

Democrat Agenda Omissions

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With all the customary pomp and pageantry accompanying the occasion, the 110th nominally (first time in 12 years) Democrat-led Congress convened on Capitol Hill on January 4. It was done much the same as in earlier years except for the first time ever a woman took the gavel after being elected Speaker of the House in a final vote known weeks in advance killing any suspense about its outcome.

New House Speaker California Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi called it “an historic moment for the Congress” which it was but only with respect to the gender of the Speaker, not for what significant policies can be expected over the next two years as this writer explained in an earlier article on November 13 titled New Faces, Same Agenda. The article suggested the political firmament shook briefly on November 7 leading some in the country to hope a new day on Capitol Hill had arrived with the Democrats now in charge ready to bring with them some long-delayed substantive change voters demanded in the November 7 mid-term elections.

It didn't take long, for those paying attention, to realize how foolish that thinking was as the presumed new Democrat leadership at the time (now confirmed) made it clear in its barely disguised rhetoric it will be business as usual and one more betrayal of the public trust that sent a strong message of disgust in the mid-term elections demanding change it won't get.

Expecting none is even more certain based on the background of the new Speaker, a 20 year congressional veteran, who's more privileged than populist, and is one of the wealthiest members in the Congress indicating she'll do nothing to alter the nation's course put in place by the Bush administration benefitting members of her class and herself including those ensconced in corporate boardrooms (where the real power of the country lies). They've been greatly enriched in the past six years and the previous 20 before them under Republican and DLC Democrat leadership still in charge and very much aligned in planning the continuation of the same agenda ahead.

Expecting change will be even harder in the Senate that's split 51 – 49 with newly elected former Vermont congressman Bernie Sanders an independent socialist aligned with the Democrats but former Democrat and now independent Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman nominally counted as a Democrat (keeping his seniority in the party and in charge of the Homeland Security panel) but one who votes consistently with the hard right wing of the Republican party, especially for our wars of aggression and Israel's. It makes the new Senate effectively 50 – 50 with Dick Cheney as vice-president able to cast the only vote that counts if he gets to use it. In addition, George Bush unfortunately is still president and able to veto any unwanted legislation and prevail as the Congress is far from veto-proof.

What might matter for Democrats is they control committee chairmanships in both the

House and Senate. Those positions have power, and chairmen of them can use it to advantage if they wish. Beyond the rhetoric now being heard and likely to continue, those expecting little use of that authority against the Bush administration and Republicans in Congress won't be disappointed. For the country's majority, however, it's another story, but most people will be slow catching on if even able at all to do it. It's the reason politicians literally get away with murder.

The United States of Power and Privilege

Politics 101 again teaches that nothing in Washington can be taken on its face, that campaign promises are empty and disingenuous, and the criminal class in the Capitol is bipartisan in what noted author and social critic Gore Vidal calls our one party state – the property party with two wings in a plutocracy. It also proves former iconic investigative journalist IF Stone's wisdom that "All governments are run by liars and nothing they say should be believed."

Political deception is institutionalized in Washington. It's in the DNA of most arriving there or succumb to its contagion once elected, and very few officials in Washington stay true to their principles if they had any. Doing it might exclude them from rising to leadership positions because getting them depends on playing by the same kind of "good old boys" rules as all the others in power.

Whatever it is, there may be something about the nation's capital that brings this on – that makes even good people do bad things when they get there. Sooner or later most decide to go along to get along, and then succumb to the inevitable deadly syndrome of power corrupting and absolute power doing it absolutely. It especially affects those with seniority who've risen to high positions in their parties with all the special privileges afforded them in that capacity.

Those paying attention to the rhetoric on January 4 got a bad taste of what it's like and what's to come. It came from House Speaker Pelosi and her 26 year congressional veteran and establishmentarian war hawk Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and in the Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid sent the same message promising, as he and Pelosi did on November 8, to work with the president in a spirit of bipartisanship. It meant they were unconditionally surrendering to the established power structure agreeing not be "obstructionist" even though Republicans and the Bush administration never made a pretense of governing that way when they're in charge. Bottom line – the public got scammed again just like they always are under either party.

As part of the deception, Democrats added some boilerplate pro forma comments promising a "new direction....for all the people, not just the privileged few (and) restoring economic security to a very vulnerable middle class." If only they meant it which they don't. Don't be fooled again as the clear direction ahead was signaled (for those noticing) in the supposedly "liberal" New York Times on January 5 by columnist Carl Hulse saying: "They (the Democrats) can spend their energy trying to reverse what they see as the flaws of the Bush administration and a dozen years (of a) conservative....dominated Congress. Or they can accept the rightward tilt of that period (the NYT through Hulse supports) and grudgingly concede that big tax cuts (not mentioned for the rich), deregulation (no mention of its harm), restrictions on abortion (ignoring the country's majority saying they're pro-choice), and other Republican-inspired changes now a permanent part of the legislative framework" the NYT clearly signals it approves of but fails to mention them.

They include the oppressive Patriot Acts I and II, the Military Commissions Act, the revised Insurrection Act of 1807, the Read ID Act, secret illegal surveillance of everyone (even by the Pentagon) including a recent presidential signing statement to postal legislation allowing mail to be opened without a warrant, many tens of billions funded off-the-books for two illegal wars of aggression and many billions more for thuggish “homeland security” enforcement. All these congressionally-approved actions violate our constitutional rights now effectively annulled. So do the privatization of the hopelessly corrupted electoral process and the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) resolution that allowed most all the above abuses to follow it. These and other legislative acts signify a nation sinking fast into despotism. The “liberal” NYT supports it in its role as a quasi-official instrument of state-approved information and propaganda.

The Times columnist, expressing his paper’s view, wants the above agenda continued opposing the majority voting for change who’ll learn soon again none is forthcoming. What is ahead is little more than some tinkering around the edges in the form of inadequate feel-good legislative efforts in what’s characterized as the “first hundred (meaningless) hours” leaving out the remaining 726 or so days in the 110th congressional term that count the most.

