

Statement on the Second Anniversary of the Iraq War

We are here today to publicly voice our opposition to the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Tomorrow, March 19, 2005, is the second anniversary of the "shock and awe" invasion of Iraq. The proponents of "shock and awe" described it as a "rapid dominance" assault with "sufficiently intimidating and compelling factors to force an adversary to accept our will." That strategy may have worked for a few terrifying days upon the people of Iraq but has since proved to be an utter failure.

Despite the courage of the Iraqi people to go to the polls in January, the human and domestic costs of this war continue and must not go unnoticed. U.S. casualties are now over 1,515, and estimates of Iraqi deaths range between 15,000 and 100,000. Seventy-one soldiers from Pennsylvania have been killed, seven of them from right here in northwestern Pennsylvania.

We call on Congressman English to show strong leadership and urge him to tell the administration to announce an exit strategy from an occupation that a majority of Americans now oppose. We ask him to call for a cut in funding, because the massive wasteful expenditures of our tax dollars in Iraq are beginning to have an impact on our communities. We remind Congressman English that human needs programs for the people of the 3rd District of Pennsylvania -- like education, health care, home heating assistance, public transportation, and child care -- will have to be cut in order to pay for the debacle in Iraq. This must change.

The three allocations made by Congress plus the recent supplemental request submitted by the Bush Administration has made the war in Iraq a \$208 billion financial burden on U.S. taxpayers. The National Priorities Project estimates that the cost to Pennsylvania taxpayers is now over \$7.9 billion, with the city of Erie's burden now over \$37 million. Add this to the Bush administrations proposed 2006 budget cuts that leave No Child Left Behind in Pennsylvania underfunded by \$426 million and what we have is a shameful ranking of priorities.

We ask Congressman English to consider the enormous amount of good work that \$7.9 billion could have done in our state. It is time for public dialogue, and therefore we request a town meeting with Congressman English at his earliest convenience so that people in our community can raise their heartfelt concerns about the human and economic costs of doing nothing. We want to lead, not follow.

We will now respectfully read the names of our brave American soldiers and the innocent Iraqi citizens who have lost their lives in this wasteful and wrong-headed war on Iraq.

Endorsing organizations:

9/11 Peace Initiative of Erie, Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Center for Social Concerns, Gannon University Erie Peace and Justice Center, Green Party of Erie County, Lake Erie Alliance for Democracy (LEAD), Northwestern Pennsylvania National Organization for Women, Peace and Justice Club, Mercyhurst College, Peace and Justice Task Force of the Episcopal Diocese of Northwestern PA, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Erie Regional Community, Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, Social Responsibility Committee, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Erie, Voice for Peace, Gannon University