

## The Casualties of War

Three weeks into the war and America has lost something of great value over those past weeks, our status as purveyors of democracy has been diminished both at home and abroad. We have lost face and more importantly, our sense of decency. Journalists report “the American public has been shocked and awed” by a second world country whose bloodied and tortured people aren’t willing to lay down their arms for our brand of liberation. American soldiers - young men and women - have been taken hostage and killed for a commodity, oil. Incidentally, with control of Iraq, the United States will control more oil than any other entity outside of OPEC.

In these difficult times it appears our press has even resorted to self-censorship in order to project a sense of patriotism to the American public. Veteran journalists with war experience who refused to “embed” themselves with the military or violate the journalistic ethic of neutrality have been marginalized. American news has become a factory farm of information, where video of the same two-story building in Baghdad in daylight, nightfall, and twilight is news. Relentless scenes of American soldiers in tanks rolling through the desert and providing aid to poor children may leave us with sad hearts for the soldiers, the children, and their families, but we must ask ourselves: what does the omnipresent imagery leave out?

The Bush Administration asked Congress for \$74.5 billion to fight the war in Iraq and by all indications this will be the beginning of a long parade of allocations for a war that will drain the general fund and siphon money from other essential government programs. Conservative economists have estimated that the total cost for war would be in the neighborhood of \$100 billion, but the Bush administration expects the \$74.5 billion it asked for to last for just six months. In response, the Republican controlled Senate slashed the President’s tax cut bill almost in half from \$726 billion to \$350 billion, to offer the non-existent budget some kind of relief.

Our Federal government does not have a budget in place for the next fiscal year. Forty-seven states across the country are facing a collective deficit of \$162 billion. President Bush wants to rebuild Iraq with taxpayer money, but he has yet to address the issues of America’s health, education and aging. The Department of Education’s appropriation for 2001 was \$55.8 billion or 2.7% of the federal government’s budget, and had to be used for all 50 states. Last year’s education appropriation for all fifty states is only 73% of the estimated cost of the first six months of the war. Furthermore, the White House projects that the federal deficit will be at least \$300 billion in fiscal year 2004.

How do we want our tax dollars to be utilized? Should we send young men and women into harms way or possibly to die in Iraq? President Bush asserts Saddam Hussein was connected to September 11<sup>th</sup> yet, he has not provided one iota of proof. Should we use our tax dollars to provide all of our children with the world’s best education? We should provide our children with the skills and fundamentals of reading, writing and math and

intellectually empower them to ask thoughtful questions with a goal of understanding others and the world around them!

We cannot wait for the 2004 Presidential election. We must think nationally, and act locally. We need to hold those elected officials and policy makers who support the war accountable today, so they don't jeopardize our future. Our voices have been heard with peaceful demonstrations as we protest the war, but we need to take our message to the halls of the legislature. Our schools need us, our communities need us, and together we can make real positive change.