

CONA TODAY

CITIZENS OFFERING NEW ALTERNATIVES

Spring 2004

P.O. Box 7, Walpole, ME 04573

A CRITICAL CHOICE

The Supreme Court selected the president in 2000. This November, American citizens will choose their president in the most critical election of our lifetime. Over the last 3 years, the Bush administration has led our country in a drastic direction.

Their philosophy of government sees its highest purpose as military defense of the homeland. The Bush Doctrine replaced deterrence with unilateral, preemptive war. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the doctrine became a War on Terrorism against "evil" men and nations. The enemy would be chosen by the president and attacked with overwhelming military force.

Government's second purpose is promoting corporate growth to maximize profits. It exists for the benefit of corporations, the wealthy, and the powerful, not for the people. Social security, unemployment insurance, occupational health and safety, health care, quality education, defending the rights of all minorities seeking social and economic justice, and the environment must be privatized or significantly reduced.

This administration seems to be undoing all the socially beneficial programs of the past sixty years: the New Deal, the Great Society, civil rights, women's reproductive rights. Is their approach to the dilemmas of this new century, their conservatism, fundamentalism, and its resulting programs what you want in your future and your children's?

The other major areas of choice emerged after the September 11 attacks. Our democracy and constitutional liberties are seriously threatened by Patriot Acts I and II. We are "One Nation - under surveillance." Our Bill of Rights is virtually repealed to stop terrorism. Everyone, citizen and foreigner, is suspect. To assemble, protest, *habeas corpus*, legal counsel, privacy protected, and protection from unlawful search and seizure are not rights, but impediments to national safety. Is this justifiable?

(continued on page 2)

CONA Annual Meeting

Saturday June 12, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Glidden Street, Newcastle
11 a.m. Annual Meeting • 12 noon Potluck Luncheon • 1 p.m. Annual Meeting Speaker

Who on earth would choose to be in a church basement for a couple of hours on a beautiful June day?

Just those who are heartsick at the direction our beautiful country has turned... Just those who need to share the optimism, courage and forthrightness of CONA members and friends... Just people like us who want a better life for this world and are willing to do something about it.

The Annual Meeting is a time to show your appreciation for those who work hard all year to bring this community Peaceful Beginnings, Potluck and Poetry, and monthly forums and films as well as those who prepare this newsletter, handle our finances, keep up with our membership records and lists, maintain our website and minutes of our meetings.

It is time for solidarity, fellowship and support for one another.

Our speaker is unusual. You might think that Bill Coperthwaite... who got his undergraduate degree from Bowdoin and his doctorate from Harvard; who has lived in and worked in far flung parts of this hemisphere; who is an innovative teacher, an artist and intellectual... is going to stand behind an oak lectern and pour his wisdom on our heads for 40 minutes. Not so.

He has asked to sit in a circle with us. While he is convinced he has truths to share, he wants to talk with us, not at us. He has said that "Most teaching is presumptuous, paternalistic and destructive of the teacher's potential as well as that of the student"; "My central concern is *encouragement* - encouraging people to seek, to experiment, to design, to create, to dream"; "What is beautiful is easier to live with and care for"; and "If we are to design a world without violence and prejudice, we must help people become more confident, aware, and secure".

Much of Bill's wisdom is distilled in his recent book, *A Handmade Life - In Search of Simplicity*. The book, with Peter Forbes' photographs, is visually stunning.



President's Letter

In many volunteer organizations there are individuals "behind the scenes" who continue to make an enormous contribution without receiving the recognition they deserve. One of ours has retired, having given 22 uninterrupted years of service to CONA and the peace movement. Her name is Enid Sharp.

Enid's first serious endeavor was in June 1982 when she brought the Nuclear Weapons Freeze proposal to her home town (Waldoboro) for a popular vote. The next day she attended the historic March of One Million in New York City and became involved with CONA that Sunday by going to the community debate on the Freeze, which was CONA's "coming out" event. She became active in the statewide Freeze movement and championed the importance of local groups and nurturance of the local-state connection.

