

Sheehan storms Vermont



Not all Vermonters roll out the welcome mat

By Christian Avard | *Vermont Guardian*

The word is out that antiwar activist and Gold Star Mother for Peace Cindy Sheehan will be coming to Vermont this weekend.

From Friday to Sunday, impeachment resolution guru Dan DeWalt of Newfane, *The Nation's* Washington editor John Nichols, and three Iraq War veterans from Vermont — Drew Cameron, Matt Howard, and Adrienne Kinne — will accompany Sheehan on a whirlwind bus tour of the state.

The tour is largely to urge Vermonters to vote in favor of two resolutions appearing on many Town Meeting Day ballots. Voters in 23 towns will be asked to approve an impeachment resolution calling for investigations into the actions of Pres. George

W. Bush and Vice Pres. Dick Cheney. Voters in 20 towns will take up the “soldiers home now” resolution calling for an immediate troop withdrawal from Iraq. The Iraq War is seen as a major concern for most Vermonters, especially since Vermont leads the nation in per capita deaths of U.S. soldier and guardsmen in Iraq.

But, while much of Vermont is anticipating Sheehan's visit this weekend, some Vermonters are not happy, and they plan to shadow the tour.

A group of Vermonters will counter-demonstrate at the stops where Sheehan plans to visit. Lynn Baldwin of Chester is one of the major organizers of the counter demonstrations.

“What is coming together as a counter-protest to Cindy Sheehan began last week. It is not an ‘organized action committee’ of any sort, nor is it partisan,” said Baldwin in an e-mail interview with the *Vermont Guardian*. “This is a grassroots ‘growing

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Welch leads probe of Army hospital

By Shay Totten
Vermont Guardian

COLCHESTER — Vermont's lone congressman met with several veterans and medical staff at the Veterans Administration outpatient clinic recently to see what questions he should be asking of Bush administration officials about the alleged poor treatment of returning Iraqi veterans.

Within days of a scathing report in *The Washington Post* about poor conditions in one building at Walter Reed Army Medical Hospital Rep. Peter Welch, D-VT, requested a Con-

gressional hearing, preferably to be held at the medical center.

In a letter to Rep. Henry Waxman, D-CA, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Welch said, “It is clear from these reports on outpatient care that the United States is not meeting its obligation to our injured veterans. Furthermore, this brings to focus that the president's budget is not committing the financial resources necessary to maintain the veterans services required.

“We have an obligation to our troops. They reported for duty when called. It is now our country's obligation to pro-

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Women's film fest raises awareness



By Joe Milliken
Special to the *Vermont Guardian*

BRATTLEBORO — The timing is perfect: March is Women's History Month and the 17th annual Woman's Film Festival in Brattleboro is ready to raise awareness and money.

The festival — to be held from March 9 through March 18 — will show films in several downtown theaters, including the Latchis Theatre, the Hooker-

Dunham Theater, and the New England Youth Theatre.

“This is the seventeenth year of this amazing event,” said festival coordinator Marilyn Buhlmann. “The festival began to honor the memory of a woman by the name of Judith Fournier who was brutally stabbed and murdered by her ex-lover, in broad daylight, here in Brattleboro.”

This year's festival will feature

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snowball' that began when I sent out an e-mail that several others and I were going to show up in Montpelier with 'Vermonters for Victory' signs. It was just an invitation to anyone to join us."

Baldwin says the victory message is spreading, adding that what Sheehan stands for does not represent the views of all Vermonters.

"The message is growing as well. There are perhaps thousands of people across Vermont who disagree with Cindy Sheehan's message to pull our troops out of Iraq," said Baldwin.

"While many sympathize with Sheehan as a grieving mother who has lost her son in the war, many also believe that her alliance with anti-American interests, namely Hugo Chavez, a sworn enemy of the United States and ally of Mamoud Ahmehinejad of Iran — who is sending weapons into Iraq that are killing American soldiers — is an act of treason," said Baldwin.

"I cannot speak for everyone who may show up to support our U.S. Soldiers and their mission, but for me, I believe Sheehan is not only a traitor to her own country, but also, in that act, she has become a traitor to the legacy and sacrifice of her own son."

DeWalt, an organizer of Sheehan's bus tour, said that anyone who may disagree with Sheehan's beliefs would be welcome at the rallies.

We hope "to bring people out in great numbers to town meeting. Even if people are coming out and they're going to counter protest also, we want them to come to town meeting too. I want to revitalize town meeting and I think this is a perfect example of why it should be," said DeWalt. "I hope they'll come and pose

hard questions during the question and answer session that will follow" the Senate Hearing Committee.

On Friday, Sheehan will testify before the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs. The hearing was called to give proper testimony on a Senate resolution calling for an immediate troop withdrawal. Due to the debate on Iraq at U.S. Congress, legislative leaders felt it necessary to act swiftly at the time to represent Vermont's concerns during the debate.

Some Republicans have raised concerns that Democratic leaders pushed a troop withdrawal measure through the Legislature without going through proper committee channels, and therefore didn't allow amendments to be debated. Instead, the resolutions went directly to a floor vote. A GOP effort to have the resolution sent to committee was rejected.

A troop withdrawal measure passed earlier this month in the Senate 24 to 5 and in the House by a 95 to 52 vote.

Aside from Sheehan, the three Iraq War vets traveling with her — Cameron, Howard, and Kinne — will testify in favor of the resolution.

In addition, three Gold Star Mothers will testify against the resolution — Vicky Strong, Helen Therrien, and Marion Gray.