Congressional Proposals in the “First 100 Hours” That Will Extend Well Beyond Them For the Senate to Act and Final Reconciliation to Be Completed On Whatever Bills Emerge

It sounds like a title from a Hollywood “bad dream” factory,” but this was the docket in the “First 100 Hours” of posturing hyperbole with lots more ahead from where this came from promising great pain and suffering in the next two years again failing to deliver on promises made just like it’s always been.

— some far too inadequate House “ethics reform” tightening of lobbying standards; requiring members to disclose and justify (but not loose) special-interest and home-district so-called “earmark” pork barrel appropriations (aka thefts of taxpayers money); certifying spouses don’t benefit from “earmark” appropriations; banning members from accepting gifts from lobbyists including fancy meals, free travel paid for by outside groups including corporations, or use of campaign funds to pay for them except for two big loopholes still allowing one-day trips (anywhere) for meetings, panels or to speak and exempting charter plane services from the rule changes that easily can be ordered by a lobbyist as an allowable bribe for congressional services wanted in return.

There’s not a hint in this legislation about the biggest ethical abuse of all – the outrageous corporate and other special interests violations of the public trust in the way campaigns are now financed. They include monstrous loopholes in the law to do it without limit in various soft and hard money ways. It means those running for office have to sell their souls and honor to become a serious candidate for political office unless they have vast independent resources and will part with enough of them. The result is the public gets “the best democracy money can buy” meaning none at all.

An example of it has already begun. With the rhetoric still echoing in the House chamber about so-called ethics reform, the victorious Democrats held a top-dollar fund-raiser collecting admission fees of \$1000 a head from attendees quick to line up to take advantage of Democrat influence-peddling for big bucks the Pelosi-led ones see no conflict of interest collecting. In 1995, the Republicans did the same thing, we know the result, and now Democrats in power are acting the same corrupted way at night while disingenuously

preaching reform during the day. So the message to voters is free meals from lobbyists are out, but big cash contributions are OK, and with enough of them coming it won't be hard buying lots of fancy meals and trips and most anything else.

— new proposed rules for pay-as-you-go budgeting requiring new tax cuts (not touching those in place) or entitlement spending be offset with corresponding spending cuts. It means those cuts are coming from essential social services, so this hardly represents reform. Nor is it a step forward from the ugly past generation of congressionally legislated cuts in vitally needed programs those most in need don't get like many millions of poor single mothers taken off the welfare rolls by the cruel 1996 Clinton administration Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act euphemistically called "welfare reform."

— raising the federally-mandated minimum wage (last increased in 1996 and 97 in two steps to \$5.15 an hour) by \$2.15 to a pathetic \$7.25 an hour as the Office of Management and Budget defined the inflation-adjusted poverty threshold for a family of four in 2004 to be \$19,307 and at year end 2006 is a likely estimated \$20,500. The higher minimum wage, if enacted, will provide an income of about \$15,000 for someone employed the full year meaning it's a sub-poverty wage.

In passing this inadequate minimum wage increase, the new House Speaker showed another hint of her anti-populist dark side and betrayal of the public trust five days into the new congressional term. The new law as initially passed exempted American Samoa while applying to all 50 states and other US territories. The reason - to benefit the Starkist subsidiary of Del Monte Corporation headquartered in Pelosi's home district that employs 75% of the Somoan workforce that was to continue receiving a \$3.62 minimum wage or half the amount applicable to all other areas subject to US law if the bill clears the Senate and George Bush signs it. Now the power of public Republican rebuke made Pelosi reconsider. She quickly backtracked saying the initial bill will be altered so American Somoan workers will be guaranteed the same minimum wage as all others the legislation covers.

— Feel-good legislation removing constraints on federally-funded embryonic stem cell research sure to be sustainably vetoed by George Bush who'll never allow it.

— More feel-good legislation requiring the federal government to negotiate lower prices on prescription drugs for seniors on Medicare again with no chance of final passage as a presidential veto is certain unless a change in the final legislation accomplishes the same thing by keeping drug prices high. The House passed the new law on January 12 without a veto-proof margin, and its fate in the Senate is uncertain before anything ever gets to the White House.

— Legislation to codify recommendations of the fraudulent and corrupted 9/11 (whitewash) commission that should instead be enacted to denounce and scrap its report demanding a new independent commission be formed to learn and disclose all the facts so far suppressed with Democrat complicity in the Congress. More on this below.

— New measures to reduce interest rates on student loans, create federal incentives to develop renewable energy sources and reduce subsidies for Big Oil - more feel-good efforts with few positive results expected beneath the disingenuous headlined achievements.

All of the above is from the House only with the Senate under its much different procedural rules taking them up next in debate under a system where a filibuster can kill a bill and a de facto 50 – 50 body can do it even easier, plus the reconciling procedure between different House and Senate bills to reach compromise on a final one. As the legislative process drags on in the new year and the warm glow of a new “people’s” Congress slowly fades with few substantive results, cold reality will set in that the 110th body isn’t much different than the ones preceding it.

Expect that pattern to emerge even though a bipartisan Senate bill was introduced by Democrat Senator Max Baucus and Republican Charles Grassley to repeal the increasingly repressive alternative minimum tax (AMT) originally intended to assure only the wealthy didn’t escape their tax obligation through loopholes. Now the AMT is a monster mainly afflicting middle-income earners it was never intended for and who shouldn’t be burdened with it. Repealing it, however, won’t be easy because this unfair tax produces so much growing revenue. It’s hard to see its revocation enacted without some serious vital offsets eliminated to pay for it that would result in more harm done than good if it happens. It’s also directly contrary to Speaker Pelosi’s pay-as-you-go budgeting scheme that requires tax cuts to be offset by spending cuts or other compensating revenue adjustments. It will take a whopper of either one to pay for this, and thus it won’t happen without sweeping tax reform along with it that’s impossible in this Congress unwilling to change the sweet tax laws now in place benefitting the rich including themselves.