Editor of the newsletter from 1983 to 1992, Enid also created the membership program and served as CONA's President. A dedicated, creative volunteer, her contributions are beyond measure. She departs with our gratitude and best wishes.

In these trying times, volunteer opportunities are abundant and varied. Our organization is committed to community education related to peace and justice issues. Most have a political solution. We welcome volunteers to monitor national and state legislation, prepare hand-outs, assist with program events and work with the newsletter committee.

What issues concern you? Do you let your Congressional delegation know how you feel? Are you up-to-date on pending legislation in Augusta? Political participation continues to lag in the U.S. Non-voting figures have motivated several organizations to conduct "get-out-the-vote" campaigns. According to the Friends Committee on National Legislation: "In the last presidential campaign, only 51.3% of the voting age population cast ballots and a mere 24.5% of the voting age population voted for the candidate who took office." Urge your church or meeting members, your friends and neighbors to register. Get more involved. Become more informed - and volunteer your time and energy.

Jo Clauson

CONA To Change Fiscal Year

In an effort to simplify our membership procedures CONA will change its fiscal year to match the calendar year. Our fiscal year will end May 31st this year and then next year will match the calendar year. We will not be asking for membership dues until December this year, leaving us a six month gap in our income this year.

You will get a letter in the mail shortly asking for funds to help us out. I hope you will be able to play your part in closing the gap. A donation of about half of what you normally give each year will tide us over nicely.

(critical choice continued)

The war in Iraq embroils the whole world in controversy and outrage. The administration's secrecy, lies, manipulation of fact, "evidence" of weapons of mass destruction, the "connection" between bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, and the "16 words" in the State of the Union address, deliberately deceived the nation and convinced congress to delegate its war power authority to the Executive. The conduct of the war, its loss of life on both sides, and destruction of Iraq's infrastructure and cities, its brutal occupation, and treatment of prisoners ensure enmity and recruit more Iraqis to their cause.

Dare we ask this administration why the "evil ones" hate us so much? Could *our* policies of economic sanctions, shoring up a ruthless dictator, taking over their economy to control its oil profits, and disregard for its society, religion, and culture *be* causes? We force Iraq, and Afghanistan, to accept our vision of what is "right" for them, "freedom and democracy"

Woodrow Wilson wanted to make the world "safe for democracy"; the Great War defeated fascism; "falling dominoes" rationalized the Vietnam War. Once again, a powerful nation is an occupier besieged by the occupied who are fighting a guerrilla war to determine their own destiny. Once again our nation must choose between jobs and the economy or foreign wars.

Many issues, impact the next four years and beyond. Do we keep the present administration, or elect a new one? The electorate is polarized. Do your research, discuss the issues, evaluate the options, and decide what matters most to you.

Make your critical choice, and vote! (sc)

