

Katrina vanden Heuvel: The US Should End the Cuban Embargo



The Rich Have Reason to Rejoice

In Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," Ebenezer Scrooge was forced to view his own death in order to gain some self-awareness of his life as the epitome of cruelty and selfishness.

Peter Dreier and Kelly Candaele December 23, 2002 | This article appeared in the January 6, 2003 edition of *The Nation*.

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§ Cut \$300 million from the \$1.7 billion federal program that provides subsidies to poor families so they can heat their homes during the winter--a move that leaves 438,000 families in the cold.

About the Author

Kelly Candaele

Kelly Candaele is a writer, a founding member of the Peace Institute at California State University, Chico, and a...

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In the next four years—and beyond—progressives must create the political space for the president to represent the majority of Americans.

Peter Dreier and Donald Cohen

§ Added special-interest legislation to the Homeland Security bill that protects Eli Lilly, the giant pharmaceutical firm, from lawsuits over a preservative (thimerosal) in vaccines—which could result in the dismissal of thousands of suits filed by parents who claim that mercury in thimerosal has poisoned their children, causing autism and other neurological problems. John Ashcroft's Justice Department also asked a federal claims court to seal documents relating to hundreds of claims that thimerosal had caused these problems in children. (George W.'s dad sat on Lilly's board in the 1970s; White House budget director Mitchell Daniels Jr. is a former Lilly executive; and Bush appointed current Lilly CEO Sidney Taurel to sit on the President's Homeland Security Advisory Council).

§ Tucked an additional rider into the Homeland Security bill that will allow American companies to win government contracts even if they have moved offshore to evade corporate taxes, while giving the new department a free hand to bypass civil service rules in promoting and firing workers and allowing the President to exempt unionized workers from collective bargaining agreements in the name of "national security."

§ Gave annual bonuses as large as \$25,000 to top political appointees (who typically already earn \$115,000 to \$140,000), while cutting a pay raise, already passed by both houses of Congress, for 1.8 million federal employees. Bush said it would "interfere with our nation's ability to pursue the war on terrorism."

§ Called for as many as 850,000 government jobs--nearly half the federal civilian work force--to be outsourced to private contractors--a move designed to reduce their pay and benefits and eliminate union protections, prompting Bobby Harnage Sr., president of the American Federation of Government Employees, to say that Bush had "declared all-out war on federal employees."

§ Refused to support an extension of unemployment benefits to about 750,000 American families whose

benefits would run out three days after Christmas, until pressured by Congressional Democrats a week after front-page headlines announced that the nation's unemployment rate had reached 6 percent (an eight-year high) and that each week an additional 95,000 workers will lose their benefits. Bush changed his position in mid-December, but did not indicate whether he would advocate the twenty-six-week extension supported by Democrats or whether he would support extending benefits to jobless workers whose original round of benefits will soon run out.

§ Proposed changes in rules covering employee pensions that will save companies money but threaten the retirement funds of older workers.

§ Repealed a Clinton-era Labor Department rule that allows states to use unemployment insurance money to help people who take a leave from work to have babies or adopt children--a rule that the US Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) opposed, claiming it was essentially a tax on employers.

§ Proposed additional tax cuts--including making last year's "temporary" ten-year cut a permanent one--that would primarily benefit the wealthiest 2 percent of Americans.

§ Pushed to privatize Social Security by diverting trillions of dollars to stockbrokers, putting the retirement cushion for millions of Americans at risk.

§ Lowered product-labeling standards, allowing food makers to list health claims on labels before they have been scientifically proven. Bush's new Food and Drug Administration chief Mark McClellan announced in mid-December that the FDA will no longer require claims to be based on "significant scientific agreement," but instead on the "weight of scientific evidence"--a change that the National Food Processors Association, the trade association of the \$500 billion food processing industry, had lobbied for. Bruce Silverglade of the Center for Science in the Public Interest told the Los Angeles Times that the ruling would lead to a "marketplace free-for-all of false and misleading claims."

§ Loosened EPA air pollution standards for oil refineries and manufacturing plants, which allows them to modernize their facilities without installing pollution-control equipment--a rule change that could actually increase the level of dangerous pollutants emitted into the air. A spokesman for the NAM, which fought for the change, called the new rules "a refreshingly flexible approach to regulation."

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