So much for reform and change in an age of permanent discretionary wars for conquest and plunder with giant corporations running everything for their benefit and Congress in their pockets giving them everything they want from ours.

What the Democrat-Led Congress Isn’t Addressing or Is Doing Inadequately

When all is said and done and the legislative dust clears in the months ahead, whatever parts of the above agenda are enacted in whatever final form, it’s sure they’ll fall far short of rhetoric trumpeting them. They’ll be seen for what they are – a lot of posturing, unmet promises to voters and a little tinkering around the edges with the most crucial of all things people want left unaddressed or taken up inadequately starting with issue number one in the minds of a large and growing majority of the public:

Ending the War in Iraq and Bringing Home the Troops

A majority of the public demands it, protests continue over it, some in the Congress pay it lip service, and nothing happens in the only venues that count – on the floors of both Houses of Congress with the Democrat leadership serving the will of the electorate and introducing and passing legislation to end the illegal wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan and all funding for them. Cutting off their funding means cutting off their oxygen effectively ending them no matter what the president, Pentagon or war-profiteers may want.

But it won’t happen according to Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin who speaks from both sides of his mouth saying the US “commitment (in Iraq) is not open-ended....I believe the (American) people want us to find a way out (but not) precipitously (so we can) leave Iraq better than we found it (letting Iraqis) take responsibility for their own future (indicating with no firm commitment) we are going to begin (reducing or redeploying) our forces four to six months from now without setting an end point (is the position) the American people will support.”

At the same time, Levin and other key Democrats say they'll continue funding wars and will accept Bush's January 10 proposed 20,000+ temporary troop "surge" in Iraq (despite some contrary posturing for the public) now called a strategy to "change America's course" since the earlier one for "Victory in Iraq" flopped. They'll do it even though three-fourths of the US public opposes it and the White House gives no indication it intends a force reduction any time soon.

That was the message from Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joe Biden as well who believes top Bush administration officials think the Iraq war is lost and are just postponing its inglorious end. Biden opposes a troop "surge" and will hold weeks of committee hearings on the war. Still he concludes "There is nothing a United States Senate (or senator in any capacity) can do to stop a president from conducting his war."

Untrue as Biden, Levin, Pelosi and all others in the Democrat leadership know as just explained above. Congress has appropriation authority, and voting to end the funding will cut off George Bush's power to do anything the Congress forbids. It will render him impotent if the Congress acts responsibly which this Democrat-led one signals unequivocally it will not.

It's also up to the Congress, not the president, that has sole authority under Section 4(a)(3) of the War Powers Resolution stating "In the absence of a declaration of war (none declared for Iraq), (whenever US) Forces are introduced....in numbers which substantially enlarge (US) Forces....for combat....in a foreign country (only the Congress has the power to authorize it)." As international law expert Professor Francis Boyle explains, failure by the Bush administration to get such authorization is an "impeachable offense under the terms of the United States Constitution for violating the Constitution's War Powers Clause and Congress's own War Powers Resolution."

Despite the law and potential consequences of violating it, the Bush administration isn't easily deterred or intimidated. So don't expect change ahead in its permanent war agenda or any Democrat-led effort to force it whatever their post-election bluster that's only intended as a head fake diversion with no muscle backing it up. George Bush intends to do as he pleases, law or no law, so wars of aggression won't end because the new Congress backs and will fund them "supporting the troops" and the president - even one with an approval rating down to 26% in one or more independent opinion polls that's a single point above Richard Nixon's low point in August, 1974 right before he departed in disgrace to avoid impeachment.

It gets even worse, as it always does, as not a word is heard from Democrats that the Bush administration through lies and deceit committed what the Nuremberg Tribunal called the "supreme international crime" of illegal aggression against a country posing no threat to us or its neighbors. The new Congress also said nothing about what former UN head of Iraqi humanitarian relief called an act of genocide against the Iraqi people when he resigned from his post in anger and disgust in 1998.

The Congress ignored the Lancet report in October, 2006 (other than shamelessly mocking it) that an estimated 655,000 Iraqis were killed by violence stemming from the US invasion, occupation and continuing aggression against the people. It said nothing about the outrageous economic sanctions imposed for a dozen years prior to March, 2003 that killed as many as 1.5 million innocent Iraqis including at least 500,000 children former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright thought was a price worth paying when asked about it on the

CBS 60 Minutes program in May, 1996, and since then the number of total deaths has skyrocketed.

It said nothing about US policy under three presidents maliciously and willfully destroying a once prosperous, modern nation leaving in its wake a surreal lawless armed camp wasteland with few or no essential services like electricity, clean water, medical care, fuel or most everything else needed for sustenance and survival denied them by their oppressive occupier there only to seize and control the country's vast oil reserves to have "veto power" over other nations wanting access to them. It said nothing about the Bush administration building 6 to 12 major permanent bases in the country including at least four to six super-sized ones with every convenience of a modern US city that are there because there's no force withdrawal intended as long as there's enough oil in the country and region to warrant their staying.

It said nothing about construction continuing on what will be the world's largest embassy in Baghdad critics call "Fortress Baghdad" in the so-called Green Zone. It sits on 104 acres making it six times larger than the UN compound in New York. It's a self-contained city within a city for more than 1000 people already there, insulated from the Baghdad community behind 15 foot thick walls for security. It has its own water, sewers, electricity, apartment buildings, a Marine barracks, swimming pool, shops and all other modern conveniences of home at a budgeted cost of \$592 million meaning likely double that amount or more once completed. It's another clear sign the US occupying force isn't planning an early exit.

