

National News

Is Ashcroft's Drumbeat For Patriot Act Illegal?

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, issued a statement on Sept. 13, saying that a new study by the Government Accounting Office, a watchdog agency of the Congress, shows that Attorney General John Ashcroft spent more than \$200,000 on his travels around the country to promote the Patriot Act. Ashcroft travelled to 32 cities, holding meetings with mostly hand-picked audiences, to drum up support for the Act; this was after the House of Representatives had passed a bipartisan amendment, sponsored by Butch Otter (R-Idaho), which would have cut back the powers used by the FBI and Justice Department under the Patriot Act. Ashcroft even travelled to Otter's home district to lobby Otter's constituents against restricting the Patriot Act.

A 2002 law prohibits Federal funds from being used by any Executive branch agency—including the Justice Department—to lobby the public for support, or defeat, of legislation pending before the Congress.

Vatican Won't Support Sneak Attack on Kerry

The Catholic News Service on July 6 reported on a portion of a memo by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to Cardinal Theodore McCarrick in Washington, D.C., which stated that it is not necessarily sinful for Catholics to vote for politicians who support abortion, as long as they are voting for that candidate for "other reasons." The leak which was confirmed as accurate, though incomplete, by Ratzinger.

This rejection of any "one issue" approach to elections is a strong rebuke to the neo-conservative effort to convince Catholics and others to support the Bush-Cheney team. This is an important intervention by those in the Vatican who, along with Pope John Paul II, have taken a strong stand

against the Bush-Cheney perpetual war policy, and, who, through the Ratzinger document, have weighed in against the electoral manipulations of Bush's "brain," Karl Rove.

Two U.S. bishops had argued that it was a sin for Catholics to vote for a pro-abortion candidate, such as Kerry. Ratzinger's memo said that such a vote was a sin only if it were a "deliberate vote for a candidate precisely because of the candidate's permissive stand on abortion and/or euthanasia."

U.S.-Arab Council Slams War Party

The National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) held its 13th annual conference in Washington on Sept. 12-13. Attended by about 300 oil industry executives, diplomats, journalists, and Middle East political activists, the event was a non-stop assault on the Bush-Cheney Administration's foreign policy of perpetual war. But the second theme of the event was disappointment at John Kerry for failing to differentiate himself from Bush. The complaints about Kerry were based on the fact that the audience, almost to a person, knew that four more years of Bush-Cheney would have devastating consequences for the region and the world.

The conference was opened at a reception by Palestinian National Council member Hanan Ashrawi, who lambasted the Bush Administration for hypocrisy. She said that Bush was the first President to publicly call for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, yet he did nothing to back up his words, and gave Sharon a blessing to steal Palestinian land. Former Arab League Ambassador to the UN, Clovis Maksoud, also addressed the closing session.

Democratic economist Clyde Prestowitz brought the reality of the economic collapse to the event, by talking about the United States as the most bankrupt nation in history, living on borrowed money, as the result of the entire industrial sector being shut down or shipped overseas. He ended his remarks by spelling out a scenario of a total dollar meltdown.

Former CIA Station Chief in Saudi Arabia, Ray Close, delivered a stinging indictment of both the Bush White House and the intelligence community, for going into Iraq with no justification and no plan. He said that many professional intelligence officials knew the war would result in disaster but were too cowardly to raise their voices.

Hamilton Calls for 'Robust Policy Debate'

In an impassioned speech at the 2004 Eisenhower National Security Conference, in Washington on Sept. 15, Lee Hamilton, the vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission, lambasted both Presidential candidates for refusing to discuss the major foreign policy issues facing the nation, and to elaborate on the policies that they would implement if elected in November.

"The stakes in this election are high, at home and abroad, and the next President will have momentous choices to make—choices that will directly affect the lives of all Americans, and billions of people around the world," Hamilton said. "A robust debate about American foreign policy and national security is surely in order. There are many questions about the war on terror, Afghanistan, Iraq, nuclear proliferation, Iran, North Korea, global trade, poverty, and tumult. . . ."

"In this campaign, at least from my perception, there has been an extraordinary emphasis on the past events that happened 35 years ago. The candidates are spending too much time looking back and not enough time looking forward. I believe the American voter cares more about the choices the candidates offer for tomorrow than the choices they made decades ago. . . . What bothers me, this year as in the past, is that we are missing a real opportunity to address global challenges and the U.S. role in the world. In a democracy, it is not only the choices that you make which are important it is also the manner in which you make those choices. The 2004 election may prove to be a precursor to extraordinary choices but you wouldn't know that from the campaign."