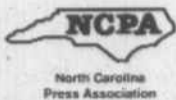


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Congress needs to act to end Iraq occupation



Barbara Lee
 Guest Columnist

Four years ago, President Bush issued a challenge to the Iraqi insurgents. He said, "There are some who feel like that the conditions are such that they can attack us there. My answer is, bring them on."

In the four years since he uttered those unfortunate words, it has become clear that what many of us said before the invasion was true, that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; that there was no connection between Iraq and al Qaeda and that the case for going to war was false.

It has also become clear that there was no plan to stabilize the country after the invasion, and there was no exit strategy. Since President Bush uttered those words, 3,380 U.S. troops have died in Iraq and more than 23,000 have been wounded, not to mention the countless Iraqi deaths and injuries. After spending more than \$400 billion on the invasion and occupation, U.S. troops are now in the position of refereeing an Iraqi civil war. Our troops' presence in Iraq has become a rallying point for terrorist recruitment and fundraising, a development that makes our country and the world less safe.

Last November, the American people sent a clear message that they wanted an end to the occupation. In January, against the will of the American people and the advice of our military commanders, the President decided to escalate the conflict in Iraq and subsequently vetoed Congressional efforts to establish a timeline for bringing our troops home.

Now, despite the fact

that the escalation has failed to change the security situation on the ground, the administration wants to extend the occupation indefinitely, saying that they envision a United States military presence in Iraq similar to that "we have in South Korea," where American troops have been stationed for more than 50 years.

It is time to end the President's failed policy in Iraq and bring our troops home. We know the President is not going to do it, so Congress is going to have to act.

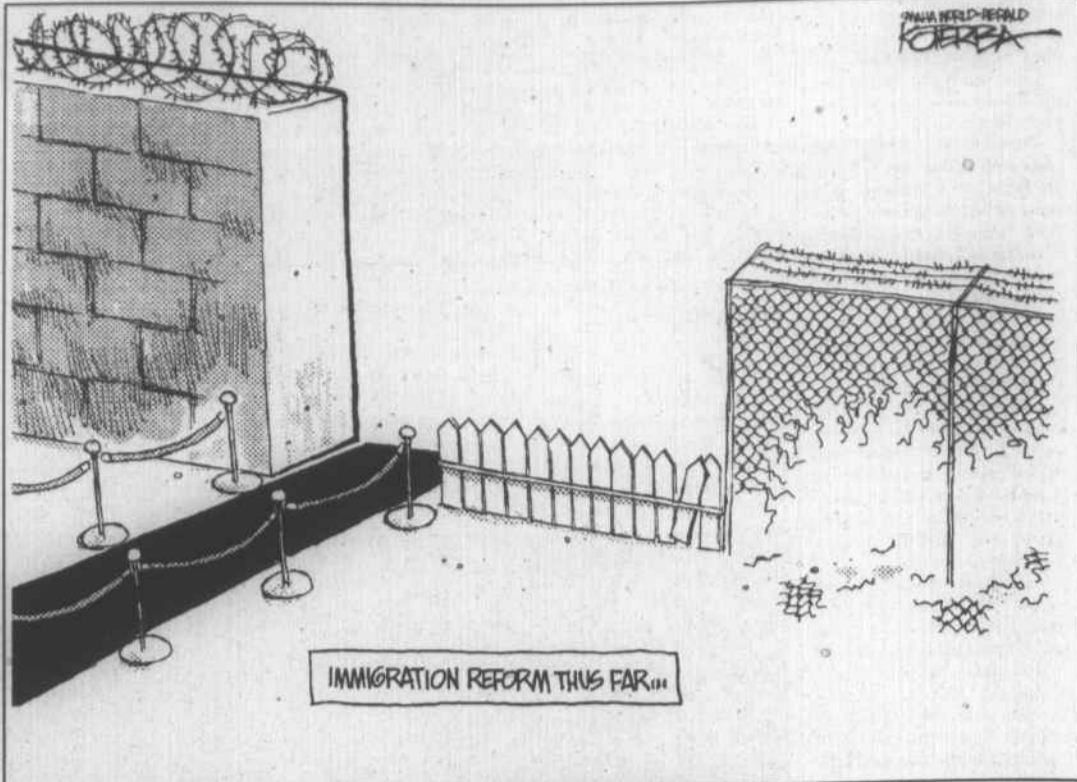
When Congress last took up the question of funding for the occupation, some members supported efforts to end the occupation by fully funding withdrawal, which would have provided the funds to do only two things: to protect our troops, and bring them home within six months.

In September, the President will ask Congress for another emergency supplemental spending bill, another blank check to continue his failed policy indefinitely. When that time comes, Congress should appropriate the funds to protect our troops and bring them home. We should fully fund withdrawal.

This month, the House will take up other legislation aimed at changing course in Iraq and bringing the occupation to an end, including legislation to prevent permanent military bases in Iraq, to set a timeline for redeployment and to stop war profiteering.

Representatives need to know what their constituents think about these issues. Call your member of Congress and let him or her know that you support ending the occupation. It's time to bring our troops home.

U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, a Democrat, represents Ninth Congressional District.