The Democrat rhetoric says a lot about the 110th Congress speaking like all others before it with forked tongue – pretending in rhetoric to serve the public interest while acting against it. That's the reality the US public must understand, address, and demand this time not to tolerate in mass protest demonstrations across the country, in the nation's capital and in the halls and offices of their representatives in Congress elected to serve us, and it's high time they did or step aside and let others do it for them.

Other Foreign Wars Unaddressed

With an unwinnable war in Iraq only an end to US occupation will resolve, you'd think the leadership in both parties would raise and debate the other unwinnable one now raging out-of-control in Afghanistan, mostly below the radar. Instead the other US war of aggression against the Afghan people goes on with almost no discussion of it publicly or any hint the Democrat leadership will end that conflict along with the one in Iraq. It's also never mentioned that like Iraq, this is another resource war for control of the great energy reserves in Central Asia in the landlocked Caspian Basin.

Like the war in Iraq, the Afghan effort also failed, the war is lost, and the Taliban are slowly regaining control because of an oppressive occupation and return of the hated "warlords" after the 2001 intensive joint US-British aerial assault displaced them. The "shock and awe" attack then was against a vulnerable country unable to mount any kind of defense. The Taliban easily succumbed to the onslaught after five weeks when they fled Kabul allowing US-backed Northern Alliance "warlord" forces to enter the city the next day. Once back in charge there and around the country, they engaged in the same kind of murder, rape and mayhem that gave rise to the Taliban originally who finally routed them from most of the country.

The US-led war of aggression created a state of unaddressed desperation for the great majority of Afghans creating high unemployment, extreme poverty, one of the lowest levels of life expectancy in the world, the highest infant mortality rate in the world, one-fifth of all children dying before age five, little access to electricity, clean drinking water and sanitation, little available medical care or most other essentials of life, and an overall surreal situation throughout the country where in parts of Kabul an opulent elite have grown rich from rampant corruption and drug trafficking while most others struggle to survive and many don't.

US leaders in Washington simply don't care any more than they do about conditions in Iraq for the people there forced to endure our brutality that won't ever end until the occupation does in both countries. The new Democrat-led Congress understands the situation and the Bush administration's intent to turn both nations into subservient US neocolonial states. Doing it will make their people serfs used for imperial gain, but only at a great cost to taxpayers at home. Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz estimates it will exceed \$2 trillion of wasted expenditure for its failure to achieve anything except enhancing the bottom lines of corporate war-profiteering participants in this grand theft of the US treasury. Stiglitz is horrified that under the Bush administration, the defense and energy industries have been in charge, and the results have been "disastrous."

Besides the enormous political damage at home and around the world, Washington's budgetary recklessness has done serious economic damage to the country. It's likely to have long-term negative effects that may, in Stiglitz's judgment, result in a global economic depression within two years without major changes made in how the US economy is managed going forward. It all begins with ending US wars of aggression draining the treasury and amassing a huge debt financing them as well as harming the country and welfare of the public not even aware it's been cheated. Where are the Democrats busy addressing free lunches from lobbyists while ignoring the welfare of the nation and its growing millions of poor. Many can't afford any lunch, often going hungry and are forced to endure a state of misery from extreme and growing poverty as resources are diverted from addressing vital people needs to use waging foreign wars of aggression for wealth and power.

Where are these leaders as well on the other long-festered Middle East conflict that must be addressed and resolved equitably for solutions to all others in the region to be possible. It's the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict allowed to continue because of US committed one-sided support for the Jewish state no matter which party is in power. There's bipartisan unity to supply it with all the modern weapons of war and billions in annual funding and loan guarantees with more available as needed causing an intolerable state of repression against a vulnerable and defenseless people getting no outside support in their battle for life, liberty, justice and the right to live freely in their own land just as Jews can in Israel on land taken from them in large and incremental pieces over many decades.

Not a word from the Democrat-led Congress on this issue, on the daily killing and destruction in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), or on the brutal war of aggression against the Lebanese people last summer approved, sanctioned and funded by both parties in the Congress and administration supporting it for imperial gain that turned out again to be all for naught.

Unfortunately it didn't deter Democrats or Republicans from working post-war with their Lebanese neoliberal prime minister ally, Fouad Siniora. They helped arrange a so-called

reconstruction aid conference to convene in Paris January 25 after the Lebanese government, absent its Hezbollah opposition, rammed through its idea of reform by agreeing to IMF and World Bank diktats that include the usual kinds of structural adjustment privatizations. They always come at the expense of ordinary people who lose critically needed social services. In the case of Lebanon, it's coming when people most need them. They'll now have to get by with less when their ability to pay for essentials and everything else has been curtailed.

Where are the Democrat leaders busy celebrating, ending free gift lunches and posturing with pompous rhetoric while another "Rome" burns in the US-supported Ethiopian invasion of Somalia to route forces loyal to the United Islamic Courts (UIC) the people support because they defeated the hated warlords most Somalis want to be free of. The support now includes US air attacks conducting targeted assassination attempts that will continue with the carrier Eisenhower off the Somali coast. The attacks have already killed many innocent civilians, as they always do, with many more likely collateral damage casualties ahead as the Bush administration apparently wants to give Somalis a taste of the same kind of nation-building it brought to Iraq and Afghanistan Democrats are very comfortable going along with.

So don't expect this issue to be on their agenda either. Once again it's because central to it is oil, and four US Big Oil giants, including Amoco and Chevron, have exclusive concessions rights to develop what energy experts believe are lucrative amounts of oil and gas in the country. They won't likely get them unless a friendly regime is in power, so the despotic Ethiopian Meles Zenawi regime was enlisted and funded to fight a US proxy war with plenty of US firepower backing him up as needed.

It includes a US-British combined task force patrolling Somalia waters with heavy firepower from the Arleigh Burk-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ramage, the carrier Eisenhower, and US air power. It also includes US military and CIA forces imbedded with Ethiopian troops meaning this country is now actively at war in three countries (plus others directly or indirectly below the radar) with possible further aggressive action planned against Iran, Syria and Venezuela, especially after Hugo Chavez announced he'll nationalize (but not expropriate) two large US-owned companies. They are the telecom giant Compania Nacional Telefonos de Venezuela (CANTV) owned by Verizon Communications and Electricidad de Caracas that's part of AES Corporation. Both companies will be bought out by the state at fair market value.

