

## Four more years?

As the Iraq War enters its fifth year, the call continues to grow for a withdrawal of troops from the region.

Yet, continuously that call is falling on deaf ears — neither a Democratically-led Congress nor a Republican lame-duck president are budging from their variant versions of “stay the course” and “support the troops.”

On March 19, Pres. George W. Bush laid out his assessment of the war. And, as usual, it was seemingly devoid of reality. His “new way forward” in Iraq, which means putting more U.S. troops in Baghdad to act as neighborhood SWAT teams alongside Iraqi police, is just beginning to see results and he urged, once again, for patience.

“I want to stress that this operation is still in the early stages, it’s still in the beginning stages. Fewer than half of the troop reinforcements we are sending have arrived in Baghdad. The new strategy will need more time to take effect. And there will be good days, and there will be bad days ahead as the security plan unfolds,” Bush told a crowd of reporters.

Early stages? What happened to “Mission Accomplished?” Did we miss a change in the mission? Or, did we really have one to begin with?

Everyone knows this nation was led to war based on lies and half-truths, and since the first soldier set foot on the soil, the war has been poorly planned and executed.

The removal of Saddam Hussein from power, along with elections, are two milestones worth noting. But, what milestones are we marking now? For too long, we’ve been led to believe that in just a few more weeks, all will be well.

All is not well, and Vermont’s delegation needs to step up the pressure on Democratic leaders to support a true plan to end the war and secure the peace.

The timid steps being taken by Democrats right now in Washington to put an end to the war will only prolong the suffering, the loss of life, and the refereeing by U.S. soldiers over sectarian civil war.

What will it take for those elected to understand that the U.S. public no longer believes our prolonged presence is needed, or warranted?

Poll after poll after poll shows that the people of this country — save a few diehards — are ready to “declare victory and get out.”

This administration’s understanding of the Middle East is only matched by its brazen belief that might makes right.

Bush warned critics that a “cut and run” strategy, while appealing, would be devastating to the region. But, in saying so, he fails to grasp what millions of people in the region — from Palestine to Baghdad — suffer daily.

“It can be tempting to look at the challenges in Iraq and conclude our best option is to pack up and go home. That may be satisfying in the short run, but I believe the consequences for American security would be devastating. If American forces were to step back from Baghdad before it is more secure, a contagion of violence could spill out across the entire country. In time, this violence could engulf the region,” said Bush.

Just look at that last line: “In time, this violence could engulf the region.” In time? We would expect that if you ask a Palestinian living in Gaza, or a Jew in Israel, that they might already see the region as being engulfed in violence.

## Nothing PATRIOTic about it

The U.S. Senate shouldn’t stop with its revision to the PATRIOT Act taking back the attorney general’s ability to appoint federal prosecutors without Senate approval.

That measure was added into last year’s revision to the PATRIOT Act at the last minute, and taken out were protections that U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-VT, had fought to include. Leahy’s provisions would have protected public libraries from the rampant use of national security letters by the Justice Department.

These letters, which come with lifetime gag orders to not speak about ever receiving such a letter or divulging its contents, have been issued to tens of thousands of people, according to a recent inspector general’s audit. The letters are issued without judicial oversight, and can only be appealed to the attorney general.

Leahy should use the occasion of the audit to push for judicial oversight on the use of these secret letters.

Because ask yourselves — what’s the difference between a secret police force and a police force with secret powers?



## letters • • • • •

**CORRECTION:** *Physicians will be able to choose which electronic medical record system they use under the new statewide rules for medical records. This information was incorrect in a story posted in the Vermont Guardian (March 16).*

## Legislature needs to listen to the people

Rep. Janet Ancel and the Education Committee continue their long-held tradition of ignoring Vermonters (*Vermont Guardian*, March 16). The committee heard Vermonters say don’t implement your bill until they: have some understanding of its impact; remove the punitive elements; have a funding source other than income tax (reserved for Congress) or property taxes (decision from Vermont Supreme Court that real estate doesn’t tax according to wealth); understand the sacrifices schools have already made; the cost of immigrants; and, stop issuing unfunded mandates and changing formularies that require endless, needless hours of labor for compliance and take away from time educating children.

