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Bush's Kiss of Death

By Molly Ivins, [AlterNet](#)

June 9, 2004

AUSTIN, Texas – As Lily Tomlin observed, "No matter how cynical you get, it's impossible to keep up." But as Con Ed used to say, dig we must. Courtesy of David Sirota at [americanprogress.org](#), we find the following matches between word and deed:



Just before Memorial Day, Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi said, "Our active military respond better to Republicans" because of "the tremendous support that President Bush has provided for our military and our veterans." The same day, the White House announced plans for massive cuts in veterans' health care for 2006.

Last January, Bush praised veterans during a visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The same day, 164,000 veterans were told the White House was "immediately cutting off their access to the VA health care system."

My favorite in this category was the short-lived plan to charge soldiers wounded in Iraq for their meals when they got to American military hospitals. The plan mercifully died a-borning after it hit the newspapers.

In January 2003, just before the war, Bush said, "I want to make sure that our soldiers have the best possible pay." A few months later, the White House announced it would roll back increases in "imminent danger" pay (from \$225 to \$150) and family separation allowance (from \$250 to \$100).

In October 2003, the president told troops, "I want to thank you for your willingness to heed the important call, and I want to thank your families." Two weeks later, the White House announced it opposed a proposal to give National Guard and Reserve members access to the Pentagon's health insurance system, even though a recent General Accounting Office report estimated that one out of every five Guard members has no health insurance. What a nice thank you note.

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A month before the war started, the White House proposed cutting \$1.5 billion from funding for military housing. The House Armed Services Committee had concluded that thousands of military families were living "in decrepit and dilapidated military housing." Progressive lawmakers counter-proposed an amendment to restore \$1 billion in housing funds and pay for it by reducing new tax cuts Bush was proposing for the 200,000 Americans who make more than \$1 million a year. Instead of getting \$88,000 in tax cuts, the poor millionaires would get only \$83,000. The House, with White House backing, voted the proposal down. (All thanks to Sirota.)

With the release of the 2006 budget, we're constantly finding instances of programs that Bush, the candidate, proudly claims to support, while he prepares to cut them drastically in order to pay for making his tax cuts permanent.

According to The Washington Post, the White House guidelines for the 2006 budget include a \$1.7 billion cut for education, supposedly his signature program. That neatly wipes out last year's increase – and, you may recall, the administration has never funded education at anything close to the figures in the original agreement with Sen. Ted Kennedy. Teachers say the No Child Left Behind law should be called "No Dollars Left Behind to Pay for It." Head Start is to be cut by \$177 million, and the highly successful nutrition program for women, infants and children is to be cut by \$100 million.

Any time Bush goes out into the country and claims credit for, or praises the work being done by, some government program, it is an almost-certain kiss of death – budget cuts follow.

Back to veterans. This year, the administration increased spending on veterans by \$519 million. In 2006, it plans to cut veterans spending by \$910 million.

Also on the list for substantial cuts are the National Institutes of Health, the Environmental Protection Agency, and police assistance and crime prevention programs. When something like the West Nile virus gets out of control, can't you just envision the independent investigation committee that will have a look into that government failure? Can we fire George Tenet again?

Rep. David Obey, D-Wisc., points out the House Interior Appropriations Committee had to cut \$682 million from the White House budget proposal this year. The budget situation is now so dire that the latest Republican scheme is to not pass a budget at all this year (until after the election), lest people notice what is going on.

The White House's latest ploy is to claim that the 2006 guidelines it issued are just a mere wisp of a suggestion, nothing to be taken seriously. But the White House has already submitted legislation to impose spending caps that would continue the cuts every year thereafter until 2009.

Are there any grown-ups in this administration? Budgets are the guts of government. "Who benefits?" and "Who pays?" are the only serious

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questions. Except, of course, for the always timely, "What the hell will they do to us next?"

Molly Ivins writes for Texas Observer.

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