Chavez also said he'll ask for a constitutional amendment to end the nation's Central Bank autonomy and indicated again he wants majority state control over the nation's natural gas reserves and lucrative oil projects in the Orinoco River basin where US Big Oil companies now operate including Chevron, BP Amoco, ConocoPhillips and Exxon Mobil that aren't pleased with the news. As a result, talks over a proposed new relationship have been stalemated for months. Finally, the Venezuelan government announced on January 15 it broke them off giving the oil giants the option of staying on as minority partners or sell out to a competitor that will.

The Somali conflict is another Washington-backed war for oil and regional dominance of the Horn of Africa. The situation is very unstable, and the likelihood is it will settle down to one more unwinnable imperial war of aggression and attrition against another determined guerrilla resistance with the US getting more deeply embroiled with its proxy Ethiopian ally plus whatever other regional countries (like Uganda) it can convince to send in thuggish

“paramilitary force” help euphemistically called “peacekeepers” that may not be up to the task of wanting part in a long-term regional conflict.

Add to that, growing signs of a looming humanitarian disaster across the African Horn UNICEF estimates may place 8 million people at risk of starvation. You’d never know it, or what’s at stake overall, listening to reports in the dominant US media portraying the fiction of fighting al-Qaeda terrorism while suppressing the truth that it’s one more war for oil along with the other resource war in Dhafur explained below. As long as the public is kept in the dark, it gets the Democrats off the hook having to do anything to stop either of them or their funding at more taxpayer expense.

From Afghanistan to Iraq to Somalia and Dhafur, an area in western Sudan the size of France. Sudan overall is a country the size of western Europe where again the issue is mainly oil and gas and a Sudanese government unwilling to surrender its sovereignty to Washington that never takes no for an answer and intends pursuing further imperial aims there only portending even greater harm to the people and the entire nation of Sudan if it goes ahead.

The Dhafur conflict involves intertribal fighting over increasingly scarce water and grazing rights in an area hard hit by draught and famine. It’s falsely portrayed in the US corporate media as atrocities committed by Arab Jan jawid militias supported by the Khartoum government against black African people. The truth is all parties involved are indigenous Arabic-speaking black Sunni Muslims. Solving the conflict won’t be easy, but US involvement in it only guarantees greater strife that again may come in the form of so-called UN or African paramilitaries masquerading as “peacekeepers.” Washington wants them in the region as a proxy force for imperial control, not to maintain peace.

More ominous still is what may be ahead following George Bush’s announced plans in late December to establish a new military command for Africa called the US Africa Command, or AFRICOM. It will be headquartered in the African Horn region at the large US base in Djibouti at the narrow Bab el Mandeb Strait at the entrance of the Red Sea close to the Arabian oil fields where the world’s busiest shipping lanes are located.

It’s likely to assure the Bush administration under congressional Democrat leadership will get further embroiled in more unwinnable conflicts that along with those ongoing will cause unimaginable economic and political damage abroad and at home. Unless they’re all resolved, the nation will sink further into the kind of hellish situation and decline Democrats were elected to extract us from. Are they paying attention and will they act responsibly? So far the answers are unequivocally no. Does the public understand what’s at stake? Again, the answer sadly is no, and it’s why US aggression and its crimes of war and against humanity continue affecting huge numbers of people around the world and a growing majority at home stripped of essential social services for lack of resources to pay for them and denied their civil rights under de facto military rule.

Unaddressed Domestic Issues

After the war in Iraq, voters sent a message of disgust about the cesspool of public corruption in Washington and a general feeling of unease about and mistrust for the political class they voted out wanting change. They want an end to the Bush administration’s business as usual policies but aren’t likely to get much more than the kind of minor tinkering already explained amounting to virtually none at all. Voters have plenty to think about

including demanding Congress restore our constitutional rights the Bush administration destroyed with Democrat complicity during the past six years.

It was done incrementally with a series of repressive acts destroying civil liberties, human rights and the fundamental freedoms guaranteed all Americans by the Constitution and Bill of Rights – now in suspension and effectively null and void unless a Democrat Congress acts responsibly to restore them along with their honor and integrity lost but regainable in part if meaningful action is undertaken straight away. What's needed is a blizzard of Bush-reversing legislation undoing damage to the republic done over the past six years. The body politic is on life support only determined Democrat leadership can counteract to move the nation in a direction voters demanded but so far see no indication of getting.

The early signs are already bad right out of the gate beginning with the “first 100 hours.” On January 9 in the first on the legislative docket schedule the House passed new anti-terrorism legislation based on 9/11 Commission recommendations it should have denounced and rejected. Instead it enacted a far-reaching impossible to implement law to inspect all cargo at a cost of unknown billions if put in force that will also be another repressive step toward a full-blown police state because it targets people as well by expanding no-fly and terror watch lists and other harsh measures. The bill amounts to even more government surveillance in an age where everyone is suspicious and fair game for whatever state-controlling mechanisms are cooked up to harass us. The 9/11 Commission recommended a menu of these kinds of authoritarian measures, and HR 1 includes many of them.

Congressional critics opposing the proposed new law for once got it right calling it political posturing providing no added security but a larger federal deficit for no good reason. It's just one more sign the Democrat leadership will disappoint the electorate the way their rejected Republican counterparts did. Hopefully the Senate will reject this outrageous bill that should arrive in their chamber stillborn, but don't bet on it.

Revoke or Drastically Amend the Repressive Patriot I and II Acts

Patriot Acts I and II were enacted under the false pretense of fighting an ill-defined “terrorism” people believe exists because of Bush administration deceptive scare tactics about threats to national security and the public welfare that warrant them. They do not, and the reason they were enacted had nothing to do with the nation's security or public safety.

