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**President, People for the American Way**

**Take Back America Conference**  
Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future

**Plenary Session: Shrubbed: The Radical Project of George Bush**

**Thursday, June 5, 2003**  
**Washington, DC**

I am Ralph G. Neas, President of People for the American Way. It's great to be here. People For is a national social justice organization of 600,000 members and activists around this nation, founded by Norman Lear and former Congresswoman, the late Barbara Jordan, Father Ted Hessburg and many others, 22 years ago. We promote and defend American values, Constitutional rights and liberties, public education, and an independent federal judiciary. I too want to salute Bob Borosage and Roger Hickey. What an extraordinary conference this has been so far and much more to go. Thank you Bob, thank you Roger. People For is proud to be part of this conference as a full partner. I'm also proud to be joined by Lara Bergtholde and Lynn Lear, and dozens of Regional Directors and staffers throughout the country.

This is an extraordinary and propitious time to meet. We've got about three weeks before a Supreme Court nominee or two arises. We've been preparing a long time for this and we are going to block any right wing nominee in the mold of Scalia and Thomas!

Today, June 5, we have a hearing in the United States Senate. Trent Lott and Bill Frist want to eliminate the filibuster with respect to judicial nominations. We are facing one of the greatest Constitutional threats to our Constitutional scheme of government since the founding of our fathers. The next 5 months to 17 months will determine what the law of the land will be for the next several decades. Whether a woman is going to have a Constitutional right to reproductive freedom and privacy, whether we're going to have strong environmental laws for clean air and clean water, whether we're going to have strong equal opportunity laws and religious liberty. All of this could be decided in the next year or two.

I am going to be pretty tough in the next remaining minutes that I have. You're going to understand better why the Wall Street Journal editorial board has attacked me and People For 14 different times in editorials over the last year. You'll understand why Orrin Hatch and Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell would attack us on almost a daily basis. Because we are exposing what this Bush administration is truly all about. This is the most right wing administration in modern American history. George W. Bush, Karl Rove, Ashcroft, Cheney, you name them, they are taking on a strategy that has two prongs. Number one are the recent tax cuts. This is not tax cut policy with respect to this permanent tax cut. It is a concerted, premeditated effort to take away the money from

the federal government over the next couple decades. Six trillion dollars worth. What do they want to do? Grover Norquist put it well, "starve the federal government, make it so small that it will shrink in the bathtub". This is a fight over the role of the government. They don't want the money to fund the social justice programs of the last 65 years, and they don't want us to invest in public health care, public education, or make sure that Medicare and Social Security are solvent for the rest of our nations history.

Most fundamentally, they want to pack the courts. Take away the money, take away the rights. That is the strategy of the Bush administration. That's why we have this Constitutional crisis that we must overcome. Most disturbing is the way they're going about it. We have administration officials backed up by Tom DeLay, backed up by Bill Frist and Trent Lott, who have a disrespect for the Constitution. Who don't like to obey the separation of powers doctrine. Who want to act in an extra-Constitutional way. They like to circumvent the courts, they don't like to go to Congress for a congressional authorization. They want to act by executive fiat. This is unacceptable. This is tyrannical conduct. This is inconsistent with the Constitution.

That's what the filibuster change is all about. I think we're going to block it because there are thoughtful, conservative and moderate Republicans who will bring some measure of reality and fairness to this debate. With the Democrats they'll beat it back. We have to preserve the ability to defeat, to block extremist judges who would turn back the clock 65 years.

The fight is about the judiciary. This is going to be a fight that will consume America for weeks and maybe months because of what's at stake. We know that the Supreme Court has been part of the second American Revolution, in which so many dreams and aspirations contained in the Bill of Rights and the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence have been given some measure of reality for millions of Americans. But we have people on the Supreme Court now who don't agree with how the Constitution has been interpreted over the last 65 years. They want to undo scores of precedents—dozens of years of Constitutional precedents. George W. Bush wants to name people in the mold of Thomas and Scalia. If that happens, one or two more right wing justices, you will have over 100 Supreme Court precedents overturned. Roe v. Wade, yes, but also environmental protections, civil rights protections, and religious liberty. They want to remove the Constitutional basis by reinterpreting the commerce clause, the spending clause, and the 14th amendment, so we that can't address health care, we can't address public education and save Social Security and Medicare.

That's what this is all about. Remove the Constitutional basis for a progressive government, for the role of government that we've had for decades. We're going to fight back, we're going to have an army, we're going to have a message. This is not going to be about process or about filibusters. It's going to be about what's at stake, for every American—what taking away these 70 years of precedents would do to the daily lives of every American, their children and their grandchildren. We are going to stand up and fight! That's what we have to do all around this country! We have to say, "we're not going to take it anymore". George W. Bush, Tom DeLay, Bill Frist, Trent Lott, Ashcroft,

they are the schoolyard bullies and what do we do with schoolyard bullies? We stand up to them! We stand up to them and fight. Filibuster, if necessary. But we just don't take it lying down.

We have to be guardians of the Constitution. We have to be protectors of every single American. We can't let them get away with it. It's time to play hardball. What do the Anita Hill hearings, and Florida 2000 and the attempt to eliminate the filibuster, have in common? The other side, the Lotts and the Frist's and the Hatch's and the Bushes, they're willing to play hardball. They're willing to go to the mat. We've got to make sure progressive Democrats and Republicans will go to the mat. Build a mainstream coalition, but stand up to those schoolyard bullies and make sure that we preserve our Constitution.

I am optimistic about the next 5 months, the next 17 months, the next decade or two, because we're going to convince people that we have to preserve our Constitutional rights and freedom. We have to preserve economic justice and extend it. We have to make sure that we convey to America that everything that we've achieved in these last 65 years, everything we believe in, everything that we've fought for, is in serious jeopardy. Paul Wellstone, shortly before he died, put it very well. "The future of America belongs to those who have passion and those who are willing to make the personal commitment to make things better in this country. Those in this room, those listening in the audience, throughout this country today, you have the passion, you have the personal commitment. Together we are going to build an even better America. I'm profoundly grateful to be with you today, look forward to working with you and continuing to be your ally. Thank you so very much.