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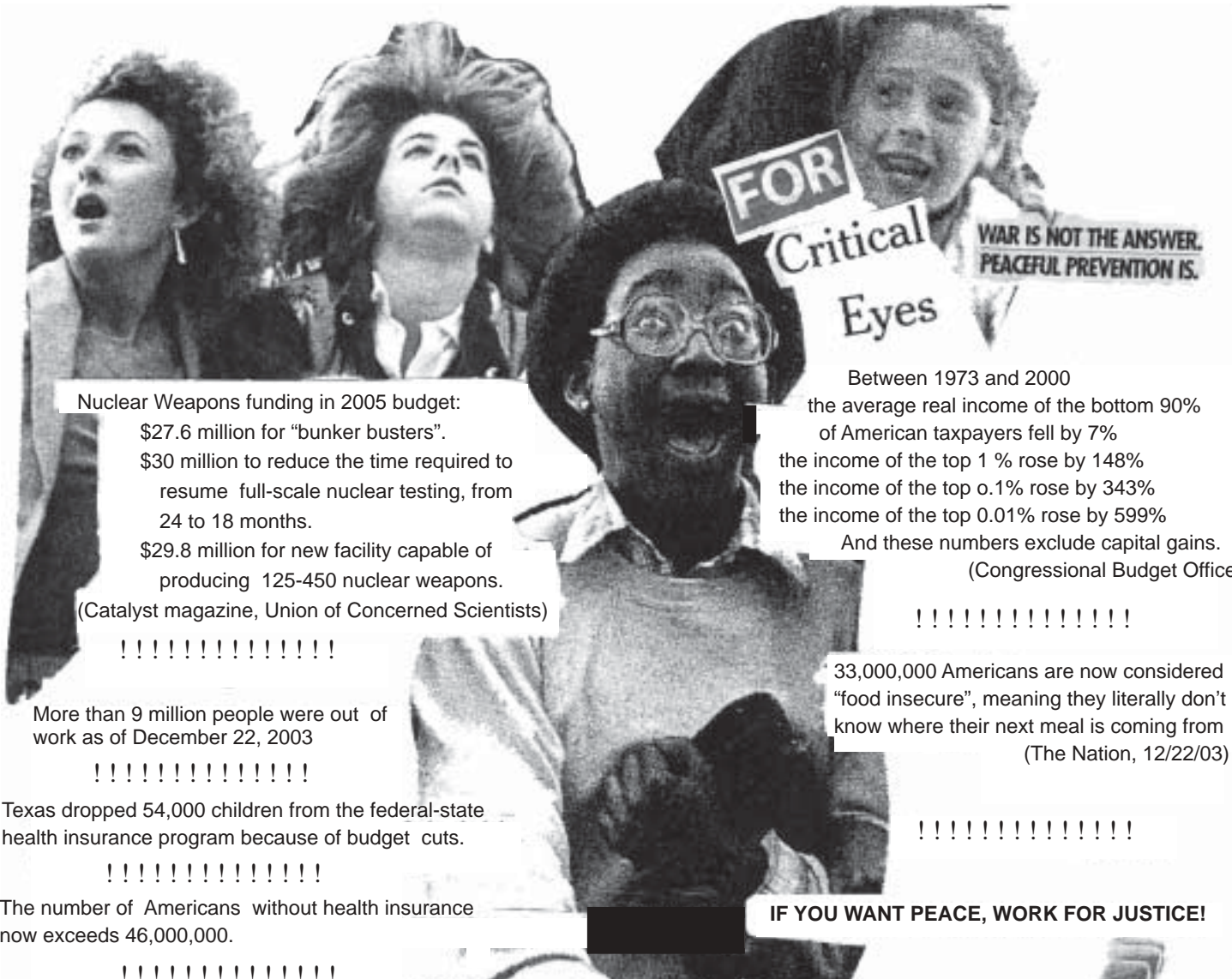
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"Terrorism is the war of the poor - war is the terrorism of the rich"



Nuclear Weapons funding in 2005 budget:
 \$27.6 million for "bunker busters".
 \$30 million to reduce the time required to resume full-scale nuclear testing, from 24 to 18 months.
 \$29.8 million for new facility capable of producing 125-450 nuclear weapons.
 (Catalyst magazine, Union of Concerned Scientists)

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More than 9 million people were out of work as of December 22, 2003

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Texas dropped 54,000 children from the federal-state health insurance program because of budget cuts.

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The number of Americans without health insurance now exceeds 46,000,000.

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Since the beginning of 2003 another 1,700,000 Americans slipped below the poverty line. (\$19,000 for a couple and two children)

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1 in 12 civilian federal workers is now employed by the Department of Homeland Security. (Transnational Record Access Clearinghouse)

Number of new government jobs created since 2000... 721,000

Number of private sector jobs lost since then... 2,692,000

(Department of Labor)

!!

"In a democracy, the future isn't something that just happens; it's something we shape for ourselves, together. Special-interest lobbyists get the government they pay for only when we stay home from the polls -- only when we abdicate the electoral power that is mightier than any soft-money check, more decisive than any million-dollar ad blitz or corporate misinformation campaign."