Both these measures were assaults on fundamental civil liberties in a free society and are affronts to constitutional law in a state calling itself a democracy. They broaden the notion of “domestic terrorism” to mean almost anything the government says it is or who it says is part of it. They violate our rights of privacy and constitutional protection against illegal searches and seizures in unprecedented ways by expanding law enforcement and intelligence gathering by virtually any means including surveilling everyone (and their phone calls and emails) plus opening and reading anyone's mail for any reason that requires a warrant by law now effectively voided by presidential decree. They authorize secret arrests and detentions, create new death penalty provisions and empower the state to strip citizenship from those belonging to disfavored political, labor or other groups that may only have been formed to work for the lawful rights of everyone but now are falsely accused of supporting “domestic terrorism.”

These are the acts of a national security fascist police state passed in Congress to control a

population that might become restive, disapproving and no longer willing to accept government policies it believes harm public welfare and intend doing something about it. When a rogue state squanders the national wealth on imperial wars, ignores essential people needs doing it, the result will be eventual public opposition these acts were put in place to combat. They're the same kinds of repressive acts all police states use that abandon the rule of law imposing instead a total crackdown on anyone seen as a potential threat to their agenda. The time has come to demand these violations of constitutional law will no longer be tolerated. They must be reversed leaving in place only those provisions in them that comply with all rights guaranteed everyone under the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

The Military Commissions Act and Revision of the 1807 Insurrection Act

On October 17, 2006 George Bush took another step toward ending constitutional rule by signing into law two more repressive acts making that day one that will live in even greater infamy than the earlier one on December 7 we're never allowed to forget. He signed into law the Military Commissions Act, known as the "torture authorization act," that does far more damage than that. With little public awareness of what happened in a White House signing ceremony, this act alone ends constitutional and Bill of Rights protections allowing the chief executive the extraordinary right to designate anyone an enemy of the state on his say alone based on no evidence beyond his word that's now the law of the land. It means anyone can be charged with "terrorism" for what Orwell called a "thoughtcrime" making us all "enemy combatants, unsafe from the reach of "Big Brother" residing in the White House with the power of life and death over everyone everywhere in the world.

This new law allows the chief executive the right to order anyone arrested, interrogated, tortured and incarcerated in a secret prison anywhere in the world, subject to the justice of a harsh military tribunal with no competent counsel or right of appeal. It goes even further annulling the habeas rights of "everyone" including innocent US citizens falsely accused of terrorism, charged under this law and prosecuted under its provisions as harshly as a verifiable bomb-thrower caught in the act.

October 17 was doubly heinous as George Bush also quietly and privately signed into law a revision to the 1807 Insurrection Act. It was hidden in Sections 1076 and 333 of the John Warner Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007. Two hundred years of tradition along with the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act prohibit using federal and National Guard troops for law enforcement inside the country except as allowed by the Constitution or authorized by Congress in times of a national emergency like an insurrection. Under the new law, the chief executive can claim a public emergency, effectively declare martial law and send federal and National Guard troops to the nation's streets to suppress whatever he calls public disorder that may include peaceful demonstrations against wars of aggression and rightful demands for restoration of our constitutional rights now abandoned.

The new law authorizes a direct role for the Pentagon including use and transfer of state-of-the-art crowd control weapons and technology to state and local responders. It's intended to militarize them and blur the distinction between those from the Pentagon and local law enforcement agencies - very ominous and clear police state tactical readiness only needing a trigger, sure to come, to make them operational.

Criminalizing Speech Further Through Potential New "Hate Crime" Legislation

George Bush already has authority to block free speech that will be even more endangered if the new Congress introduces and passes a new Orwellian federal “hate crimes” bill which seems likely. Democrats are closely allied to the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith that tried unsuccessfully for the past eight years to get this type legislation through the Republican-controlled Congress. The bill it wants, and Democrats already indicate they’ll support, is called The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act (aka The Thought Crime Act), and its purported intent is to criminalize preaching hate against gays, minorities and other often demonized groups but could also be used to make dissent a crime or outlaw any kind of free speech the government wishes to stanch making it punishable by heavy fines, imprisonment or both.

If introduced, as is likely, this legislation will pass because no Democrat in Congress ever voted against a hate crime bill, even one as outrageous as this one likely will be that will outlaw free expression making it a crime to say unwanted things labelled as “hate,” including through the internet, giving the government great latitude in who it can charge with a crime and for what offense.

Democrats in Congress supported the repressive acts discussed above and now may add to them with the passage of even more harmful legislation. They aren’t likely to cop a plea of mea culpa, act quickly to reverse the ones already on the books, or be deterred from making things even worse with their own agenda of new oppressive laws. It’s for the public en masse to act in our collective self-interest and defense, to stand in defiance of these revocations of our constitutional rights demanding those lost be restored, no further compounding harm be done, and not letting lawmakers off the hook with inaction or using their legislative authority to make matters even worse as now seems likely.

With all their power and privilege, those in Congress know their limits. They’re most vulnerable when they ignore the will of the electorate who in enough numbers can throw them out just like the “bums” before them in another Capitol cleansing that can and should continue each mid-term period until we finally get it right. It’s no simple task, and the congressional makeup over the last generation alone proves it. But unless people act in our own self-interest, real change for the better won’t ever happen. It must come from below, from the bottom up. It never, never comes from the top down.

The Repressive Real ID Act

This act passed in 2005 is another Orwellian affront to our civil liberties requiring all states by 2008 to meet federally enacted ID standards. The law makes it mandatory for every US citizen and legal resident to have a national identity card (usually a driver’s license) that will contain on it a person’s vital and personal information. Once implemented, no one will be able to open a bank account, cash a check, board an airplane, be able to vote or conduct other essential business without one. This bill was passed to repressively crackdown on undocumented immigrants (meaning those of color or Muslims) and legitimate refugees fleeing persecution and seeking their right to asylum. But it effectively targets everyone as another means of social control.

