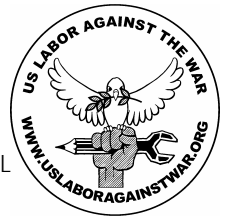


U.S. LABOR AGAINST THE WAR



Saturday, July 3, 2004 SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Happy 4th of July!

Members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars 5888, the "Post for Peace," are very proud of America but very concerned for our great country. We sincerely hope you will take some time to read and think about our humble, heartfelt ideas concerning our position on the conflict in Iraq, our assessment of the costs of war in Iraq, and our vision for America.

June 1, 2004

Dear Friends:

It is past time that the members of the Bill Motto Post 5888 VFW USA adamantly voice our opposition to the war in Iraq. The prevailing opinion of our elected leaders (and of Americans in general) is that we may have made a terrible mistake, but we are there, and we can't quit now, that we will look weak if we pull out, and that Iraq will fall into chaos. This opinion serves the politicians who are yet to find the courage to oppose an unjust, ill-conceived, costly, immoral war. This prevailing opinion also serves to fuel the war machine, line the pockets of the weapons makers, foster fear in the American public, and alienate us from the rest of the world. We must not believe this opinion; we must stop the fighting with all reasonable speed.

When the Bill Motto Post opposed the war before we invaded Iraq, we were among a minority of Americans who openly stood against it. Now, we find ourselves rich with allies who can see through the smoke screen the present administration has created to cloud the hearts and minds of the American people. Shortly after 9/11 that administration ratcheted up its already planned campaign to invade Iraq. The president promised to smoke out and kill the terrorists, created a bogus connection between Iraq and the terrorists, and rationalized our invasion by telling us that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction primed to use on America; he even painted specific word images of mushroom clouds looming above in the skies as he spoke to a frightened America on national TV. When civilized countries opposed the invasion, his administration ridiculed them, and the president let the world know that they were either for us or against us, and while this outdated cowboy rhetoric reassures and encourages some Americans, it shocks, offends, and disappoints as many or more of us here and around the world.

Since the invasion started, the death toll has risen, and Iraq is in bitter turmoil if not chaos. The sympathy and compassion the rest of the world had for us after 9/11 has in great measure turned to scorn. We have alienated the people of Iraq and deepened the divide between the Arab world and us. And all this after the president arrogantly stood on the deck of an aircraft carrier in front of a giant banner reading "Mission Accomplished." Here at home the cost of the war is beginning to take its toll as local communities begin to make deep cuts in social services, education, and important programs for community welfare and for our children. The American public has become deeply divided as the administration tries to paint the "peaceful patriots" as un-American or cowardly, and simultaneously portray those who support the ill-conceived invasion as the true Americans. The Patriot Act does as much to stifle the voice of America as it does to stifle terrorism. And soon thousands of weary, disillusioned, traumatized, angry young soldiers will return to face a lifetime of the powerful, often tragic repercussions of war. The financial, spiritual, and emotional burden of this conflict may prove to be one Americans will bear for generations. Yes, like the Vietnam War.

The litany of lies we have been told and mistakes the administration has made in Iraq grows like a cancer, but many of us are tragically blinded by the administrations slick sales job and by the sanitized, self-serving corporate news reporting. But we do know that Iraq under Saddam was not an immediate threat to the United States; there were no weapons of mass destruction, no tie between Iraq and al-Qaida; the Iraqis don't appear to want us there any longer, and we have failed to win their hearts and minds. And where is Bin Laden, anyway? In the meantime, more American and Coalition soldiers are killed, wounded, and traumatized, as are the enemy and the innocent, and tragically, more and more Americans are sucked into the belief that more violence will quell violence, that more killing will bring us less killing. This is all happening as the administration plans to cut into the federal deficit by making huge cuts in funding for veterans as well as for education and child welfare. (Since this letter was written, the bipartisan commission investigating the September 11 attacks has called into question the administration's rationale for war in Iraq and reports no link between Iraq and al-Qaida.)

The Bill Motto Post 5888, VFW, USA calls for an end to our involvement in the bloodshed and folly in Iraq!

Respectfully,
Members of the Bill Motto Post 5888, Veterans of Foreign Wars USA

P In Santa Cruz County:

The proposed 2004-05 \$355.6 million county budget, which is \$16 million less than the current year's, proposes eliminating 118 jobs.