(Al Gore, MoveOn's 50 Ways to Love Your Country)

Between 1973 and 2000 the average real income of the bottom 90% of American taxpayers fell by 7% the income of the top 1% rose by 148% the income of the top 0.1% rose by 343% the income of the top 0.01% rose by 599%
 And these numbers exclude capital gains. (Congressional Budget Office)

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33,000,000 Americans are now considered "food insecure", meaning they literally don't know where their next meal is coming from (The Nation, 12/22/03)

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IF YOU WANT PEACE, WORK FOR JUSTICE!



"The history of liberty is a history of resistance."

—Woodrow Wilson

Who should you believe?

If we are to reach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children."

The Case for Universal Health Care

For the past twenty years, I have been an advocate for Universal Health Care. During the presidential campaign of 1988, I was greatly impressed with the argument for single payer health care by Congressman Jim McDermott (D - Washington). He was one of the first members of Congress, himself a medical doctor, to come out boldly for a health care system patterned after the Canadian system, and covering every person in America.

Four years later, Bill Clinton carried the health care bill which became the centerpiece of his campaign. One of his first initiatives to Congress was his own health care plan, which was a giant step toward eventual universal health care. Unfortunately, it failed to pass, and we are still without, but still in need of, health care reform.

Senator Hilary Rodham Clinton (D - New York) was a partner in developing the health care bill presented to Congress. She continues the fight for universal health care. In a well-reasoned article in *The New York Times Magazine* of April 18, 2004, she points out that the health care crisis has worsened since the defeat of the Clinton bill in 1993. In 1993 there were 37 million uninsured; in the late 90's there was a slight improvement. Now there are 43.6 million Americans uninsured, and the vast majority are in working families. In 1993, 46% of companies with 500 or more employees offered some type of retiree health benefit. That declined to 29% by 2001. These figures show that working families, retirees, and the very poor, are being hit hard in the struggle for a healthy survival.

The Canadian plan, cited above, which actually began as an amalgamation of separate provincial plans. I quote from an article in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, dated June 29, 2000, "The cornerstone of Canada's health insurance system was laid in 1957, when the national government, unable to achieve consensus with the provincial governments for one overall plan, wielded its spending power to encourage the creation of provincial plans. Through federal legislation, the House of Commons provided cash payments to any province that agreed to administer and partially finance a universal hospital insurance plan. Medical insurance was added in 1968, again with the federal government offering cash payments to provinces that fell into line."

I want to have readers start thinking about universal health care in the United States based on shared responsibility between state and federal governments. Shared financing, as in the Canadian plan, would provide automatic adjustment to states with different costs. Two states do provide single payer health care, Oregon and Hawaii. To keep costs down, both states have curtailed certain health care modalities. Shared federal and state costs would have prevented this reduction in needed services.

As a board member of The American Lung Association of Maine, and member of the Citizens Advisory Committee of The Maine Health Access Foundation, I have been involved for over fifteen years in the development of health care initiatives. Both organizations supported the governor's

Dirigo Health Plan, but even Dirigo does not go far enough. It does provide a level of financing health care for working families, but so far, nothing but simple charity provides health care coverage for the very poor who are unable to pay any premiums.

Recognizing this, the State Democratic Party seeks health care for all. Their 2004 platform says, "We applaud the establishment of the Dirigo Health Plan and its commitment to guarantee, in the near future, comprehensive health care for all Maine residents. At the same time, we support the establishment of a comprehensive, national single-payer health insurance system."

During the darkest days of World War II, countries with a history of single payer health care, including Germany and Russia, never lost it. A former co-worker of mine, a school girl in war torn Berlin, never lost her government sponsored health care.

Senator John Kerry has proposed a plan that would cover all who are living in poverty, allow people to buy into the federal employee health benefits program; help employers by re-insuring high cost claims, and assuming more of the costs from hard pressed state and local programs. This Kerry plan has more merit than most, but it is still a stop gap fix. True single payer health care will remain a dream until the private insurers with their high paid executives are out of the picture. Lyndon Johnson laid the foundation for Medicare in 1965. Expand it now to insure all.

