

AFSC Armistice/Veterans Day Commemoration

Waters Park Akron, Ohio November 11, 2007

OPENING REMARKS

Joe Mosyjowski, Moderator

First of all, on behalf of the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the American Friends Service Committee, good evening and welcome. If you are a Veteran or currently a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, we say THANK YOU. It is not our intention to impugn your service to your country in any way. If you have any relationship to any of the 3860 servicepeople killed in Iraq or 439 killed in Afghanistan (or any member of the armed forces seriously wounded in those countries) you have our heartfelt condolences.

It's fitting that Veterans Day has evolved from Armistice Day, the anniversary of the end of World War I, a day that hostilities ceased, a day that soldiers could put down their arms and think about coming home.

While we're here to commemorate the deaths from past and current wars, we're also here to call for an end to the Iraq War, to prevent the additional deaths of US soldiers and Iraqi civilians. We're here to honor Veterans for their commitment to us, but unless we also examine OUR contract with them, this day can easily become just another Hallmark Holiday. (pg.1A article in the BJ reading "1 in 4 homeless is veteran")... Dept. of Vetran Affairs states that 45% of homeless vets have a mental illness/>75% homeless vets have a substance abuse problem. (Locally, we can support this problem with assistance to a new homeless veterans shelter being constructed in Kent by Portage County Family and Community Services called Freedom House.)

Further we need to ask a few questions...

Why did Vietnam vets have to fight for health benefits related to their exposure to agent orange? Why has the VA denied any link between depleted uranium munitions and the Gulf War Syndrome? Why were returning Iraq war vets warehoused in cockroach and mold infested hospital wards? Why are returning veterans being denied the full percentage of disability benefits which they have earned? Why must returning veterans fight TWICE: first overseas, then to receive the support and treatment they rightly deserve. Veterans Day is meaningless without support and care the OTHER 364 days of the year.

If our government has failed our veterans then perhaps we the people have failed them as well...

During the campaign of fear from the Executive Branch of government prior to the start of the Iraq War, we should have demanded a campaign of truth instead.

If members of our Legislative Branch of government didn't have the political courage to ask the tough questions prior to the start of the war, how could they demand that same courage from our troops which they sent into harms way?

Why for nearly 5 years have we accepted the status quo?

Why have we not worked to end the cozy alliance that President Dwight Eisenhower warned us about: the military-industrial complex? Even Alan Greenspan has acknowledged that the Iraq War is "largely about oil". Why don't we equate politically connected war profiteers, gaining billions of dollars off the blood, the pain, the trauma, the stress, and the sacrifice of our veterans with committing treason upon those veterans collective soul? If we do not demand that our armed forces be deployed for defensive purposes only, why don't we just change the name of the Department of Defense to the Department of War, then merge it with the Commerce Department? Starting war for economic or territorial gain is as old as the gold in the Black Hills. Veterans, we have let you down. We have gotten lazy. We have allowed our government to be operated largely by corporate interests, by someone other than ourselves. For this, we must say that we are sorry.