In the future, that kind of control may be tightened by requiring radio frequency identification technology (RFID) computer chips be embedded in these cards to track everyone’s movements, activities and transactions. If it happens, it will be the ultimate dream of a government wanting police state powers able to monitor all our moves only leaving out knowing or controlling our thoughts research geniuses in labs somewhere surely

are now working on. Should people in a free society have to tolerate this kind of affront to our freedom with our elected officials in both parties being the problem, not the solution.

The Mother of the Above-Listed Repressive Acts

State-sponsored repression against the US public began with the passage of the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) joint House-Senate resolution on September 18, 2001 authorizing “the use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States (exercising our) rights to self-defense to protect United States citizens at home and abroad (and giving) the President....authority under the Constitution to take action to deter and prevent acts of international terrorism against the United States....”

This single act alone is responsible for George Bush claiming justification in the name of national security to seize de facto dictatorial power, ignore constitutional law, and get passed all the repressive legislation discussed above and more and be able to get away with it. Any hope for a chance to restore the rule of law and a republic on life support must begin with revoking this unseemly AUMF resolution, but so far amidst all the Democrat bluster not a hint is heard they have any plans to do it or even bring it up for debate.

The Theft of A Free and Fair Electoral Process by Privatizing It

No right in a free society is more precious than the one guaranteeing free, fair and open elections monitored and run by independent observers un beholden to any political constituency. It shouldn't surprise anyone that elections in this country were never that way, and all of them to some degree were tainted with fraud and abuse that never should have been tolerated but were by a public largely unaware they were cheated. One of many earlier corrupted ones happened before the emergence of Republican dominance after 1980. It was the 1976 election won by Jimmy Carter over Gerald Ford that was dubious at best and possibly just another stolen one. It matched an obscure Georgia governor as the choice of Rockefeller Trilateralists and Wall Street winning out over Gerald Ford backed by opposing Republicans in a close race that could have gone the other way and maybe did.

Electoral fraud is worse today because technology has taken over allowing it to happen with electronic ease. Following the 2000 presidential election (Al Gore won but didn't contest), the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) was passed in 2002 that was the first ever comprehensive law in the nation's history on electoral administration supposed to be a major advance that, in fact, took a giant step backwards. It ushered in the age of voting by electronic machines owned, operated, programmed, controlled and corrupted by giant corporations that now count over 80% of all votes cast in US elections.

Most of these machines have no verifiable paper receipts, are easily manipulated guaranteeing fraud in a secretive, unreliable electoral process privatized in the hands of corporate interests with everything to gain if candidates they support win. So it's no secret that's what happened in 2000 (even before these machines took over) and since in 02, 04 and 2006 and will be in perpetuity as long as private interests control the most precious of all rights in a democracy now lost. This is the “ultimate crime” against people in a free society, and it demands we compel our “elected leaders” strike down the HAVA Act, put elections back in the hands of the people at the state, local and federal levels, outlaw use of these machines, and require all elections be administered by paper ballots hand-counted by civil servants monitored by independent observers and party faithful if they wish. What are

we waiting for?

Impeaching George Bush, Richard Cheney and Other High Administration Officials for Crimes and Malfeasance in Office, Violating the Rule of Law and Betraying the Public Trust – For Starters

No two “elected” leaders come to mind more deserving punishment by impeachment than George Bush and Richard Cheney both of whom in six disgraceful years in office are guilty of enough crimes, malfeasance, violations of law, derelictions of duty and betrayal of the public trust to keep the House of Representatives busy a long time doing their constitutional job as required under Article II, Section 4 that states: The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.”

This president, vice president and other high-ranking officials can rightfully be charged and convicted for multiple offenses on all counts, but the House leadership straight away after November 7 said impeachment is off the table, so it’s up to the public to demand it and not back down till it happens and justice is finally served as it should be.

States have the power to impeach their officials, but at the federal level the House has sole power to impeach the President, Vice President and all other US civil officers. If one is so charged, the Senate then has the power to try the accused and if convicted remove that official from office in a process that’s automatic if it happens.

The case for impeaching George Bush, Richard Cheney and other high-ranking administration officials has been made persuasively by various writers and legal experts including Michael Ratner and Barbara Olshansky of the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), former federal prosecutor Elizabeth de la Vega, former district attorney and congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman, former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, and professor of law and international law expert Francis Boyle on multiple counts of lying to the Congress on the reasons to wage war against Iraq, threatening new wars without cause, violating laws against torture, warrantless surveillance, subverting the Constitution’s separation of powers, and more.

Boyle wrote a Draft Impeachment Resolution Against President George W. Bush for high crimes and misdemeanors in January, 2003, two months before the Iraq war began making it even more relevant today. Back then he accused the president and other administration officials of lying about Iraq’s so-called WMDs and manipulating intelligence. The facts now prove he was right. Four months after the war began, he wrote that the US is “the oldest republic in the world (and we the people) must fight to keep it that way. And for the good of humanity, we must terminate America’s Imperial Presidency (and its scorn for the rule of law) and subject it to the Rule of Law.”

Before the November mid-term elections new House Judiciary Chairman John Conyers stated George Bush committed “impeachable offenses” because he and other administration officials “countenanced torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in Iraq” and elsewhere including Guantanamo. On March 13, 2003, almost on the eve of war, Conyers convened an emergency meeting of over 40 of his top advisors (mostly lawyers) to draft emergency bills of impeachment against Bush and other top administration officials to prevent the impending war that looked inevitable without such action.

Boyle and Ramsey Clark were among the participants, they made the case for impeachment impressively, but no bill emerged at the time because of timidity and misjudgment on the part of others attending who were members of the Democrat party and worried about such action hurting their chances with voters in the next mid-term election. John Conyers acted as moderator in 2003 without stating his position then although, as quoted above, he later stated his feelings quite clearly more than once.

