

COMMUNITY VIEW

## Bush's immoral campaign on Social Security

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JOURNAL NEWS  
4/21/05

As a committed Democrat and fervent Pentecostal Christian, I have closely followed the role of morality in our elections and policy discussions. I was dismayed by the Democrats' lack of interest in my denomination, just as I was ashamed by what the Republicans did in its name.

Jim Wallis's book, "God's Politics," currently on The New York Times best-seller list, claims morality is not an exclusive province of either the left or the right but has been prevalent, or absent, on both ends of the political spectrum. I couldn't agree more.

Now, however, having hardly had a chance to catch our collective breath after the splintering of the nation into red and blue states, we are engaged in another partisan struggle over Social Security. While cultural issues such as abortion and gay marriage are inherently immoral, Social Security is not. That's why President Bush's approach to it troubles me so much.

In the debates prior to Mr. Bush's first term, he touted his ability to work with others and cross party lines. This technique obviously includes treating everyone as your colleague at the end of the day, despite honest differences of opinion. But the Bush administration has consistently pursued a very immoral, and unChristian, *modus operandi*. If you disagree with the Republican leadership or, God forbid, stand in its way, you can anticipate personal, *ad hominem* attacks. You are either unpatriotic or

stonewalling or against family values.

Senators who oppose or are undecided about Mr. Bush's Social Security plan have had the president visit their home state, threatening to campaign against their re-election. The drive to alter this extremely popular program has been framed as a moral issue; thus, opposition to Bush's plan shows selfishness and an unwillingness to consider future generations. So an honest policy difference becomes an occasion for all-out political war.

There is no attempt at compromise or a frank discussion of the issues. The current political blitzkrieg, with Bush going around the country promoting his plan and his way to save Social Security, does not involve working with others or crossing party lines. It represents an attempt to go over Congress' head, both Republicans and Democrats, and create grassroots pressure.

This campaign for Social Security is immoral in other ways as well. President Bush has cynically argued his case among the elderly, who vote more often than anyone else, by saying they would not be affected by the programmatic changes. But if his reforms are so beneficial, they should be positive for everyone. You can't just ask an entire demographic group to opt out of the discussion because it won't affect them.

President Bush is also destroying the moral foundation of Social Security itself. The idea behind this legislation, that we will not abandon our elderly, means no matter how you mess up in life, you can still count on a protected benefit that

cannot be misused or invested away. Should private accounts be instituted, this support would no longer be guaranteed. It would depend, instead, on wise investments and patience, qualities particularly lacking in the younger generations who would need them.

Finally, even the nature of Mr. Bush's campaign is immoral. By closely linking private accounts and the solvency of Social Security in his speeches, without directly saying they are related, Mr. Bush gives exactly that impression. He has avoided talking about cuts in benefits, supposedly the real key to saving Social Security, because that part of his program is unpopular.

This is dishonest, and involves the same tactic used to link Iraq to 9/11: No, they're not related, but I'll discuss them in contiguous sections of my speech to infer that they are. The American public still thinks Iraq was responsible for 9/11 because of this approach, even though there is virtually no evidence to support it.

Why is it that this president, who claims to be so moral, is unable to unite our country? Why is it that every issue is either "for" or "against" with no middle ground? Why can't this president bring us together when we face times of decision, instead of driving us apart?

Perhaps this is an area Mr. Bush can pursue if he really believes in morality, and not the typical political game of divide and conquer.

The writer is a Hartsdale resident.