space and building missile shields, U.S. policy should lead by example in non-proliferation by disarming our own nuclear stockpiles. Reducing our nuclear weapons will facilitate negotiations with major powers like Russia and new nuclear countries like Iran. U.S. policy must be even-handed in the Middle East, aimed at justice and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. U.S. foreign policy must shift from reckless unilateralism toward cooperation and diplomacy – with people of other countries knowing us more by our helping hand than our sluggish arm.

## **2) Healthcare for All**

It is immoral for a country as wealthy as ours to have 47 million people with no healthcare coverage, and millions more with inadequate, overly expensive coverage. Despite spending twice as much as other industrialized nations on healthcare, our system performs poorly because the private U. S. insurance bureaucracy soaks up nearly one-third of all healthcare money in waste, profits, paperwork and advertising. Poor health and poor healthcare drag down the economy and job creation; healthcare expenses are a factor in half of all personal bankruptcies. Nonprofit national health insurance – “Enhanced Medicare for All” – could provide topnotch universal coverage by negotiating drug and treatment costs, while recouping \$300 billion in administrative savings currently wasted in private insurance bureaucracy. This kind of cost-effective “single-payer” system is publicly financed, privately delivered healthcare.

## **3) Economic Justice**

The Bush Administration’s enormous tax breaks for the wealthy must be rolled back – so that the richest 1 percent of our population (with yearly incomes averaging \$1.3 million) will not pocket \$300 billion over the next few years. Tax burdens on the middle class can be eased if the wealthy pay their share. Thirty seven million people (equivalent to the population of California) are living in poverty in the U.S. today. These immoral levels of poverty, which disproportionately impact communities of color and women, can be significantly reduced through concerted effort – including a living wage for all workers, expanded earned income tax credits, childcare assistance and housing vouchers. The federal government must fulfill its promise of resources to Hurricane Katrina survivors so they can return to rebuild their communities in the Gulf Coast.

Protecting the right of workers to form and join unions in the U.S. is essential to preserving the middle class, as is federal investment in job creation, such as the Apollo Alliance for renewable energy, and investment in wireless Internet networks. We need fair trade deals with other countries that protect workers’ rights and the environment – not wage-reducing “free trade” agreements that protect only corporate rights to globally exploit unprotected labor. We need to begin by canceling NAFTA. Finally, we need humane and comprehensive immigration reform, which insures a fair attainable path to citizenship and the rights of undocumented workers in the workplace, and affirms the dignity and integrity of immigrant families.

## 4) Stop Global Warming

No issue reveals more clearly the flaws of the U.S. political-economic system than global warming – the triumph of greed and corporate power over the public good, and the near-sighted focus on the short-term over the welfare of future generations. But the U.S. public is ready to take action to save the planet and protect our remaining wild places from further degradation in the pursuit of oil. We need elected leaders who will act boldly in reducing our country's oil dependence and use of fossil fuels. This can be done by raising auto fuel economy and imposing mandatory caps on carbon pollution while investing in public transportation, energy conservation technologies and alternative energy development. (Such investments create good-paying jobs.)

## 5) Reproductive Freedom/Civil Rights & Liberties

A woman's reproductive freedom, including the right-to-choose, is essential to personal privacy and gender equality. Equal rights and equal opportunity must be a guiding principle of society, especially in view of historic and ongoing discrimination against women and racial, ethnic and sexual minorities. Affirmative action in employment and education is an important tool for racial and gender equality. Lesbians and gays must be afforded equality, including in marriage and military service. The Bush administration has exploited the 9/11 tragedy to constrict precious Constitutional rights of privacy, speech, assembly, the right to habeas corpus, to a speedy trial, to a trial by jury, the right to defend oneself in court, and the right not to be tortured or murdered. Our Bill of Rights must be restored. Drug policy should emphasize treatment over criminalization – not a "drug war" that erodes Constitutional freedoms, privacy and law enforcement resources. The prison-industrial complex in which economic interests profit from incarceration must be shrunk – and capital punishment, with its racial and class biases, must be abolished.

## 6) Clean, Fair, Transparent Elections

The U.S. election system is in crisis, with voters facing political and racial obstacles in casting votes and in getting their votes counted. Big money and entrenched power deform the political process, with incumbents unfairly insulated by district gerrymandering and rules obstructing independent candidates and parties. We need comprehensive campaign finance reform at the state and national level, including Clean Money public financing of the public's elections, plus free TV/radio time for candidates. We need a ban on touch-screen (DRE) voting machines for counting votes, paper ballots as the official records for deriving voter intent, and rigorous mandatory audits of elections. We must end racially-biased disenfranchisement of felons who've served their time, and initiate reforms like "Instant Runoff"/proportional voting, which assure more accurate and broader representation than winner-take-all elections.

## 7) Media Reform

A half-dozen media conglomerates now sit on the windpipe of the First Amendment, having seized the public's broadcast airwaves; these companies helped facilitate the Iraq War. Giant phone and cable TV companies threaten to transform the Internet from a free forum fostering citizen action to a corporate-dominated medium fostering profiteering. The Internet can be saved by legislating "Net Neutrality." Regulation and anti-trust enforcement can break up media monopolies to diversify broadcasting and expand minority and nonprofit ownership. Our country needs well-funded, genuinely independent public broadcasting – to replace the current corrupt system of corporate underwriting and politicized White House control. Government policy should promote nonprofit and public access outlets, along with high-speed community Internet for all.

***Join the movement to demand that candidates for President, Congress and the U.S. Senate support the Progressive Agenda.***

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