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## **Mr. Bush Neglects the Constitution** **by Sheldon Richman**

It isn't entirely encouraging that the top man of the political party theoretically dedicated to the Constitution, limited government, and individual liberty thinks the government he runs should cure AIDS in Africa, create a hydrogen-powered car, pay for retirees' medicine, and provide mentors to troubled kids.

Ominously, President Bush's state of the Union speech contained neither the words "Constitution" nor "limited," as in "limited government," which, after all, was the point of the Constitution. The term "spending discipline" was pronounced. But it was tempered, again ominously, by the word "some."

The president insisted that the good taxpayers' lucre should be squandered only on "our most important priorities" — which surely explains why he didn't promise subsidies to municipal recorders of deeds and dogcatchers. (Perhaps — we'll have to await the budget to know for sure.) He also struck a responsible pose by promising to hold the line on the growth in "discretionary spending" to a piddling 4 percent. "Federal spending should not rise any faster than the paychecks of American families," he said.

Such eloquence might warm the hearts of conservatives throughout the land, but as a revolutionary slogan it lacks something. For one thing, why should the rise in the average American's pay be any guide to how much more the government may pilfer and pander? Americans work for their pay. All the government does is hover over the toiling masses waiting to take its healthy cut. Yes, of course, Mr. Bush wants tax cuts. But in truth, those cuts are small in percentage and even in absolute terms. Besides, since he proposes to spend more than he rakes in, Mr. Bush is simply planning to tax the hapless American earners implicitly. Whoever first said "there ain't no such thing as a free hydrogen-powered car" spoke the truth plainly.

One will search in vain through the Constitution for a warrant to spend the taxpayers' money on the things Mr. Bush listed in his speech. Africa and the Caribbean may be ravaged by a terrible disease, but the Framers were aware of both those regions and of the existence of terrible diseases. Yet they neglected to include the power Mr. Bush asserts in the bedrock law Americans

believe makes their country the greatest in the world. The same goes for government's assisting in the development of a new car, providing mentors, or paying for medicine.

That slippery term "discretionary spending" shouldn't go unexamined. It refers to only one category of federal spending, but that's just a device for bamboozling the taxpayers. It's all discretionary when you come right down to it. Congress has put a lot of spending increases on automatic pilot, but it could change that if it wanted to. Those increases are not acts of God. Federal spending is heading up because those who spend our money for us want it that way.

Mr. Bush's neglect of the document he swore to uphold is further evident in his promise to spend more money on treatment for drug addicts. It's not clear why the taxpayers have a duty to harass people who choose to use drugs habitually, but it is clear that the Constitution doesn't grant that power. Nor can I make out a case for the government's spending money to encourage people to do voluntary service. That seems to be well within the power of the individual. Mr. Bush says it will "build a more welcome society." But I can't find those words in the Constitution either.

Finally, the president mocks the original American rationale by pressing his case against Iraq. His menu of reasons for why he will eventually make war indicates he lacks confidence in any one of them. Saddam Hussein certainly has no hostile designs on the United States. But when Mr. Bush invokes the tyranny over the Iraqi people, he is most obviously out of bounds. It's not the job of the U.S. president to bring freedom (even if by some long shot that's what is brought) to foreign people. Had Mr. Bush paid attention to his own speech he would have seen that we have enough to do just to free ourselves from unlimited government at home.

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