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Plenary Session: Shrubbed: The Radical Project of George Bush

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Thank you, thank you. I hear some NOW people out there! You know, this is such an amazing crowd. As I was sitting on the side and ran into some people that I knew, I was thinking that what I really wanted to do was shake every hand in this room and say, "Thank you for being here." So I want you to do it for me. Everybody turn to the person next to you, shake their hand, and say, "Thank you for being here." Thank you! Does everybody feel appropriately appreciated? Because now we're going to ask you to work!

Some of the NOW folks are meeting with Senator Clinton on Tuesday and, as invariably happens with these meetings, we started off with the parade of horrors. Somebody said, "Oh, look what they're about to do with the new abortion procedures ban." Followed by, "and look what they're doing with the FCC." We went down the list, as we always do whenever two or more of us are gathered. It's what they are doing to us, and it's everything from the cuts to family planning, both internationally and domestically, the global gag rule that is literally killing women in other countries. The new abortion procedures ban. It's all part of what the *New York Times* called, "The War Against Women." And it is a war. It is a war of deception and trickery and lies. Look at them. They've got a bill up there that they're saying is a Family Flexibility bill that will let people spend more time with their families. It's an elimination of overtime! It doesn't have anything to do with family flexibility!

Judges who violate their oath of office to help cross burners. Judges who say publicly that they believe women should submit to their husbands. Judges who say publicly that violence against women isn't really a serious problem. Judges who say that they would, given the chance, overturn *Roe v. Wade*. These are the kind of people that George Bush is nominating to the Federal bench. But it doesn't stop there! They're going after Title IX and equal educational opportunity, we all know about the threat to Affirmative Action. They've already gone after the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Age Discrimination Act, the FCC giveaway. And we all sort of looked at each other and started laughing and said, "Okay, okay. Now that we've done that, let's get down to the real work." And we did.

But all of us, everyone in the progressive movement, carry around in our head all of these things that they're doing to us. And the list is long. So I'm going to ask you all just

to repeat silently in your own minds, as you nod with me, all of the things that you're thinking about, and all of the bad things that George Bush is doing, and all of the things that we're going to stop as soon as he is out of the White House. That feel better? Got it out? Because now we have to get to work.

Don't you love it when they call us Special Interests? I love the way that 52 percent of the population, women, we are special interests! Halliburton is not a special interest! But women are a special interest. People of color are a special interest. And while they're saying that, and while they're saying, "Oh well, we don't need to hear what you have to say because you're just a special interest. You're not a real person". So they bring in the corporate types to get their opinions. So real special interests groups are lining up and filing their pockets. Look at Bechtel, look at Halliburton, all these no bid contracts? With their connections to Cheney and Bush, it really does give a new meaning to insider trading! I mean, Martha Stewart is nowhere in their league. She's down at the tee-ball level! But guess who's going to jail? It's not Kenneth Lay of Enron going to jail.

And look at WorldCom. Not only is nobody going to jail, they just got one of the biggest contracts in Iraq to rebuild the telephone system! It went to WorldCom! Did you not hear about that? Imagine why. Because the biggest special interest in all of this is the media itself. Soon to be owned by a handful of Rupert Murdoch cronies that stifle our messages and keep our messages from being heard. And when we get them out, they're drowned in a sea of lies.

I sat at the correspondents' dinner last night at the table next to Bill O'Reilly. And as I looked over at him at the next table holding court, I thought about the fact that there are literally millions of people who get their news from Bill O'Reilly, who actually think that he's telling them the truth about what's happening in the world. They get their perspective on the world from the O'Reilly Factor and from Scarborough Country with Joe Scarborough. It's gotten to the point that Pat Robertson can just retire from his television career because his job has been taken over by Fox News and MSNBC and Clear Channel Broadcasting. They're doing his work for him!

Speaking of Clear Channel, could we hear one round for the Dixie Chicks please? How many of you bought your first Dixie Chicks CD after Clear Channel banned them? They have lots of new fans all over the country. Imagine all this fuss over their embarrassment at being from Texas—every Texan should be embarrassed! I'm from Louisiana and I'd be more embarrassed to be from Texas! Look at this. Their state legislature just played doctor. They not only set a 24 hour waiting period for a woman who is seeking an abortion, like she didn't think about it for 24 hours, but also before she can have an abortion the doctor has to tell her that abortions cause breast cancer. Never mind that it's not even true! The doctor has to tell stuff that's not even true in order to be allowed to perform an abortion in Texas. They're going to make a landmark out of that Holiday Inn in Oklahoma! I was thinking of a pilgrimage myself!

These legislators, not just in Texas, but everywhere, they're playing doctor, they don't even play one on TV. But they like to put police officers or maybe FBI agents, maybe

even CIA agents, into every women's health facility so they can see whether women really need abortions or whether they're just scamming the system. They all have their walkie-talkies connected directly to John Ashcroft. You know, "speak into this pen."

I am unapologetically liberal, I'm proud to be left. I'm proud to be left, but I'm tired of being left out! I'm tired of being called a "splinter group", but you know, sometimes you just have to take back the language. We're all of us "splinter groups". We're about to get ourselves together and become a two-by-four and light a match! I'm tired of people who call themselves leaders whose idea of leadership is to say, "Which way were they going? How many were there? What were they saying? I have to find them, I'm their leader!" The idea that leadership is putting your finger up to see which way the wind goes and going that way.

But we have a great legacy here. I was so privileged last year to share this platform with the late Senator Paul Wellstone. The loss of Paul and Sheila Wellstone weighs heavily on all of us. A couple of weeks ago we had a meeting where there were over a dozen very progressive Senators in the room. One of the things that I took that opportunity to do was to ask each of them to take a little time to stand in Paul Wellstone's shoes. Whether it was a month, a week, a day, an hour on the Senate floor, a minute on the Senate floor, to do what Paul Wellstone would have done. We can't do the same thing, but we can after a fashion stand in Paul Wellstone's shoes, every one of us in this room. We can speak the truth without apology. We can take a stand and we can lead by example. Everyone in this room can do that and I ask you to think on a regular basis, "What would Paul Wellstone do? And what can I do to continue the Wellstone legacy?"

I want to ask you something. I want to ask you something that is not an easy thing to ask, but it's critically important that we do it. If we're going to turn all those splinters into a two-by-four, we're going to have to change our lives for the next 17 months. And I really mean that in a very serious way. We have to change our lives. Every single day we need to think, "What must I be doing today so that the outcome of the 2004 election takes back this country for the people it belongs to, not for the special interests? What can I do?" For some of you, it may mean giving up a vacation and spending those two weeks in a state where your help is needed. For some of you, it may mean changing your plans, not doing something you do every Monday night and going to work in a phone bank instead for the next 17 months. It can be something big, like quitting your job and going to Iowa. Or something small, like giving up your tall double latte frappachino and giving that \$3.50 to a campaign that's going to make a difference.

If we don't seriously change our lives, seriously change the way we do everything we do for the next 17 months, we're not going to be here celebrating two years from now. I want to ask every one of you, in all seriousness, to think about what you can do to change your life, to change your direction, to make a difference in the next 17 months. We have all got to work like our future depends on it, because it does.