

A BuzzFlash Reader Contribution



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Dear Representatives, What The Hell Are You Thinking?

An Open Letter to the United States Congress

A BUZZFLASH READER CONTRIBUTION

by Donna Wade

Senators and Representatives:

I write to you today to ask a simple question: "What the hell are you thinking?"

Not terribly long ago in our history, the occupants of your respective offices at least appeared to be grappling with the problems we face as a nation. There used to be some semblance of reasoned debate on the critical issues of the time. Really good representatives tried to find some point on which they agreed with their opponents to use as a starting point for developing a workable solution to the impasse of the moment. Perhaps each side wouldn't get exactly what they wanted, but they compromised and lived with it, because action was thought to be better than lengthy inaction. At least it kept the political process moving.

Now it seems you're content with exacerbating problems, or worse, ignoring them, because they don't fit in with the objectives of your respective parties. In fact, I get the distinct impression that many of you have placed your loyalty to your party above your loyalty to the people of this nation, its Constitution, and its founding principles.

Shame on you. You are supposed to be our watchdogs, yet, with too few exceptions, you have turned into the lapdogs of deep-pocketed campaign contributors, special interest lobbyists, big business, and those who fantasize that US laws should be based on their interpretation of Biblical ones.

You sit there, with your fully-funded retirements and top-dollar medical care, while the administration hawks a dubious Social Security crisis, proposes to decimate the most successful social program of the 20th century, while creating a big boon for Wall Street. How can you do nothing as 45 million of your constituents have no health insurance, and countless more are paying exorbitant premiums for reduced benefits?

Shame on you. One of you changed the name of an American staple to "freedom fries", yet your august body couldn't muster the will to raise the minimum wage for the person scooping up those fries beneath the golden arches or in your cafeteria. You made sure you got your own raises this year, though, didn't you?

Shame on you. You are supposed to be doing the peoples' business, and you are failing us at every turn. We placed our trust in you, as evidenced by our votes, and this is how we are repaid? You grant "seats at the table" to those who fill your campaign coffers and send you on golf trips, or give you a yacht to live on, yet you can't pass one bit of legislation in five years that makes our lives a bit easier, helps us find decent jobs, or otherwise cuts us some slack? Have you forgotten that the American people own that table you're selling seats to?

As my mother would say, you spend money like it's water...and pretend there's a never-ending supply. Have you forgotten who gave you that money to spend? It certainly didn't come from your big corporate contributors...most of the really big companies here don't pay any taxes, courtesy of your wonderful tax incentives (corporate welfare) or off-shore tax havens, and other loopholes which you can't see either the need or the urgency to close. Businesses that make incredible profit by virtue of doing business here should pay their fair share. If they consume our resources, depend on our patronage and labor for their success, and are protected by our laws, they should be kicking into the national kitty. End of story.

A conservative used to be someone who preached fiscal responsibility and then practiced it. I still hear plenty of preaching, but you're more than a bit lacking on the follow-through.

Shame on You. In the *Harper's* magazine cover article "[The Great American Pork Barrel: Washington Streamlines the Means of Corruption](#)," by Ken Silverstein, I read that last year "15,584 separate earmarks worth a combined \$32.7 billion were attached to the appropriations bills -- more than twice the dollar amount in 2001 ... and more than three times the dollar amount in 1998, when roughly 2,000 earmarks totaled \$10.6 billion. The process is so willfully murky that abuse has become not the exception, but the rule."

Seems to me that \$32.7 billion might be better spent on updating our power and transportation infrastructure, or renewable energy, or any one of myriad pressing issues, than on that Quilting Museum you think is so important to your district. If it's that important, why not convince a charitable or faith-based organization to pony up for it as a community service? Surely in your many travels you've come across somebody on the board of directors at a mega-church or philanthropic group who could help you raise funds for the project.

You allowed this administration to run up the largest deficit in our history, but don't worry, because you can always ignore the results of your inaction until you can pawn the problem off on someone else. Your grandchildren may see it differently, however, because they'll be paying for it most of their lives. You ignored the findings of Congressional Democrats who found that Halliburton overcharged us for what they did deliver in Iraq, and didn't blink when they billed us for things they didn't do. So how were they held accountable for bilking the American public? You rewarded them with another \$8 billion of our hard-earned money to continue their scams.

Shame on you. You passed a bankruptcy bill that takes away a person's ability to start over with a clean slate after a life-calamity such as divorce, loss of employment, or mountainous medical bills. In case you didn't know, those are the top three reasons people file bankruptcy, not, as the spin goes, people who spend, spend, spend on credit cards and never intended to pay. That bill was a gift with a nod and a wink to the banking industry, nothing more. How much did they increase your campaign lines of credit for that one?

Double shame on you. You abdicated your war powers by giving the President basically a blank check to attack, invade and occupy a sovereign nation that had not attacked us. Perhaps you had other priorities and didn't notice as the administration stepped up the air attacks on Iraq before even asking you for authority to use force, in an effort to provoke Saddam. I certainly believe the world is better without Saddam, but there was a right way to go about this and a wrong way, in my opinion. And you chose the latter.

