

Antiwar heroes?

Vermonters have taken to the streets, and two congressional offices, in the past two weeks to reinforce the message they sent in November when they helped sweep a Democratic majority into Congress — end the war, now.

The *Guardian* has been steadfast in its opposition to the Iraq War and the ongoing occupation of a country that did not attack us, nor pose any direct, immediate threat to the United States.

We have also lent our voice to those who want to see an immediate end to the occupation, and to begin the task of reparations and nation building, rather than attempting to intercede in an ever-shifting civil war.

As reported in this week's issue, two different surveys find a majority of Iraqis want us out and do no longer believe our presence is a positive force for change, or for their own betterment.

But, since when does Pres. George W. Bush listen to a mandate from the people in his own country, let alone one that is thousands of miles away?

Some of the most powerful voices for ending this occupation are coming from those who served on the front lines — the veterans themselves.

At a rally over the weekend, several Vermont veterans spoke to hundreds gathered in front of City Hall in Burlington.

Their message was simple, and urgent: End the war, now. Not in 12 or 18 months, but now.

Perhaps because they have been there and can speak of the horrors they experienced that they have are so focused and determined to end the war. If only Congress, and some in the antiwar movement, had their courage and conviction.

Former Army Sgt. Drew Cameron said cutting off funds for the war would not damage morale.

"What is hurting the morale of the troops is two tours, three tours, four tours, five tours — years and years away from their families and communities. That's what is destroying the morale of the troops," said Cameron. "Mr. Sanders, Mr. Leahy, Mr. Welch, if you are our representatives, then represent us."

Antiwar activists are lamenting that Vermont's delegation, which voted against the war in the first place, and fought against the president's "surge" of troops, didn't simply cut off funds for the war. In essence, they want a hero in Congress to single-handedly stop the war.

Given the close divisions of party, and power control, in the House and the Senate there is not likely to be any one person, or even a majority of people elected who will dramatically change the course of the war.

But, those who believe the war should end now, rather than months from now, already have heroes to fall behind, and they shouldn't be looking at a body of 535 people whose daily lives are centered around compromise.

Think of it this way: The USA PATRIOT Act was passed in the U.S. Senate with only one dissenting voice. One of the most far-reaching bills to take away our civil rights got only one dissenting voice, Sen. Russ Feingold, D-WI.

Did he vote on principle? Sure, but the other 99 votes in favor were out of political expediency, not principle. It was another case of people voting for the "best" bill they could come up with and have passed, not the best legislation for the country.

It's this type of thinking that former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld employed when he said, "You go to war with the army you have, not the one you want."

The veterans who are speaking out about the war are the heroes — more than 1,000 active duty soldiers and a growing chorus of now former soldiers — understand this, and also know that speaking out in the military is not something that will affect change.

Instead, they know it will take a larger and more sustained effort to lend a voice to the true majority opinion in this country — one that is in contrast to the Democratic bill in Congress, and the president's own plans.

"This bill won't end the war — it's up to us to end the war," said former Marine Cpl. Matt Howard.

And, he's right.

So, the question is, will we, the people, lead the way out of this war, or will we follow in hopes that someday someone might lead us?

The choice is ours to make.



letters • • • • •

Support employee free choice

We are writing to urge everyone to support H. 353 — the Vermont Employee Free Choice Act (*Vermont Guardian*, March 22). This legislation would permit Vermont state employees to create their union through a simple process of majority authorization.

This would mean that when the majority of employees at a worksite sign authorization cards, the Vermont Labor Relations Board verifies the cards and the workers are then able to collectively bargain with their employer. Should employees file with more than 30 percent, but less than a majority, the workers can proceed to a certification election, if they so choose.

Collective bargaining is the best way for Vermont's working families to get ahead and ensure a better future for our children. Workers covered by collective bargaining agreements are more likely to have livable wages, quality health care and secure retirement than workers who do not have that right.

This is fundamentally about workers' rights. Freedom of association is assured by the First Amendment to the U.S. Consti-

tution. The right to organize and bargain collectively is asserted in the UN's 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. This right is explained in the UN's International Labor Organization Convention, Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize. It establishes the right of all workers to form and join organizations of their own choosing without prior authorization.

Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to matter what's in the Declaration of Human Rights or the U.S. Constitution, because there are no rights without organization. The reality is that the National Labor Relations Board has documented that more than 20,000 workers in this country have been fired or victimized trying to exercise their right to form a union every year for the past 10 years.