Santa Cruz Sentinel, June 15, 2004, By BRIAN SEALS ~/ In Santa Cruz

P In Santa Cruz City:

Fiscal year will end \$1.5 million in red! Despite slashing another \$1 million over the past few months from parks, public safety and other departments, the city will end its fiscal year, at the end of June, with a \$1.5 million deficit. *Santa Cruz Sentinel, June 2, 2004, By DAN WHITE*

P In Scotts Valley Schools:

School district must chop about \$1 million from budget. SV parents hope to spare counselors, small class sizes. *Santa Cruz Sentinel, February 11, 2004, By DAVID SCHARFENBERG*

P In Santa Cruz Schools:

Students say one last goodbye to Natural Bridges, Branciforte schools. After 89 years of service Branciforte Elementary School closed its doors for the last time Friday afternoon, the casualty of a brutal schools budget crisis.

Santa Cruz Sentinel, June 12, 2004, By DAVID SCHARFENBERG

P If the cost of war in Iraq were given back to the states according each state's resident tax contribution, California would receive **\$19,505,176,761**. San Jose alone would receive **\$762,223,591**. (National Priorities Project)

P In California, 38% of our tax dollars go to the military or to the national debt created by the military. (National Priorities Project)

P Los Angeles alone has paid approximately **\$1,346,000,000** for the war in Iraq, a sum that could provide 200,000 housing vouchers for the needy. (National Priorities Project)

The Costs Of War - A Partial list

- P The lives of almost 900 American soldiers
- P Thousands of Iraqi lives
- P Respect for America both at home and abroad
- P The polarization of the American people
- P Cuts to education and higher costs for education
- P The erosion of the American spirit
- P The loss of credibility at America's highest levels of leadership
- P Increased American indebtedness
- P Over \$8,000,000 in cuts in Santa Cruz alone over the last two years
- P Cuts in staffing at the County Veteran's Service Office
- P Increased cost of living
- P Paranoia and distrust of the American government
- P The abuse and misuse of the word "hero"
- P The glorification and commercialization of war
- P Environmental destruction
- P The perpetuation of the idea that might makes right
- P Our attention to great local, state, national and global problems
- P Huge profits for war-related industries
- P Post Traumatic stress disorder
- P Cuts to care for Veterans
- P Human rights and prisoner abuse
- P Neglect of important environmental legislation
- P Fear to speak up for beliefs
- P Loss of personal freedoms
- P Rise in terrorism abroad and increased terrorist recruitment
- P More civilian deaths and kidnappings
- P The destruction of Iraq

Our Vision - Words That Describe a Great Country

We envision an America that **respects** the sovereignty of all nations. We see an America that **trusts** its citizens and is led by the **will of the people**.

We envision a country that has the **wisdom** to reject and ban pre-emptive military action.

We envision a country **committed** to comply if asked to leave by the new Iraqi government.

We envision a land **dedicated** to the health and welfare of its people and to the welfare of those with whom we share the planet.

We envision a land that **supports** Israel but rejects its violent policies toward Palestine.

We see a country whose citizens have the **fortitude** to recognize that military solutions to conflict should be a last resort.

We envision a country that will stand **responsible** for any *crimes* committed by American or coalition soldiers or contractors against Iraqi civilians.

We envision a land with the **insight** to recognize our country's horrible legacy of violence, and we pray for the **courage** to change that legacy to one of compassion, generosity, and shining **spirit**.

We envision America's **creativity and ingenuity** employed to drastically reduce our dependence on oil, to encourage conservation, and to develop environmentally sustainable energy sources.

Placing this statement in the paper was the unanimous decision of the members attending the June 2 meeting of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5888. All members were not present, nor can it be assumed that all members agree with every assertion made on this page, nor do the statements made here necessarily represent the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National.

We see a nation **determined** to create peace in the world through cooperation and non-violent action.

We envision an America **dedicated** to treating all prisoners in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

We envision and call for a nation with **integrity**, the integrity to acknowledge our mistakes and repair the damage we have done.

We envision a nation **committed** to **electing** leadership that will dedicate its efforts to the "general welfare" of the American people.

We envision a country **capable** of bringing terrorists to justice without endangering the lives of innocent civilians through massive military actions.

We see a country that **respects** the sovereignty and right to self-determination of the Iraqi people.

We envision a nation with the **wisdom** to understand that the security of Americans is inextricably linked to the security and well-being of others.

We envision a country with the **intelligence** to recognize that our exorbitant lifestyle is damaging the planet and hurting many of its people.

We envision a nation with the **strength** to recognize that American "interests" may not reflect the interests and values of American citizens.

We see a country with **the power** to lead the world through compassion, foresight, ingenuity, and generosity.

VFW 5888 meets every 1st Wednesday at 7:30 in Room 23 of the Veterans Memorial Building.

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