Ancel’s claim that taxes weren’t worrisome since so many budgets passed was shattered. Many

explained budgets passed by the narrowest margins ever and one by two votes. Budgets passed because voters weren’t willing to punish our children and re-vote costs.

Shocking was the decrease in student numbers, downsizing, and sharing of teachers when we are suffering dramatic tax increases. No one seemed to understand politicians are hiding babysitting, technical schools, job training, inmate education, downtown development, tax incremental financing, and wealth building for the poor costs. Prebates are transitional and can end.

The fix was in before the public hearing. Special interest groups and the government’s agenda were in the draft prepared and distributed with no consideration of what Vermonters want. Rep. Michael Obuchowski, D-Rockingham, refused to allow individuals to testify in his “private” hearings.

Laura Brueckner  
Waterbury Center

## Leahy: Ask these questions

U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-VT, as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, is in a position to uncover what appears to be a systematic effort in the Justice

Department and White House to turn the nation’s 93 U.S. attorneys into a set of persecutors of Democrats and enablers of corrupt Republicans.

The committee’s ongoing investigation is focusing on eight U.S. attorneys who have been fired, apparently for political reasons. I would like to see the committee find answers to the following questions:

- Have top members of the Justice Department, including the attorney general, lied to Congress? If so, is this punishable by federal law?

- Is the firing of San Diego U.S. Attorney Carol Lam connected with her investigations of two Republican representatives and the number three person at the CIA?

- Does the White House or the Department of Justice systematically pressure U.S. attorneys to pursue or not pursue certain investigations for partisan reasons? In Bush’s Justice Department, the U.S. attorneys have investigated seven times as many Democratic officials as Republican officials. Is this because of orders from the White House and the Justice Department? If so, what did the president know about these orders and when did he know it?

- Have members of Congress tried to illegally influence U.S. attorneys? Three Republican mem-

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—John Harington (1561-1612)

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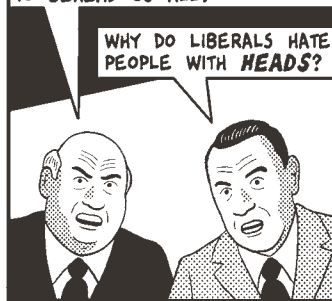
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## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

**THE SPIN:** THE PATRIOT ACT IS A VITAL COMPONENT OF THE WAR ON TERROR WHICH WILL NEVER, EVER BE ABUSED BY ANY GOVERNMENT AGENCY.

ANYONE WHO DOUBTS THAT PROBABLY WANTS THE TERRORISTS TO BEHEAD US ALL!



**REALITY:** ROBERT MUELLER ADMITS THAT THE FBI HAS ROUTINELY ABUSED THE PATRIOT ACT; SAYS "MISTAKES WERE MADE."

UH--YEAH, WELL, MAYBE SO--

--BUT DIDJA HEAR ABOUT THE FAKE WALTER REED SCANDAL?



**THE SPIN:** CONDITIONS AT WALTER REED WERE BLOWN OUT OF PROPORTION BY A FEW SLOVENLY MAL-CONTENTS AND THEIR ENABLERS IN THE BUSH-HATING MEDIA.

THE MICE WERE ATTRACTED BY ALL THE DIRTY DISHES AND TAKE-OUT CONTAINERS THEY LEFT LYING AROUND!



**REALITY:** TWO TOP ARMY OFFICIALS ARE FORCED TO RESIGN; FORMER HEAD OF WALTER REED IS FIRED; TELLS CONGRESS THAT "MISTAKES WERE MADE."

UM--WELL-- MOVING RIGHT ALONG--

-- DIDJA HEAR ABOUT THE FAKE U.S. ATTORNEY SCANDAL?



**THE SPIN:** EIGHT U.S. ATTORNEYS WERE FIRED FOR COMPLETELY LEGITIMATE PERFORMANCE-RELATED REASONS HAVING NOTHING WHATSOEVER TO DO WITH PARTISAN POLITICS.

YOU'D HAVE TO BE A TINFOIL-HAT CONSPIRACY NUT TO FIND ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS IN THAT!



