

The President's confidence is scary - even in the Bible Belt

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You know you are on the radical edge of the political spectrum when Pat Robertson looks more reasonable than you. Mr. Robertson, famous for making statements that blamed lesbians and gay men for hurricanes and feminists for the attacks of 9/11, and who has claimed that you can get AIDS from kissing, said this week that President George W. Bush was out of touch with the reality of war when he sent troops to Iraq in 2003.

On Paula Zahn's CNN show on Tuesday, Mr. Robertson reported that he had met the President in March of 2003, and that he had asked him to "prepare Americans for the likelihood of casualties." According to Mr. Robertson, Mr. Bush had replied that there would be no casualties.

No casualties? In a war? Does the President think that this is just a video game, that when you get killed, you just press the restart button?

Mr. Robertson, who supports Mr. Bush's re-election, says that he had "grave misgivings" about the war from the beginning, but that the President did not share them. In fact, he says Mr. Bush had looked like a poker player with four aces in his hand.

Those of us who watched the three U.S. presidential debates will not be surprised at this exaggerated self-confidence. During the first debate, the President looked visibly irritated that John Kerry would have the nerve to question his decisions about the war. As comedian Jon Stewart put it, "How dare the Democrats field an opposition candidate! And in an election year!" As the debates went on, the President made visible efforts to stop showing irritation, but it seemed pretty clear to viewers that smirks were bubbling beneath the surface.

There is no doubt that Mr. Bush feels he is making the right decisions from the Oval Office. But those decisions are not necessarily based on the facts from the ground. Inconvenient truths have consistently been rejected in favour of empty rhetoric about staying the course and strong leadership.

And the American media are dropping the ball when it comes to their responsibility to ask Mr. Bush the tough questions. Consequently, Americans have to make a decision about whom to vote for without all the facts.

Mr. Robertson is going to cast his vote for the President because, despite his mistakes ("and he's had his share of stumbles and gaffes"), he feels God's blessing is on Mr. Bush.

But, as a major player in the Republican Party, Mr. Robertson is aware that his public warning about the President is going to send mixed messages to voters on the far right as well as those in the middle.

For once, Mr. Robertson seems to be calling for thoughtful consideration of the facts by the voting public. We can only wait to see whether the voters heed his advice.

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