

Americans show gratitude for returning Iraqi troops but dread both personal, financial losses

BY LINDSEY JENKINS
Reporter

Thursday, December 15, 2011 officially ended US involvement in the Iraq war. Families continue reflecting upon their experiences with the war; many who have lost their loved ones still grieve, while those families whose children, spouses, and friends that are seeing their brave soldiers again are in great relief. Remaining American troops, numbering 4,000, arrived home for the holidays. According to President Obama on Yahoo News, the war was extremely costly to the nation, as more than 4,400 members of the military were killed, and 32,000 were wounded. Financially, involvement in the war cost the US more than \$1.3 trillion.

Finalizing the date for the troops to leave Iraq was de-

ecided after months of talk between Baghdad and Washington. The two sides could not reach an agreement about leaving thousands of American troops behind in Iraq for a training force since the Iraqis must still cope with the possibility of Iranians interfering with them. As a safety precaution, 150-200 military troops will remain behind as part of embassy security. Therefore, American forces remain in great danger because of bombings and other violence still occurring on a daily basis.

President Barack Obama had always opposed the war, but he claimed that the troops will eventually all come home feeling proud of themselves and their success. Unfortunately, economic concerns plague the returning troops since there may not be enough work available for them to provide for their families.

"This group of veterans is extremely well-trained. It's just that they're coming home to a terrible economy; there are very few jobs for them, and they're just being dumped out on the street. We're doing our best to change that," said Steve White, a Vietnam veteran who heads the nonprofit group called Veterans Across America (VAA) Champion Mentor Program, on CNN.com.

Newly initiated, this program aims to assist new veterans in finding employment. Mentors will be assigned to individual veterans to evaluate and revise their resumes, hold face-to-face meetings, and set up professional networks for them. This nonprofit organization has already helped more than 7,000 troops find jobs.

Frank Vazquez is one such individual who has received assistance from the program.

He told CNN his success story. Following high school graduation, Vazquez enlisted in the US Navy and served as an electronic technician, third class, from 2000-2004. When he returned from his services in 2004, he searched for a job.

"I had no guidance from anyone in the military on what I should do next. I also never heard from (Veterans Affairs) or other government programs. I actually didn't even know they offered anything," said Vazquez.

After spending time seeking a job on his own, he worked temporarily as a technician between 2005 and 2008. In 2009, a mentor from the VAA's program, Glenn Witt, guided Vazquez and helped him in any way he could.

"He [Witt] was a huge help. He made sure I stayed on top of my applications; he was there if I needed to call him. He also

met me and walked with me to my interview locations. When I didn't think things were gonna work out, he really stood by me and kept me going," said Vazquez.

President Obama remains optimistic about the troops finding employment, surmising that troops will bring the much needed stimulation to the economy, according to kwtx.com. Senator John Barrasso recently discovered that the 1,700 mile Keystone XL oil pipeline is a great opportunity for providing jobs. Expectations are for the project to create up to 20,000 jobs for returning veterans. Obama argued that he would like to wait to make the decision until after the election of 2012, but Barrasso believes that the pipeline will not only improve the economy, but also help make the United States less dependent upon Middle Eastern oil.

High school journalists refuse to publish photo of student they consider inappropriate

BY AKIRAH JUSTICE
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Not often can publications pride themselves on such high integrity, especially when the editors running the show are teenagers. Editors of Durango High's yearbook have taken a great stand to prioritize their reputation as a business over their reputations among peers who may now deem them pruders for censoring a seemingly harmless photo.

Durango High School's yearbook staff refused to allow Sydney Spies' senior portrait to appear in its publication.

"This photo represents who I am. I want to be a model. I'm a dancer, and I feel like the administration isn't allowing me to show that," said Spies on NBC's "Today Show."

When she lashed out due to her anger at the yearbook adviser and school faculty, thinking they were responsible for claiming the picture was too provocative, students of the yearbook staff came forward and announced that they personally found her photo too "racy."

Editors have since proposed to Spies that they could use her photo if, and only if, she used it as a \$300 ad in the back of the book instead of using it as her senior portrait.

"If it's going to be in the yearbook anyway, then why should I not be able to have it as my senior picture? I feel like they aren't allowing me to have my freedom of expression," said Spies to the Durango Herald. "I think the administration is wrong in this situation, and I don't want this to happen to other people."



Senior Sydney Spies complains that her censorship represses her individuality. Student journalists claimed they must maintain professionalism in the business they run. *Internet photo.*

It is completely understandable why this situation is frustrating to Spies; senior portraits are supposed to illustrate one's personality and interests.

Her main interest is modeling, so it should not come as a surprise that the style she chose was a little too overwhelming and adult-like for a high school

publication. The yearbook staff should be commended for recognizing that as a business, especially one owned by a school, they are expected to uphold certain standards and cannot allow inappropriate content.

"We are an award-winning yearbook. We don't want to diminish the quality with something that can be seen as unprofessional," said editor Brian Jamirillo.

"Inappropriate" holds different meanings to different people. Regardless, if published in Durango High's yearbook published Spies' picture, surely someone would have been offended, and the school would have received a storm of backlash.

"What you're looking at is not a flier for a taxi dance club/potato bar located on the outskirts of Reno. This is the picture 18-year-old Sydney Spies (no comment on that name) tried to submit as her official senior portrait," said blogger Michael K on www.ibtimes.com.

People may be concerned that by offering to use the photo as an ad is unethical because they are essentially disregarding professionalism so long as they get a big fat check as compensation, but is it really? Businesses often add a little leeway for ad space; they are not necessarily promoting the image or object; they are really just keeping their businesses afloat.