**REALITY:** ATTORNEYS WERE BEING RANKED BY THEIR LOYALTY TO THE BUSH AGENDA; ALBERTO GONZALES NERVOUSLY ADMITS THAT "MISTAKES WERE MADE."

OH, ENOUGH ALREADY! WHY DO LIBERALS HATE PEOPLE WHO MAKE MISTAKES?



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bers of Congress have admitted to calls to U.S. attorneys about investigations. Do these calls violate federal law?

It is crucial to democracy to maintain the principles that no person is above the law and that all persons will be treated fairly by the state. I hope Congress holds the administration accountable for any attempts to subvert the rule of law.

*Carl Etnier  
Montpelier*

### People need control of their medical records

Like most health information exchanges built across the United States, the Vermont Information Technology Leaders (VITL) system violates strong state laws, common law, constitutional law, and medical ethics requiring informed patient consent before any sensitive health data is disclosed (*Vermont Guardian*, March 16).

Patient Privacy Rights has been leading the charge in Washington to restore citizens' rights to control who can see and use their most sensitive personal information: electronic medical records.

Every person's right to control who can see and use his/her medical records was eliminated in 2002 by a federal agency

— Health and Human Services (HHS). Unfortunately, Congress and the media did not realize that officials at HHS gutted the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Even today, HIPAA is touted as if it still protects privacy, when it is actually an "exposure" rule.

HIPAA allows our personal health data to be used and disclosed by more than 600,000 health-related businesses without our consent, without notice, and without recourse. Our health data is being sold to large employers and drug companies for reasons that have nothing to do with improving our health.

Because health data is so incredibly valuable, most hospitals, and state and regional electronic health systems, are selling our data.

For example, in 2006 IMS Health sued the state of New Hampshire to be able to data mine the state's prescriptions daily for sale. IMS Health's only business is selling identifiable prescription data to insurers, employers, and drug companies for medical underwriting, use in hiring and promotions, and pressuring doctors to use certain medications. IMS Health reported revenues of \$1.75 billion in 2005. IMS Health is only one of the many data aggregators and data mining businesses whose profits come from stealing our medical records.

Sadly, VITL and most state health information exchanges are being designed without the kind of privacy rights and protections patients need to trust electronic systems.

And the national standards for providing security protections in electronic health systems is abysmal. Typically only double password protections are used, which are a breeze for data thieves to crack. All personal health data should be encrypted for storage as well as transmission, and Public Key Infrastructure technology should be used to ensure access is only by those the patient designates.

We can have all the benefits of electronic health records, but only if privacy and patient control is built into electronic systems up front.

Without patient control of data access and use built in up front, VITL is a superhighway for data mining. When data can be used by or sold to employers and insurers secretly without our knowledge or permission, the information will be used to discriminate against us.

Patients refuse medical treatment, or lie and omit information when they realize that their medical records will be used against them by employers and others they would never want to see their records.

No one should ever have to

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choose between health and privacy. Our group is organizing an effort to pass a federal law to stop the sale of medical records and restore consumer control of personal health information. For more information, visit [www.patientprivacyrights.org](http://www.patientprivacyrights.org).

Deborah C. Peel  
Austin, TX

### Author responds to 9/11 critics

This is in response to Jeremy Young's letter posted in the *Vermont Guardian* (March 9) questioning my knowledge of basic physics.

It would seem that politics often supersedes science when one tries to determine what really happened on 9/11.

From my perspective as an engineer, the following statements can only be explained by the use of explosives. However, these facts seem to be either "debunked" or ignored by those who would have us avoid questioning the safer, more comfortable, and less thought-provoking official crash-and-burn theory.

I would like to question the prevailing theory by asking Young, or anyone, for reasonable alternative explanations to the following statements:

- Only explosives could have caused the pulverization of the WTC buildings' concrete into dust.

- Only high temperature explosives could create the molten metal that lingered for several weeks under the debris of those three WTC buildings. These documented temperatures of the molten metal were much hotter (by over several hundred degrees Fahrenheit) than any temperatures that could possibly be provided by the 9/11 jet fuel/kerosene fires.

