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HEADLINE: Blindly supporting the president isn't patriotism

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BODY:

The United States is unique in the world as a country with a substantial range of diversity. We are a country of immigrants, some new and some here for generations. Each of us attach to a certain belief structure, national heritage or ethnicity of some kind, but very few of us seem to relate to each other as patriotic Americans. Yes, you may live in America, but do you know what it stands for? Do you understand the Constitutional principles upon which this country was founded? Recent surveys indicate that most Americans do not. But does this make us unpatriotic?

Sandra Day O'Connor, the recently retired U.S. Supreme Court justice, spoke this month about the weakening of the U.S. courts, the growing and unchecked power of the president, and the apathetic or even blindly supportive approach of the Congress toward the president. She implied that the United States is losing many of its democratic principles and replacing them with those we see in authoritarian regimes around the world. A rather bold and politically-charged statement from such a moderate and reasoned voice (O'Connor was appointed to the court by Ronald Reagan and voted 75 percent of the time with former Chief Justice William Rehnquist).

She was not calling George W. Bush a dictator by any means. However, she was implying that the current administration has taken on more powers than the framers of the Constitution would have supported, that the president and members of his administration have violated the laws of this country, that the Republican-led Congress has not acted as the check and balance on the president that it was designed to, and that the now conservative-tilted Supreme Court may in fact ratify some of the otherwise illegal acts of the president and help him to carry-out his conservative agenda.

Her comments got me thinking. If such a high-minded person such as Justice O'Connor has such perceptions of the Bush administration, and the vast majority of the public (about 65 percent) no longer support the president, why isn't anyone doing anything to stop these developments? This is where patriotism comes in.

We have been taught in the last six years that to speak badly about the war on terror or our troop commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan or our democratization efforts in the Middle East or our detention policy in Guantanamo bay or our CIA torture and rendition program, is unpatriotic. Imagine a congressman saying publicly, "the war on terror is illegal and should not be sanctioned any further by the United States." The outcry would be mortal for this congressman's career. Even the media hesitate to print stories or carry broadcasts speaking "unpatriotically" about the war. But is this really unpatriotic? Patriotism is the support of a legitimate political community that abides by and promotes certain moral standards. To be a patriot is to fight the good fight for your country. In my research, I never

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found a definition of, "blindly support the president" or "do not question your leaders," for patriotism.

This country was founded on the concept of balanced and limited government. The power was intended to remain with the people. However, recent events have taken that power away and, even worse, have condemned those who object to these acts as unpatriotic. The time has come for the people of this country, and for our representatives, to become patriotic and to speak out against the illegal actions being orchestrated by this administration. If we are to preserve or at least reclaim the moral values of this country, we must all become patriots and reject the notion that blind and unquestioned support is in our best interests.

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GRAPHIC: Associated Press
Sandra Day O'Connor

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