

North Carolina man tells Bush certain simple truths

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A 61-year-old commercial real estate broker, Harry Taylor, spoke for millions Thursday when he told George W. Bush that “I have never felt more ashamed of, nor more frightened by my leadership in Washington.”

Bush was in Charlotte, North Carolina to speak and answer questions at a forum sponsored by the World Affairs Council at Central Piedmont Community College, where he was assured a generally warm reception. During the course of his address, Bush repeated *ad nauseam* the lies and platitudes with which his administration has justified its colonial-style invasion and occupation of Iraq.

He claimed, for example, that the decision to go war against Iraq had been an agonizing one for him, “the biggest decision I’ve had to make since I’ve been your president.... It’s a decision no president wants to make. It’s a decision I wish I did not have to make.” Moreover, Bush claimed that the war had been forced on the US by the events of September 11, 2001. “It was a war we did not ask for, it’s a war we did not want, but it is a war that I intend to deal with so long as I’m your president.” This is a pack of lies, and everyone knows it.

War against Iraq, aimed at bringing Iraq’s enormous energy reserves under American control, had been urged by right-wing elements in the Republican Party for years and, as former cabinet members such as Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill have made clear, it was on the agenda from the first day of Bush’s presidency. In reality, the Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz crowd could barely restrain themselves; they salivated at the thought of gaining control of Iraqi oil. September 11 merely provided a pretext for an invasion.

Bush went on to share his ignorant and banal “thoughts ... about this enemy we face.” He remarked, “They’re an enemy bound together by an ideology. These are not folks scattered around that are kind of angry and lash out at an opportune moment. These are people that are—believe something, and their beliefs are totalitarian in nature.

They believe you should not be able to worship freely. They believe that young girls should not go to school. They’ve got a perverted sense of justice. They believe in the use of violence to achieve their objectives. Their stated objectives, their stated goals are to spread their totalitarian view throughout the Middle East. That’s what they want to do.”

It is pretty rich for the commander-in-chief of armed forces currently wreaking havoc in Iraq to speak disapprovingly about others who “believe in the use of violence to achieve their aims.” The US military is responsible for war crimes on a vast scale, including the preparation of an aggressive war, torture and mass abuse of prisoners, the razing of cities and the use of chemical weapons. The chief source of terror and violence in the Middle East is the American government and military, as well as the principal “totalitarian” threat.

Bush’s lies went on and on, he hardly skipped one, from the wonders of the “fledgling democracy” in Afghanistan, which “Laura and I went over to” visit, to claims that he had a “strategy for victory” (reminiscent of similar assertions by countless US military and political leaders during the Vietnam era) and that “we’re moving that way, we’re moving that way. We’ve got a plan to help rebuild Iraq.”

The speech was idiotic and unconvincing by any objective standard. Unhappily, most of the audience, seemed to eat it up. And the questions from the audience were predominantly friendly, and in some cases, fawning (“And I wanted to say to you, Mr. President, that on the war on terror, Social Security, the tax cuts, Dubai Ports, immigration, you have shown immense political courage. And I really think that you will be vindicated on all of those positions, as Ronald Reagan was, for example. And also I wanted to know what else would it take for me to get my picture taken with you?”)

Finally, Harry Taylor, seated in the balcony, was called

on. He spoke slowly and soberly. “You never stop talking about freedom, and I appreciate that,” he told Bush. “But while I listen to you talk about freedom, I see you assert your right to tap my telephone, to arrest me and hold me without charges, to try to preclude me from breathing clean air and drinking clean water and eating safe food. If I were a woman, you’d like to restrict my opportunity to make a choice and decision about whether I can abort a pregnancy on my own behalf. You are—”

Bush interrupted him, facetiously, “I’m not your favorite guy. Go ahead. Go on, what’s your question?”

Taylor continued, “Okay, I don’t have a question. What I wanted to say to you is that I—in my lifetime, I have never felt more ashamed of, nor more frightened by my leadership in Washington, including the presidency, by the Senate, and—”

Some in the audience booed. Bush intervened, benevolently, “No, wait a sec—let him speak.”

Taylor went on, in the same deliberate fashion, “And I would hope—I feel like despite your rhetoric, that compassion and common sense have been left far behind during your administration, and I would hope from time to time that you have the humility and the grace to be ashamed of yourself inside yourself.”

Of course, Bush was incapable of responding to Taylor’s comments. His critic’s moral appeal fell on entirely deaf ears. The president never seriously replied to the final comment. How could he, this coward and sadist, without a hint of self-knowledge?

Remarkably, in his answer, Bush did not deny any of Taylor’s charges, which, after all, were quite serious, that the administration had arrogated to itself the right to tap its citizens’ telephones, arrest and hold them without charges, prevent them from breathing clean air and drinking clean water and eating safe food, and, if they were women, restrict their reproductive choices.

One would have thought that a political leader, facing such a list of accusations, would have responded with a firm and detailed denial, indicating how misguided or malicious his critic truly was. Nothing of the kind. On the one hand, Bush has no doubt been coached, in these days of disastrously slipping poll numbers, to pretend to encourage a “give-and-take” and exhibit grace under fire (he hardly has a choice, since he is so widely despised). On the other, the charges are all true and the president does not have the intellectual means with which to come up with convincing impromptu answers.

So Bush witlessly responded, “I’m going to start off with what you first said, if you don’t mind, you said that I

tap your phones—I think that’s what you said. You tapped your phone—I tapped your phones.”

Now, if you “start off” with a response to one point, presumably you will later go on to answer the others your critic has raised. Bush did no such thing. He went off on a rambling defense of his illegal wiretapping program, claiming that he had been assured that he had a constitutional right to authorize such actions and concluded with a demagogic, “But you said, would I apologize for that? The answer—answer is, absolutely not.” Of course Taylor had not asked him to apologize, he had merely expressed the hope that the president had the “the humility and the grace” to be ashamed of himself “inside” himself.

The American media responded with wonderment to Taylor’s comments. Incapable themselves of summoning up the courage *once* to confront the president about leading the country into a disastrous war on entirely false pretenses (no one, for example, has ever said to him at a press conference, “Mr. President, first of all, the facts show that you are a thoroughgoing liar ...”), US reporters termed Taylor’s “scolding” of Bush an “extraordinary encounter.” It is only extraordinary because of the overall unreality of American political life, which has been entirely ritualized. When a genuinely spontaneous moment occurs, when for *one instant* real public opinion surfaces, the only response is amazement, and hostility.

Asked after the event about Bush’s (non-)response, Taylor commented, “I didn’t care about his response. I wanted to say what I wanted to say and I wanted him to know that despite being in a room with a thousand people who love him ... there are plenty of people who don’t agree with him in any way, shape or form.”



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