The Vermont Employee Free Choice Act, like the Employee Free Choice Act, just passed by the U.S. House of Representatives (of which Rep. Peter Welch, D-VT, was a co-sponsor), is a step in the right direction to restoring workers' fundamental right of freedom of association — an underpinning of democracy.

The Washington-Orange-Lamoille Labor Council strongly supports H. 353. We urge oth-

ers to join us in supporting this important piece of legislation.

Traven Leyshon, president, Dave Van Deusen, secretary, K Dunbar, treasurer; Paul Montague, vice president, and Dan Brush, labor council political director

What mission have we accomplished?

It has been four years since the Bush administration dragged the United States into the war in Iraq under false pretenses. Four years of one shameful lie after another. Four years of one horrendous mistake after another. Four years of one illegal cover-up after another. And what has been accomplished? Here's a partial list:

- More than 3,000 precious young U.S. soldiers have died;
- More than 30,000 brave U.S. soldiers have been wounded, many horrifically maimed and crippled;
- More than 100,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed;
- More than \$400 billion has been spent; and,
- More U.S.-hating terrorists exist in the Middle East than before the war began.

No one wants to say that these lives and dollars were wasted, but I'm having a difficult time

continued on next page

CROW BOOKSHOP

"Books give not wisdom where none was before. But where some is, there reading makes it more."

—John Harington (1561-1612)

14 CHURCH ST. BURLINGTON, VT

GREEN WITH ENVY

17

Town Meeting

TELEVISION

UNDER THE DOME

Lifting the Lid on Vermont's Legislature

Wednesdays at 6 p.m.

PROGRAMS AVAILABLE ON THE WEB AT:

862-3966 x17 • www.Channel17.org

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

continued from previous page

coming up with any real positive accomplishments.

Someone please tell me these U.S. soldiers didn't die and suffer for nothing. Show me how our children are any safer now that tens of thousands of people blame America for the deaths of their loved ones. Explain to me why this staggering debt we are passing on to our children and grandchildren was not simply wasted.

I don't want to hear vague flag-waving generalities. Our U.S. soldiers lives and limbs are worth more than political rhetoric. Our children's safety is far more important than any current politician's reputation. Our grandchildren's economic well-being is far more important than satisfying corporate America's addiction to military spending.

Brave U.S. men and women are fighting and dying in Iraq for no clear reasons. Maimed veterans are receiving substandard health care. Iraqi civilians are still being killed on a massive scale. More than \$200 million dollars a day is being frittered away.

How much longer can we let this go on? At what point do we as voters become complicit in the deaths of our own troops and innocent Iraqi citizens? When do we take responsibility for the flawed decisions and failed tactics of our elected officials and

tell them enough is enough?

The time is now.

*Karl Johnson
Monroe, NH*

Stop the war on marijuana

If the state of Vermont needs \$7 million to map groundwater to secure our health (*Vermont Guardian*, March 23), then they can just repeal the state law that makes marijuana illegal, stop arresting people for mere marijuana possession, and save \$10 to \$40 million per year.

That is the amount currently being spent on labor for officers to arrest Vermonters, court time and court expenses, jail, prison, and probation supervision at the rate of approximately 2,000 arrests per year, and at the cost of about \$10,000 — \$30,000. of your tax dollars spent on each Vermonter arrested for mere marijuana possession.

No matter how you add it up, if you simply repeal the state law that makes marijuana possession illegal, and expect parents to control and supervise their own children (what a shocking idea), then the only thing left for the state to do is to figure out how to spend all of the excess taxpayer money left over after they've only spent \$7 million to save our health and our lives by mapping our ground water be-

fore Sparkletts Water Company, or any other bottled water company from California, comes here and takes it all away from us!

If parents try to sue the state for legalizing marijuana and risking that their children may get access to it, then the state can sue the parents for negligence for not watching their own children.

*Cris Ericson
Chester*

We need facts about radiation

Those of us in Vermont Yankee's Emergency Planning Zone need to know more about low-level radiation (*Vermont Guardian*, March 16).

Helen Caldicott, M.D., in her new book *Nuclear Power Is Not The Answer*, states that all nuclear reactors constantly emit radioactive gases from aging fuel rods. Two hundred different isotopes could be in the mix. Some are vented through holes in the top of the reactor building or from steam generators. Approximately 100 cubic feet of radioactive gases are released from condensers every hour. The typical 1,000 megawatt nuclear power plant (Vermont Yankee is about half of this size) contains an amount of long-lived radiation equivalent to that released

www.thismodernworld.com