"We wanted to have proponents and opponents of the war because we wanted to get a balanced presentation," said Sen. Vincent Illuzzi, R-Essex/Orleans, the committee's chairman. "We are providing a forum for Sheehan and her group and anyone else who wants to come in and present an opposing view. The resolution passed on short notice to get them enacted so that the U.S. Congress

could know where the state stood on this issue. Hopefully we'll have a balanced presentation."

While impeachment may be a major theme at the committee hearing, the Senate Committee is not likely to address it formally. That doesn't mean Sheehan (or the others) won't pressure the Legislature on the issue.

"I imagine the topic of impeachment will be raised because everyone understands you can't have one without the other," said DeWalt. "Bush has made it clear he's not going to pay attention what Congress says about the war. He's running the war he sees fit. So there's no real separation between those two things."

Regardless of how the Legislature voted, Baldwin wants to make it clear that the resolution doesn't represent the views of all Vermonters.

"Cindy Sheehan and Dan DeWalt do not speak for me," said Baldwin. "I suspect we may see that hundreds may show up at her appearances all across the state. It is illogical to state that one 'supports the troops' but does not support their mission. I hope that mainstream Vermonters, who are disgusted with the circus our politicians have made out of the Iraq War, will come out to show support for the mission our soldiers continue to sacrifice for. Cindy Sheehan's anti-American message is an affront to their service and I won't stand by in silence while she 'barnstorms' Vermont." ☹

For more information on the counter protests, contact Baldwin at baldwin@vermontel.net.

For more information on the Sheehan tour, go to www.vtimpetch.com/.

Union Institute to sell Vermont College campus

MONTPELIER — A newly-formed nonprofit has agreed to buy the historic Vermont College campus from Union Institute & University, and assume control of three master of fine arts (MFA) programs.

Union Institute & University's (UI&U) board of trustees, along with university president Roger H. Sublett, announced Feb. 26 that a letter of intent to transfer the 11 buildings and 33.5 acres, and the MFA programs, to the newly formed Vermont College of Fine Arts (VCFA).

After a period of due diligence, officials project that the sale will be completed by July 1. UI&U will continue to operate its undergraduate adult degree programs, as well as the master of education and master of arts programs, in leased facilities on the campus.

Along with the buildings and land, the proposed

sale to VCFA includes the master of fine arts in visual arts program, the master of arts in Writing program, and the master of arts in writing for children and young adults program.

Sublett called the signing of the Letter of Intent "a pivotal moment" in the history of Vermont College and Montpelier.

"We are proud to have been stewards of the Vermont College campus and its academic programs for the past five years," he said. "We are gratified that our investments in the buildings, the campus, the programs, and the people have given birth to the new and promising entity of the Vermont College of Fine Arts. We are also very committed to the continuing operation of our undergraduate and master's programs on the campus without interruption."

VCFA was formed in 2006 to create a national center for the fine arts in Montpelier, anchored by the three long-standing MFA programs.



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vide them with the services they need," Welch added.

In the *Post* report, the conditions at the hospital included leaky plumbing, mold, mouse droppings, and a broken elevator, among other findings.

A week later, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said an investigation would be launched into the issues raised in the article.

In response to Welch's letter, the panel's Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, chaired by Rep. John Tierney, D-MA, will hold a hearing on Monday. Tierney informed Waxman of his intentions Feb. 26 in a letter. He also hopes to hold the hearing on the grounds of the medical center, a suggestion he took from Welch and from Rep. Chris Shays, R-CT, the subcommittee's ranking Republican.

"By doing so, members of the

subcommittee will be able to visit and to speak with wounded soldiers who are currently rehabilitating and seeking continuing treatment onsite, as well as to gain unfettered access to view the building and living conditions on the campus for themselves," wrote Tierney.

At that hearing, Welch said he plans to ask how the conditions reported in the *Post* article could be allowed to occur. He believes the Bush administration did not adequately plan for the amount of wounded soldiers coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In a meeting with officials from the Veterans Administration clinic in Colchester, along with several veterans who joined the discussion, Welch asked what questions he should ask.

Several staff said Welch should focus on what levels of communication occurred between staff and

administrators about the conditions, or from patients to staff.

"They need to change the culture in the system that allows the people who were working in those conditions to not report them," said Michael Upton, a mental health counselor at the Colchester VA. "At the VA we've always had good facilities and services and those kinds of conditions would not be tolerated."

Another staff member added that if those reports were made by staff and patients, but were swept under the rug, that should be of even greater concern in terms of the communication breakdown she fears may have occurred.

"My focus in being here is to get information and hear from folks working here, and the veterans, so when I get back to Washington and we take up the issue of quality care to vets and the budget, we make sure that we can provide you with the resources you need to do your job," said Welch.

Though Walter Reed is run by the Department of Defense, and not the VA, Welch is concerned that it is a precursor to what could happen in the VA system if current budget cuts are allowed to go through. The Bush administration has proposed a 2 percent budget cut to the VA, and many veterans will be asked to pay more out of pocket to receive care through higher co-pays.

"That is just unacceptable," said Welch.




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— Peter Welch

Upton worried that this would mean the VA would not see patients who needed care sooner, rather than later.

One veteran, retired Marine Richard Gorbarczyk who served in Vietnam and who drives to the Colchester clinic from Montreal, told Welch that it shouldn't mat-


ter what war they served in, vets should receive the same level of care and treatment.

"I don't know about Iraq, and the politics of it, but the veterans should be getting the care when they come home," said Gorbarczyk. 

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