Paul S. Best



Ayiti

There was something so beautiful about that little democracy in Haiti - a people's government striving to survive, struggling to rebuild, struggling to maintain its dignity, its independence. It fought the good fight. Alas, beautiful Haiti could not overcome the forces of the world's capitalist system which arrayed against it - an unchecked capitalism determined to remain unchecked and to maintain the horrible poverty of little Haiti - poor Haiti.

The struggle goes on in the hearts of Haiti's people, as they consider the plots of the organized and heartless non-persons that destroyed their Haiti and her children's lives and hopes.

There once was something beautiful in Haiti, and now it's gone - faded. Can love help us recover our loss? Are the wonders and beauty of Haiti only to be found again in bloodshed? Can that bloodshed succeed while the corporate non-persons succeed? Would it be worth it?

Will the pain endure our whole life long?

Reginald Gagnon

"Ayiti" is Creole for Haiti

"Our nation will bleed men, money, and reputation for a long time before it figures out how to get out of the first colonial misadventure of the 21st century"

Being Poor in Maine

This is a short summary of a talk by Lisa Pohlmann of the Maine Center for Economic Policy given to CONA on February 4th, 2004, and compiled by Tom Schmidt. It was part of the public lecture series, "Changing Maine, 1960-2010", broadcast by Maine Public Radio. The complete text and information on the series can be found on the Muskie Institute website at www.muskie.usm.maine.edu. The series will be published this summer by Tilbury House of Gardiner, Me.

Do you know that one half of your neighbors (the ones that are employed) are just scraping by with jobs that barely pay the rent and usually have no benefits? The sad truth is that one half of Mainers earn less than \$12.00 per hour (2001). This low wage economy means that a high proportion of the population is trying to pacify bill collectors to keep the lights on, have no savings for an emergency, and can afford neither over-the-counter medications nor any kind of health insurance. Manufacturing jobs pay on average \$16.60 per hour, but we have lost 22% of them between 1982 to 2000. During the same period, Maine has had an increase of 72% in retail jobs, but they pay on average only \$7.75 per hour (1999 dollars). And if you have to depend on welfare, even in this relatively generous state, your financial situation is just above desperation.

Ms. Pohlmann noted in her talk that "The life of the poor has become measurably more difficult after the rise of the conservative movement in America beginning in the 1980's with the Reagan administration and its broad cuts of Government programs designed to help the poor. The 1990's, the longest economic expansion since WWII, produced another time of plenty. But the Government did not dedicate itself to trying to share this prosperity. Quite the contrary. It is remarkable and discouraging that in the 21st century we find the Bush administration pressing for even more hours of work from single parents receiving welfare assistance... workforce training programs are cut again. Equally disturbing is that these assaults on the poor have received little public attention."

On the more positive side, Ms. Pohlmann illustrated what a determined and modestly progressive state can do despite adverse Federal Government policies: "Maine has remained a bright light... with our limited state resources Maine's policy leaders have, for the most part, retained a deep commitment to helping their fellow citizens in need. In the most recent round of welfare reforms, Maine implemented one of the most compassionate and effective welfare reforms in the country... including access to college for women on welfare... continuation of benefits beyond the federal cut off... expanded Medicaid coverage, increased funding for low cost housing, expanded unemployment benefits to part-time workers, invested in early childhood development and a low cost community college system... and it has maintained a relatively progressive tax system." We might note, however, in this time of a real squeeze on State budgets some of our safety net programs may be cut back.

Ms. Pohlmann concluded her talk with a challenge that is particularly germane to those of us who belong to CONA:

***Holding people in prison without due process
degrades the democratic values you say you are trying to uphold.
from Open Democracy's conference on Madrid Terrorism***

"Each one of us will have to work harder to reach across the income divide. We have a responsibility as good citizens to generate public understanding of the terrible effects of poverty that permeate our communities. With the help of our Congressional delegation we must break through the ideological blockade in Washington that blames the poor for being poor and continues to unravel the safety net."



