

# *The Rock River Times*<sup>TM</sup>

*The Voice of the Community*

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## **Viewpoint: Same song, second chorus**

By Joe Baker, Senior Editor

“We can have a democratic society, or we can have the concentration of great wealth in the hands of the few. We cannot have both.”—Justice Louis Brandeis, U.S. Supreme Court

Once again, we have been presented a State of the Union address by President George W. Bush. It sounded much like the previous State of the Union and laid out a blueprint for bigger and better corporate welfare.

Of course, the insistent clamor for war with Iraq was there. Remember the speech in 2002? “Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for more than a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens...”

Never mind that we gave Saddam the components for the nerve gas, and never mind that UN inspectors so far have found no evidence of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. Saddam is a bad man, and we have to blast him.

Again we heard the mantra that Iraq is a threat to the U.S. and to world peace. The claim is false, but it is true that Iraq is a threat to Israel.

And there was repetition of the assertion that Saddam is linked to al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, even though it is widely known that Saddam has no liking for Islamic fundamentalists, hates al-Qaeda and bin Laden and has had death threats from that group.

Somehow, George forgot to mention the “axis of evil” and never let the name of Osama bin Laden cross his lips. But we will battle the terrorists, don’t doubt that.

Last year he said: “We will develop and deploy effective missile defenses to protect America and our allies from sudden attack.” Yippee! Beaucoup bucks for the defense contractors.

Boy George also said: “We will win this war, we will protect our homeland, and we will revive our

economy.” In the year since he said that, the economy has tanked and looks to dive even deeper into the chasm.

Bush's response: cut taxes for the richest 1 percent of our population and end double taxation of stock dividends, which aids mainly the wealthy.

The wealthy claim they pay more in taxes, but they leave out sales taxes, excise taxes, payroll taxes, import tariffs and a ton of state and local taxes. The fact is that working people pay three times as much in taxes as the wealthiest corporations and their owners.

It seems the federal government, including Congress, is for sale to the highest bidder and has been for a long time. Top corporations that paid no taxes from 1996 to 1998 include AT&T, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Pfizer, General Electric, Microsoft, Enron, ExxonMobil, Chase Manhattan and Phillip Morris.

For a relatively modest investment of \$150 million in campaign contributions from 1991 to 2001, these companies got \$55 billion in tax breaks alone between 1996 and 1998. The figures come from Public Campaign.org, a group working for public financing of political contests.

We have thousands of Americans without health insurance, seniors who can't afford outrageously priced medicines and a great bloc of children and others who go hungry in the most prosperous nation in the world.

No funds, we are told, can't afford educational costs, either. Yet Dubya proudly stated last year: “We have spent more than a billion dollars a month—over \$30 million a day—and we must be prepared for future operations. My budget includes the largest increase in defense spending in two decades, because while the price of freedom and security is high, it is never too high.”

Did you hear any post-speech analysis of the economic programs outlined by the president? No? Neither did I. All that came across was the continuing beat of “Showdown with Iraq” and the attendant baloney.

Just to make sure we got the proper emphasis and interpretation of his message, Bush, according to The Washington Post, met with two newspaper columnists on speech day and then lunched with 11 network anchors of evening news and Sunday news shows.

Maybe it's time to ask the recurring question the Republicans always asked when the Democrats were in power: are you better off today than you were two years ago?

Kevin Phillips, writing in *Wealth and Democracy*, said: “Wage earners in the United States collectively ended the decade with less pension and health coverage, as well as with the Industrial West's least amount of vacation time, shortest maternity leaves and shortest average notice of termination.”

Additionally, the typical American, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, worked 350 hours more

than the typical European, about nine workweeks.

What's the state of the union? In a word, sorry.

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