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## Ideology As Usual

By ANTHONY LEWIS

George W. Bush has focused effectively on the need for an international alliance against terrorism. But he has not yet understood what a wartime president has to do at home: Put aside ideological politics so he can be president of all the people.

With his evident approval, the ideologues in his administration are riding their conservative hobbyhorses as if the country did not have a higher purpose now. They, and the president, seem oblivious to the way those actions threaten national unity.

A striking example is the decision by Attorney General John Ashcroft this week to try to overrule the voters of Oregon and undo that state's assisted-suicide law. He said he would move to revoke the drug prescription license of any Oregon doctor who used drugs to help someone who wanted to die.

Mr. Ashcroft is a fervent opponent of abortion and, like many social and religious conservatives, sees any state sanction of suicide in the same light. His decision this week was praised by the National Right to Life Committee.

In terms of states' rights, which conservatives say they support, the Ashcroft decision was rank hypocrisy. He asserted federal power in an area that has always been pre-eminently a matter for state law, the regulation of medical practice. Oregonians approved the assisted-suicide law narrowly in a referendum in 1994 and reaffirmed it in 1996 by a 60-to-40 margin. Even some who had opposed the law reacted bitterly to Mr. Ashcroft's intrusion on Oregon territory.

In another strange example of his priorities, Mr. Ashcroft last month sent federal agents to raid a Los Angeles center that supplied marijuana to desperately ill people under a state law allowing medical use. Does a wartime Justice Department really have nothing better to do than deprive cancer and AIDS patients of relief from their pain?

Two weeks ago the British government decided to stop arresting marijuana users, adopting the policy now followed by most European governments. The U.S. law against users has not changed, but Mr. Ashcroft has discretion to use Justice Department resources where they are most urgently needed — especially in a war situation.

The attorney general has heavy responsibilities on the domestic side of the fight against terrorism. He is in charge of the hunt for supporters of the Sept. 11 terrorists, and for the spreaders of anthrax. Pursuing his ideological desires can only divide the public and weaken respect for the administration's antiterrorist effort.

Mr. Ashcroft is the most egregious example of an official unable or unwilling to curb his

ideological zealotry at this time. But he is not the only one.

The environment is another area where the Bush administration is pursuing highly controversial policies despite the country's preoccupation with the terrorist threat. Indeed, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman are taking advantage of that preoccupation to push through ripper measures while no one is paying attention.

The device being used is an ingenious one: caving in to lawsuits by interests that object to restraints on environmental damage. One such suit asks the courts to block a Clinton administration regulation that would stop further road-building in 60 million pristine acres of the national forests. The Bush administration has simply put up no defense of the regulation in court.

The administration is also trying to scuttle a Clinton regulation that would gradually end the use of snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park: a rule that the public overwhelmingly approves. When snowmobile manufacturers sued, the Bush people agreed to "reconsider" the regulation.

Finally, there is the reeking scandal of the so-called economic stimulus bill passed by the House. It would give some of the largest corporations refunds for taxes paid over many years in the past: \$671 million to General Electric, according to Citizens for Tax Justice, and \$1.4 billion to I.B.M. Making the rich richer will do little to stimulate the economy, and less to stimulate our patriotism.

During World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt publicly put aside his domestic objectives for the sake of the war. Dr. New Deal, he said, had to give way to Dr. Win-the-War. It is time for President Bush to curb his zealots and focus us all on the struggle against terrorism.