Environment... ((continued from back page)

The theory of Abrupt Climate Change examines the effect of global warming on ocean currents. The rise in temperature is melting polar ice caps and glaciers, releasing enough fresh water into the ocean to change the salinity of the "thermohaline conveyor" currents and shut them down. These currents moderate temperatures in the northern hemisphere. Should the conveyors collapse another ice age could occur, preceded by severe winters, storms, flooding, drought, high winds, rising sea levels, and human dislocations.

The Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment examined the security threat of such a climate change and concluded that global warming was a greater threat than terrorism! With Abrupt Climate Change a *probability* in the near future, there would be wars over limited resources, and for basic survival... water, food, shelter, and health.

The Apollo Alliance has taken the initiative while the administration stalls, and takes no action. The Alliance is a diverse coalition of scientific and environmental groups and includes the UAW. Its new Apollo Project would transform the American economy from suburban sprawl and fossil fuels to smart growth, renewable energy, and public infrastructure development. It proposes investing \$30 billion annually for 10 years, initiating policy changes to create millions of high wage, high-skilled jobs, and save energy consumers billions of dollars. It would control greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce oil usage by 12% - the equivalent of our oil imports from the Persian Gulf. To fund this initiative, the plan closes offshore tax loopholes that cost America \$70 billion annually.

Our national dilemma may resemble a hydra-headed monster, but this Apollo project addresses systemic problems the administration will not. Bravo Apollo!

Sharon Crosbie



We mortals are composed of
two great schools
Enlightened knaves or else
religious fools

Abul 'Ala al Ma'arri
10th century Syrian poet

Environment 2004

The environment is under seige. Environmental laws over the last thirty years established protections for water, air, wildlife, habitats, natural resources, national parks, wilderness areas, and places of unique cultural heritage.

The Bush administration is systematically dismantling this legislation, eviscerating enforcement, slashing budgets, disregarding, demeaning or firing scientists, omitting and rewriting data showing its programs are wrong or harmful, eliminating compliance reviews, and packing district and circuit courts with ideological soulmates to advance its anti-environmental political agenda.

The spinmeisters clothe revised legislation in benificent "spin"... "Clear Skies", "Healthy Forests", and "Clean Water"... but each will achieve the exact opposite. Case in point:

The EPA's revised regulations for mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants call for 30% reduction in 15 years, replacing the 90% reduction in three years under current law. Given the danger to women, young children, and fetuses, this is unconscionable! Kelpie Wilson, an energy engineer and forest protection activist, commented, "When babies are born sick or dead from mercury poisoning, polluters will not be prosecuted for the murder of fetuses... Pro-life prosecutors will find a way to blame the women for eating too many tuna fish sandwiches."

We have seen an Energy Bill in Congress that was developed in secrecy and proposes oil drilling in irreplaceable Alaskan wilderness; it gives millions of dollars to energy corporations subsidizing new oil, gas, coal, and nuclear power plants, yet, says nothing about conservation, and pays lipservice to alternative, sustainable energy sources.

The most scathing indictment of the Bush administration's environmental record is from the Natural Resources Defense Council. Their annual assessment, "Rewriting the Rules: The Bush Administration's Assault on the Environment", was presented by Robert Kennedy Jr., a senior attorney with NRDC, and major environmentalist. I quote from his remarks:

"As a citizen -- and as a taxpayer -- I'm outraged that my government is putting polluters' interests before the public interest; choosing corporate profits over people"... "this administration is committed to undoing decades of progress in cleaning up our air, water, and lands, and safeguarding our health"...

"It comes down to this: Our government is supposed to respect us, to value us, to look out for us, and to protect our best interests. Our environment is not a commodity that can -- or should -- be auctioned off to the highest corporate bidder."

On an international level, the administration refuses to acknowledge and address global climate change which many consider the most crucial environmental issue of our time.

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Sharon Crosbie

The web of life is truly interconnected, our planet is fragile, and its resources are finite. All people and cultures must recognize their interdependence and take responsible, collective action to sustain the Earth.

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