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Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future

Plenary Session: Shrubbed: The Radical Project of George Bush

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Good morning! My name is Jeff Faux. I'm with the Economic Policy Institute and I want to welcome you to our first panel. We've called this panel, "Shrubbed." The title comes from a book by Molly Ivins about George W. Bush. In Texas, I'm told, Shrub is not a term of great respect.

Now, of course, some of my New Democrat friends tell us that we're a little bit too hard on George Bush. After all, he's popular, so we ought to be more moderate, and not so negative. So I've been trying to put George Bush in a kinder, gentler perspective. I've concluded that however much we might criticize him, we have to admit that he is the President in sync with his times. These are terrible times. And he is a terrible President.

As you know, this is not your run-of-the-mill conservative Republican administration. This gang swindled itself into the Presidency and has used the horrible events of 9/11 to cloud the public's mind to their right-wing agenda. Whether it's a rationale for war, a reckless tax cut, or the erosion of our liberties, the last two years have revealed to everyone the administration's contempt for the truth, contempt for the Constitution, and contempt for the people.

This panel is a group of people who are leaders in the resistance to this attack on America's institutions and social contract. They are defenders of Constitutional freedom, environmental protection, gender and racial equality, and social and economic justice. The media echo chamber of the radical right, and their allies among the so-called "centrists" among us dismiss these issues as "special interests." This, from people who carry the political water for crony capitalists who are looting our treasury, and for extremists out to destroy our pluralist heritage. Social justice and civil liberty are in the national interest. The polls show that the vast majority of our fellow citizens, when they understand what is happening, oppose this reactionary agenda. Our task is to build and strengthen our own echo chamber. It's a big job and the people up here cannot do it alone. So I want you all to listen very carefully to what they have to say. If you have a pencil, take notes. If you don't have a pencil, borrow one from your neighbor. Use the information you're going to get today in this panel and other panels for your own speech. Everyone in this room over the next year and a half ought to give their own 5-10 minute speech, whether it's in front of an audience of 1,000, a call in talk radio show, or just educating that thickheaded brother-in-law of yours who doesn't get it. Yes, you know who I'm talking about!

I sometimes drive around the country at night going to an event. So I turn on the radio and I hear these talk shows with the right wing drunks calling in, and I ask myself, "where are our drunks?"

Now, the advantage that you have in being a progressive is that you don't have to get drunk to give a speech that makes sense. So listen carefully, we're in a political battle, the battle of our lives. Leave here energized, mobilized, organized, armed with Weapons of Mass Instruction and let's go out and do what we need to do over the next year and a half to get our country back.

We're going to start the panel now. As you know we've got Presidential candidates coming in throughout the day to talk to us; the next will be Senator John Edwards. He may come in the middle of the panel, and the panelists have graciously agreed to be interrupted to hear him. So I might have to interrupt one of you when the Senator comes in.

Let's start with the first speaker. Ralph Neas is President of People for the American Way, which is just the latest job in an extraordinarily distinguished career as a champion of human rights. For 14 years, he was Executive Director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and has been in the forefront of almost every battle in this country for civil liberties, equality and social justice. Ralph.