



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

An open letter to Members of the United States Congress

March 9, 2007

To members of the United States Congress:

The United States has spent at least \$400 billion on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The astronomical cost of these operations is exceeded only by the staggering human toll, and both counts are far beyond what any of us could have imagined when we invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003. Now, four years later, the administration is asking you to approve \$100 billion to prolong this disastrous conflict and to return exhausted soldiers to a dangerous and embittered land.

While this money would allow our nation to send more brave citizens into harm's way, it would do little to guarantee that they will be fully trained and equipped, or that our wounded veterans will receive adequate medical treatment once they return home. And the increased funding does nothing to ensure a speedy end to the carnage in Iraq. We have already failed our troops in so many tragic ways. The best way to support them now is to bring them home and to ensure that they and their families are given all of the respect, compensation, and care they deserve.

Rather than a surge of troops, we American taxpayers deserve a surge of truth.

Because citizens of all faiths and political persuasions are being asked to pay to prolong the violence, it is our moral obligation to reckon the true cost of the war before we agree to continue it. To give a true reckoning, we must honestly confront what we have done in Iraq, and we also must acknowledge the many vital needs we have left unfunded because we chose to put our money toward war.

Until we can adequately prepare and protect our troops, until we can provide them with premium medical services when they return home, and until we can guarantee a speedy and just end to the Iraq conflict, I urge you not to spend another American dollar on this war. I hope you will take a moment to review the enclosed balance sheet. These concerns are neither Republican nor Democratic. They transcend partisan differences. They are moral concerns that affect all of us.

Sincerely,

Rev. William G. Sinkford

*Please see the reverse side for **The True Cost of War: A Moral Balance Sheet***

The True Cost of War: A Moral Balance Sheet

*Sent to members of the United States Congress
by Rev. William G. Sinkford, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association
March 9, 2007*

One Day in Iraq

—To date, more than 3,100 American military members have been killed in Iraq, and another 400 have been killed in Afghanistan. On average, another college-aged soldier (between the ages of 18 and 22) is killed every day.

—The money the US spends on average in just one day in Iraq, \$259 million, could have provided 22,615 college-aged students with a full year's tuition or enrolled 35,500 three- and four-year-olds a full year in Head Start pre-school programs.

One Week in Iraq

—The toll of the war on Iraqi civilians has been devastating. Estimates of the number of Iraqi dead range up to half a million.

—As many as 3.8 million Iraqis have already fled their homes, and an additional 10,500 civilians become refugees on average every week.

—The money spent in one week in Iraq could have provided three meals a day for nearly an entire year for 6 million children, the same number that dies from hunger and malnutrition every year.

One Month in Iraq

—In addition to the tens of thousands of injuries American service members have sustained in fighting in Iraq, more than 500 have undergone "major amputations" the loss of arms or legs. In the four years of fighting in Iraq, that totals ten servicemen and women losing a limb every month (or one every three days).

—For less than the amount spent in one month in Iraq, New Orleans' neighborhoods could be completely rebuilt and improved to meet standards that would better protect them against another hurricane.

One Year in Iraq

—More than 34,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in Iraq in 2006 alone. That is equivalent to 93 civilians killed every day.

—The money spent in Iraq in one year could have paid the health insurance premiums for half of all uninsured Americans, including all uninsured American children.

Four years in Iraq

—More than 3,100 American service members have been killed since the invasion, and more than 23,500 soldiers have been wounded. As many as 300,000 veterans have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, two-thirds of whom are not being treated.

What could we have purchased with \$400 billion, had our national priorities matched our moral potential?

—We could have funded full American compliance in the Kyoto Protocol, which is estimated to cost \$75 billion less than what we've already spent in Iraq.

—We could have purchased life-giving treatment, including costly antiretroviral drugs, for every person in the world infected with HIV/AIDS. For almost six full years.

The Years Ahead

Even if it ends tomorrow, we will be paying for this war for decades to come. When we factor in the future costs of veterans' medical care, disability payments, and the price of rebuilding our depleted military, the total cost could exceed \$1.2 trillion.

Imagine what our world might look like in a few years if we had focused those resources on making the world healthier, wealthier, better educated, and safer.

As Americans, it is our duty to hold ourselves and our government accountable for any decision to spend American lives and money on a futile war. These are moral choices, and they have moral consequences.

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