- Only explosives could propel heavy steel beams/columns more than 300 feet away from the Twin Towers. According to basic projectile physics, this is well beyond the range that can be accomplished by the prevailing crash-and-burn theory.

Finally, I reaffirm my knowledge of physics and of Newton's Law of Conservation of Momentum. Inertia would slow down the collapse.

Moreover, Newton's Law is immaterial when compared to the resistance provided by the massive supporting structural steel framework of each Tower. Each of the Twin Towers' collapses would have had to compress and destroy about 100,000 tons of structural steel framing and do it in a collapse duration of only ten

seconds. Without explosives this is impossible and has never happened in the 100-year history of structural steel buildings.

William Rice, P.E.

William Rice is a former professor at the Vermont Technical College in Randolph, and wrote a piece in the Feb. 28 issue of *Vermont Guardian*.

### Vote for life

Many Vermonters, including myself, believe that the Legislature is way out of line in taking up the issue of physician assisted suicide. Which of us sent our legislators to Montpelier to have them pass this? With all of the things that we need the Legislature to do, to help our awesome state thrive, making suicide legal is not one of them! Why are there out-of-state pro-suicide groups working hard, and spending substantial sums of money, right now, in Vermont, to get this passed? Apparently, they came here after being rejected in Alaska, Hawaii, California, Michigan, and Maine. There are only four jurisdictions on the entire planet that have espoused this type of policy. There are excellent reasons for this scarcity.

Can you imagine the negative message we would be sending to our struggling youth? Do we want to ask doctors to have to dispense life-ending medications, breaking their age-old role and oath as trusted healer? Can you picture how much health insurance companies would save by this measure, lining their own pockets? After 20 years, in a time-tested experiment in the Netherlands, approximately one-quarter of those people who receive physician assisted suicide never asked for it. They did not ask for death, yet received it. That is end of life choice?

I implore our legislators to focus on bills that are going to protect and improve the quality of life here, in all stages of life — and if it comes to a vote, please vote not. Fellow Vermonters, you need to let your legislator know that you oppose physician assisted suicide.

Joanna Turner Bisceglia  
Waterbury

### Store spent fuel in pools, not cask

How dangerous is spent nuclear fuel (SNF) from a reactor such as Vermont Yankee (*Vermont Guardian*, March 12)?

A 600-rem exposure is a fatal dose. (A rem is a unit of ionizing radiation equal to the amount that produces the same damage to

humans as one roentgen of high-voltage x-rays.) After five years, SNF delivers a dose that will kill within seconds, just over a minute after 10 years, and just over four minutes after 50 years.

Recently, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) recommended reactors use military protection in case of attack.

Furthermore, researchers at Sandia National Laboratory concluded, after crashing airplane wings, a potentially destructive fuel-air deflagration could also occur in spaces below some spent nuclear fuel pools. Many pools do not have containment protection like reactors do. In fact, Vermont Yankee's spent fuel pool is five stories above the reactor.

The Swiss Nuclear Regulatory Authority has also stated, "From the construction engineering aspect ... one cannot rule out the possibility that fuel elements in the fuel pool or the cooling system would be damaged and this would result in a release of radioactive substances."

NRC staff stated that it is prudent to assume that a turbine shaft of a large aircraft engine could penetrate and drain a spent fuel storage pool. It is important to know that reactor spent fuel must be stored in pools for a minimum of five years, not dry cask.

Robert Lincoln  
Rutland

### Current use is not a "tax break"

The Current Use Program, properly titled the Vermont Use Value Appraisal Program, is not a tax break (*Vermont Guardian*, March 15). It is a taxing system based on the income method of appraisal instead of fair market value (FMV). The appraisal is based on the ability of a working landscape, not the potential and prospective value for development.

Landowners are under a contract with the state to maintain a managed forest or active use in agriculture and the tax is set appropriate so that the property tax is equitable to that use as is FMV for residential and commercial properties.

I know to say "tax break" is an easy way to write a sentence, but it is incorrect and very misleading. We say no one is being subsidized at use value. It is tax equity.

Ed Larson  
Waterbury

Ed Larson is the executive director of the Vermont Forest Products Association.

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