I suppose you were like many Americans who just couldn't bring themselves to believe that this President would "disassemble" or manipulate information to suit his political ends. Yet when the Downing Street Minutes were published, your majority members hindered any attempt to hold a serious, broad-based investigation of their contents. Keeping them out of the more prestigious hearing rooms at the Capitol, relegating them to a small one somewhere near the basement, demonstrated to the American people just how much credence you gave these revelations, and more, just how petty you've become.

If true, there is proof in those minutes that you were LIED TO, conned into authorizing pre-emptive war, yet why aren't you outraged? Does the possibility that you were intentionally misled on the most serious issue to face a President or Congress not bother you in the least? Or are you so focused on keeping your cushy government jobs that all else takes a back seat to that goal?

One of you contends "he is the government." Another makes flippant and erroneous diagnoses from a videotape in order to pander to the right-to-life constituents he hopes will shepherd him into the White House. One of you equates being gay to having "man on dog sex." Someone at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue either approved or helped to reveal the identity of a covert CIA operative (who tracked wmds, for goodness sake!) for no reason I've seen other than political retribution against her husband, who challenged the administration's questionable basis for launching a war. Why don't I hear you screaming from the rafters for people to be held accountable in this obvious disregard and disdain for national security? Even if no crime can be proven, just because it's legal doesn't make it right.

Shame on you. You sit back while junk science is substituted for the honest, peer-reviewed findings of years-long studies the people financed. With a stroke of an editor's pen, hazardous conditions at Ground Zero suddenly become less-toxic, global warming isn't caused by humans burning unsustainable levels of fossil fuels, the gasoline additive MTBE doesn't harm our drinking water supplies, industrial chemicals don't hurt babies in-utero, lucrative logging contracts for ancient forests helps prevent wildfires, and *this* is responsible stewardship and preservation of our nation's natural resources? Do you not have people who

can research and educate you on these issues before you vote? You passed the PATRIOT Act overwhelmingly and I'll lay odds that many of you hadn't even read it. Don't you think something as important as that required at least a cursory review? Or did you subscribe to the administration's Cliff Notes version of it?

Shame on you. The last three national elections have had major irregularities, if not outright fraud, yet you sit on your hands and don't do a damn thing to address those. Some of you did stand up to contest the certification, and look what good things that brought you. You got the Swift Boat treatment. It used to be that standing up for a principle such as "one person-one vote" was an admirable thing. There is something very wrong with our electoral system, and you owe it to the people of the nation to determine what it is and how to fix it BEFORE the next national election. I personally believe you need to outlaw electronic voting machines. Actually, I'd like to see a return of the paper ballot. Results may take a little longer to get, but we waited weeks after the 2000 election, so waiting for ballots to actually be counted would be a cakewalk.

These are not Republican problems, nor Democratic. They are American problems. As Americans, we have a tradition of innovation and ingenuity. Together, we put our backs and our brains into difficulties or calamities and not only help each other through them but often steer our resources toward achieving the best possible outcome for all concerned.

That's what you're supposed to be doing in the once-hallowed halls of Congress: working for the best possible outcome for all of us. That's what being an elected representative used to be about. Doing not only what is best for your constituents, but sometimes having to balance, perhaps temper, their needs because of what is best for the entire nation. Sometimes that means making tough choices, like going against your party's talking points. Sometimes that means being a visionary, like sponsoring legislation to develop and fund a project to develop safe, alternative energy technologies to end our dependence on Middle Eastern oil. We rose to President Kennedy's challenge to put a man on the moon by the end of the 60s. We can do this, too. But it requires leadership, and I've seen precious little coming from Congress recently, at least on issues that really matter to everyday Americans. Shame on you.

It's your job to figure out ways we can work together to fix these problems. Stop the posturing, the rancor, the win-at-all-costs-and-crush-your-opponent-if-at-all-possible mentality, your visions of sugar plums (whether they be building a one-party dynasty, or an American theocracy), and grow up. Stop listening to party handlers and start listening to the people, because a good portion of us are mad as hell. We don't like being swindled, especially when you do it so brazenly and with the attitude that we're too stupid to notice.

So, demonstrate a commitment to resolving the disagreements that thwart any real, much less innovative, solutions or move out of the way for someone who will.

Maybe the new breed will favor term limits so no one gets too comfortable in their positions, knowing that in a specified time they'll have to return to their home states and to the judgment of their constituents. Maybe they'll legislate public financing of national elections to help free us from the scourge of unlimited campaign war chests, so that candidates

actually have to look voters in the eye instead of bombarding our airwaves, mail boxes and living rooms with campaign propaganda. Maybe the new breed will remember what phrases like "of the people, by the people, and for the people" and "ensure the domestic tranquility" really mean. "Providing for the common defense" doesn't just mean funding for the military industrial complex. It can sometimes mean protecting us from ourselves, or those on the national stage who have become drunk or obsessed with power.

There's a new American revolution a-brewing. It's fomenting on the blogs, websites and networks of people, of all political persuasions, who believe America is headed down a dangerous, disastrous path, and who are determined to take back our government from those complicit in getting us in this sorry state. It's the American way. And if you can't hear our hoof beats looming, shame on you. You're just not listening.

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