

What Makes You Feel Secure?

by Swanee Hunt, Scripps Howard News Service, September 29, 2004

An election-year October is upon us, which means that over the next few weeks Americans will gather in their living rooms to hear two presidential candidates have it out. Mothers will pull their kids away from homework for these lessons in current events. They may have to bribe their children with snacks in front of the TV, but they'll be there.

And according to recent polls, the mothers will be listening keenly. Lately, there's been a lot of press about "security moms," women whose worst nightmare is an American version of the recent slaughter of Russian school children. They say national security is their No. 1 issue as they gravitate toward macho politicians. Ironically, our national security hasn't been strengthened by the current administration, despite its military aggressiveness. In fact, with millions of new enemies around the world, we're more of a target than ever. And because of our bullying tactics and go-it-alone swagger, many traditional allies have backed away from us.

But there are more threats to our "security" than terrorists. What really keeps us up at night? The fear of a terrorist attack in our neighborhood? Or one of a laundry-list of everyday concerns? Are healthcare costs going to skyrocket out of reach? Will reproductive rights be maintained? Will our kids get the care they need?

For the past four years, security at home has fared as poorly as homeland security. Out-of-pocket healthcare for workers has increased 50 percent, while the number of Americans with employer-provided healthcare has dropped. As a result, 45 million now lack health insurance.

The president's healthcare agenda won't help much. Though he boasts it will cover 10 million people who currently lack insurance, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office and the US Treasury Department, a best-case scenario will extend coverage to just six million. More likely, they say, it will help just two million. And those currently covered can expect costs to increase. Bush wants people to use tax-favored Health Savings Accounts and get most of their coverage through individual insurance plans. This may mean savings for younger and healthier workers, whose plans will be inexpensive. But

without relatively healthy workers with whom to spread costs, traditional group plan premiums will shoot up.

That doesn't bode well for parents and their kids. And grandparents won't do any better. Medicare is scheduled for a 17.4 percent increase in premiums. Payment for Bush's Medicare prescription drug package is on top of that, and the program no longer has authority to negotiate lower prices with drug companies. The administration also favors

carving up Social Security into private retirement accounts. That makes sense as long as the stock market is going up. But get real. The market is a roller coaster, and declines could throw millions into poverty.

Warning, security moms: Women live longer than men. That means they'll feel even more pinched by policies weakening programs for the elderly. And Americans of childbearing years must have special empathy for women all around the world who no longer receive contraceptive help of any kind because Bush cut out funding for organizations that offer information on abortion. And given his past nominations of ultra-conservative judges, with a second Bush term, abortion rights in the United States could virtually disappear.

There are more attacks on security in the workplace and the home. The administration cut the Equal Pay Matters Initiative, which helped train women for better paying jobs and improved enforcement of fair compensation laws. And the government's 2005 budget set funding for battered women's shelters at 26 percent below the level approved by Congress. Welfare reauthorization is woefully short by billions, so that in the next few years hundreds of thousands of poor parents trying to hold down a job will receive no childcare help.

Tax cuts for the wealthy seem unconscionable when our country is facing such a squeeze in basic social services. The average break for those with incomes over \$1 million amounts to five times the annual income of a typical single mother trying to support her children.

So where's this phantom boost to security the administration claims as its hallmark? Our homeland isn't more secure. Our children and our seniors aren't more secure. Instead, this administration has waged a war of neglect on the American people.