The "N" Word



Ernie Pitt

This & That

Yes! We should bury the "N" word once and for all. No! We should not get so upset when someone uses it. Words do not make people...people make words. Although words can be hurtful and damaging, we as a people, must learn to rise above those things that are thrown at us that are intended to discourage us and make us feel bad about ourselves.

We have to learn where those words came from and what their intent was. The

"N" word was used to denigrate us and to make sure we didn't think of ourselves as equal to whites. We have to understand how that criticism has effected us.

We have been criticized and called three-fifths of a man in addition to all other manner of insults and degradation that naturally has challenged all of our coping skills. We have turned the "N" word into all kinds of things and meanings that depending on who you're talking to and what you're talking about, can determine its positivity or negativity. The horrible thing about this process is that we have, to some extent, taken on the values of our oppressors by continuing to use the word and, often times, acting in a manner that gives the word

more meaning than it deserves.

Consider this: I remember when I was a little boy. One of the meanest things we could call someone was "Black". Now, that's a darn shame. However, at the same time we felt bad about being black, Whites were going to the beach, tanning houses and everywhere else trying to do what? Make themselves black. Thank God we have overcome that.

As for me, I won't be using it under any circumstances and will not allow anyone to refer to me with the word regardless of its intended meaning. I take more pride in myself than that. I am also going to make sure that I'm in a position where no one will ever have the occasion to call me

that because it will be totally out of character with no meaning perspective.

I'm suggesting that we reject the usage of the "N" word and focus more on education, home ownership, wealth-building and entrepreneurship. That's probably why the rappers are using the "N" word so readily because they're prospering from it. Hey! Ain't that America? Do anything for money? Not me! The Lord is my shepherd! God bless you. Amen.

Ernie Pitt is the publisher and co-founder of The Chronicle and the head of the N.C. Association of Black Publishers. Reach him at erpitt@wschronicle.com.

Hunger in America



George Curry

Guest Columnist

About six blocks west of the White House, I spotted a man recently who appeared to be in his late 40s or early 50s rummaging through a garbage bin, apparently in search of food. Seconds later, I saw him look through to a second pile of trash. That's when I made a sharp turn, hopped out of my car, and gave him a \$20 bill. "Brother, you don't have to do that," I said. On the edge of tears, he thanked me and headed for a nearby store.

I am not recounting this story to receive a pat on the back or because I think I've done something noble. Rather, I am sharing it because it is a scene that is repeated thousands of times each day. Because we almost have to step over homeless people to enter a downtown business establishment or we have perfected the art of seeing and not seeing at the same time, we choose to ignore the suffering that surrounds us.

I am embarrassed to admit that I was not always so quick to come to the aid of my fellow citizens. Yes, I donate to several charities and tithe on Sundays, but I, too, had become somewhat immune - actually, insensitive - to some suffering of the homeless. But a young child in St. Louis changed that. I was with Lillian Villars, whom I was dating at the time, and her daughter, April, who must have been about 9 or 10 years old.

We were riding down North Kingshighway when April noticed a man pulling a white plastic cup from a garbage bin and drinking the contents. "Look at that," April said in disbelief. "We ought to give him something." Without thinking, I replied, "We can't help every person on the



street." April persisted, "But he's eating out of a garbage can." Point well-taken. We pulled over and gave the man some money. I thanked April for restoring my humanity.

After 11 years as a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, I joined the Chicago Tribune, serving as a Washington correspondent and later New York bureau chief. I was leaving my office in the old New York Daily News building on East 42nd Street late one rainy night when I saw a couple going through a huge pile of garbage in plastic bags on the edge of a curb. This time, I did not hesitate. I gave them \$20 and they thanked me. After walking a block, I looked back and they were actually dancing, happy to have some money.

Hunger in America is real. And everyone asking for help on the street is not interested in conning the public or is headed to the nearest liquor store when someone gives them spare change.

Those of us who live in the most affluent country on earth, tend to overlook hunger and poverty among us. When we think of hunger, we conjure up images of famine in Africa or

India. Indeed, hunger is a global issue, with 852 million people in the world going hungry, according to Bread for the World. In developing countries, 6 million children die each year, mostly from hunger-related causes. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where hunger is on the rise, with 204 million hungry.

Even with safety net programs in place for the poor, such as free school breakfast and lunch programs, hunger is also a problem in the United States.

According to USDA, 35.1 million people - including 12.4 million children - live in households that frequently experience hunger or risk hunger. This means 11 percent of all U.S. households fall into this category. Almost 11 million people - including 606,000 children - live in U.S. households that frequently skip meals, consume an inadequate supply of food or don't eat for an entire day.

Local government officials confirm the federal assessment of hunger.

Last year, the U.S. Conference of Mayors noted a 7 percent increase in the

requests for emergency food assistance. Because of the rising demand for emergency food assistance, 45 percent of the mayors said they were unable to meet their community's food needs. Equally important, 63 percent of those polled said they had to decrease the amount of food given out or reduce the number of times people can receive food.

The hunger problem involves more than food. The United States has the highest wage inequality in the industrialized world. That means that even when people have jobs, often the pay is too low for them to properly feed their families. This country must provide well-paying jobs and expanded opportunities for the poor if it really wants to address the issue. Until we do that, we'll continue to see people eating out of garbage receptacles.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached at george@georgecurry.com.