

# Woodchopper's Ball

**By Rick Carter, Editor-in-Chief**

Anyone wishing to polish their powers of deception couldn't ask for a better teacher than our own President Bush. Tricks that would make con artists envious are enacted before our eyes by the Bush team in dazzling government-financed splendor. Like any shell game, though, if you know where to look, the sleight of hand is evident.

Consider some of the lesser known elements of the 2006 federal budget. As Bush and team fan the flames of Social Security privatization to divert attention, the budget they've proffered includes proposals that make this level of privatization look like child's play.

One, for example, would establish a so-called Sunset Commission (SC), charged with reviewing the efficacy of federal programs and agencies every 10 years. On the surface, this sounds OK, and the Bush spin team headed in this case by Clay Johnson, a long-time Bush chum and current deputy director for management at the Office of Management and Budget plays up the "we're looking out for your money" angle when required.

But here's the trick: As proposed, a recommendation from SC's eight-member board to terminate a program or agency would immediately give the president authority to do so. This could mean the end (or crippling) of OSHA, the EPA, the FDA and any other program or agency, except those under the Department of Defense. Little programs like the Manufacturing Extension Partnership already slated for gutting (again) in the 2006 budget could be gone in a heartbeat. An even bigger reason to worry is that SC members would be hand-picked by the president: no election, no bi-partisanship, and nothing to prevent them from being lobbyists or corporate executives. Talk about putting the rabbits in charge of the lettuce.

Though some might applaud the absence of certain federal agencies, in truth this proposal would only benefit unscrupulous executives happy to no longer be required to buy safety gear for their workers or treat their company's waste. All others, including rank-and-file Bush supporters, would pay the price for this abuse of power by having to work in unsafe facilities, live with unchecked pollution, and in countless other ways.

Yes, it's hard to imagine that such a dramatic shift in the government's infrastructure could take place. But you can be sure that the same audacity and sleight of hand that created this proposal is being marshaled to ensure its success. Help Congress defeat the Sunset Commission proposal by telling your representatives the U.S. government does not exist solely to help Bush's circle of friends.

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