Besides his comment quoted above, Conyers laid out the grounds for impeachment last December in a detailed 350 page report titled "The Constitution in Crisis: The Downing Street (smoking gun) Minutes and Deception, Manipulation, Torture, Retribution and Cover-Ups in the Iraq War and later updated it to include "illegal domestic surveillance." He also wrote a May, 2005 Washington Post op-ed piece saying a new (110th) Congress needs to get answers about whether the "intelligence was mistaken or manipulated in the run-up to the Iraq war (and if) high-ranking (administration) officials approved the use of torture and other cruel and inhumane treatment inflicted upon detainees." He added if evidence was found, these would be potentially impeachable offenses, that constitutional law is sacred, and if George Bush violated it he must be held accountable like anyone else.

There's enough evidence in the once secret and now revealed Downing Street (Memo) Minutes alone to make the impeachment case. This document refers to the secret 2002 Washington meeting of high level US and British officials when the intelligence claiming justification for the planned 2003 Iraq war was cooked to fit the policy already decided on by the Bush administration and is so-stated. It discussed how the Bush administration "wanted to remove Saddam, through military action (and) had no patience with the UN route. (So to justify doing it) the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy." Richard Dearlove, head of British intelligence M16, attended the July British PM's cabinet meeting from which these minutes were written and then leaked to the London Sunday Times on May 1, 2005. He knew they were accurate as he attended the secret meetings in Washington when the plan was discussed. He told those at the July cabinet meeting that "military action was now seen as inevitable (and) George Bush had decided "to remove Saddam through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD (and) intelligence facts were being fixed around the policy."

Now John Conyers, a 42 year respected congressional veteran, chairs the powerful House Judiciary Committee with jurisdiction over any bill of impeachment and in that capacity can do no better than waffle on his earlier commitment saying: "To be sure, I have substantial concerns about the way this administration has abused its authority, but impeachment would not be good for the American people." Conyers clearly got his marching orders from the top of the Democrat leadership reigning him in and now making him cower instead of demanding accountability and justice for administration officials guilty of lies and deceit leading to their crimes of war, against humanity and multiple violations of the rule of law and public trust. Will the public allow this betrayal to stand? It won't if enough of them stand against it and not back down until justice is finally served.

Other Action Needed by This Congress Unaddressed

The list of unaddressed issues is almost endless after more than three decades of a democracy in decline and the welfare of most Americans in it because Democrat and Republican-led governments alike dedicated themselves to the interests of wealth and power that always come at the expense of ordinary working people making up the vast majority in the country. Below are just some of the ones desperately needing attention but

won't get it without an awakened electorate demanding it.

- Addressing the most pressing social needs far more important than a pathetic increase in the federal minimum wage. They include a national health care crisis with 47 million uninsured and over 80 million with no insurance some period of every year plus many millions more underinsured; the unprecedented and growing wealth disparity between rich and poor; the growing level of millions impoverished, hungry or homeless; the planned destruction of public education; and these issues are just for starters.

- Reforming the nation's shameless gulag prison system with the highest number of people incarcerated in the world and subjected to some of the same kinds of violent abuse as prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

- Saving internet neutrality from the clutches of giant telecom and cable companies who want to own and control the last remaining free and open mass media space where everyone still has the right to speak openly. Allowing them to seize it for profit and control means articles like this may be banned and unavailable in the future.

But new developments give hope for a positive resolution of this crucial issue. One victory already won is media giant AT & T agreeing to observe Network Neutrality principles for at least 24 months in a deal with the FCC allowing their \$85 billion merger with Bell South to proceed. It's just a stopgap solution, and now it's up to the Congress to follow the FCC's lead and make Net Neutrality permanent under the law.

Hopefully it's in the cards as this issue is already on the table with legislation being drafted to prevent high-speed internet companies from charging content providers extra for priority access. Also, net neutrality legislation was introduced in the Senate on January 9 by Democrat Byron Dorgan and Republican Olympia Snowe and Democrat Edward Markey said he'll introduce similar legislation soon in the House and will hold hearings on this issue in the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet that he chairs. Nonetheless, the road ahead to final resolution promises to be long and impediment-filled as powerful divergent interests on either side of this issue will make for a lively confrontation before a conclusive result is reached.

- Supporting the rights of ordinary working Americans, the unions representing them and the right of all working people to be able to bargain collectively on equal terms with management.

The great majority in the country have now endured over three decades of ruling governments in Washington failing to address their needs and rights, but it only got worse in the neoliberal new world order in the 1980s and 1990s that reached an unprecedented level of extremism under George Bush's imperial presidency. In an age of neocon rule, it's reckless in its aims, out-of-control in policy, one-sided in support of capital, scornful of the rule of law, and indifferent to the rights and needs of ordinary people everywhere.

It's a system of savage capitalism at its worst, bordering on the tipping edge of fascism. It's based on corporatism, patriotism and nationalism backed by iron-fisted militarism and "homeland security" enforcers. It's waging a permanent war on humanity, intolerant of dissent and opposition in an age where the law is what the chief executive says it is and checks and balances no longer exist because the Congress and courts surrendered them in

the name of national security.

This is a state of desperation the public only began sensing from visible parts of it like the daily account of war in Iraq without end or resolution that's only possible when US occupying forces leave. They went to the polls on November 7 and demanded this and an end to embedded corruption and abuse of power in Washington. They got their new Congress, most want the president impeached and removed from office, and they're facing disappointment on both counts unless they become aroused, realize again they've been had and act in the spirit of news anchor Howard Beale from the 1976 Hollywood film Network who got fed up one day and yelled "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore." We've never been more in need of an army of fed up "Howards" giving vent, fighting back for their rights, and demanding their representatives in Congress pay attention and act responsibly, or step aside for others who will.

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