

October 11, 2011

Dear Larry and fellow VFP colleagues,

Thank you for inviting my thoughts on the chapter's disassociation votes.

Minority comment:

When the vote was taken at the chapter, none of those voting had participated in the national convention business meeting. I believe that our chapter's vote was taken hastily and without an opportunity for a fair rebuttal from me who heard both sides of the argument in Portland, Oregon. And these arguments for the resolution's passage were very rational. I believe only Bruce Barry, Janet Chisholm and I were there for the whole debate and Barry and I voted to support the resolutions after hearing all of the cogent, passionate and intelligent discussion that ensued. So, to be fair, I would like to offer some of the reasons for my affirmative vote on both resolutions and trust you will be fair in keeping an open mind:

First from the historical perspective: The national board, after a deliberate and free flowing debate, approved the impeachment resolution unanimously. That included many who DO have the historical connection. The part that most moved me and the major reason for that vote was that in 2004, at which time I served as secretary, we passed a resolution that called for the next president, whether it be John Kerry or George W. Bush, to order the troops OUT of Iraq and Afghanistan in 60 days after taking office. It did not matter whether Republican or Democrat. It was strictly a non partisan vote.

So, to be consistent, and given the myriad reasons too many to mention in this letter, because of President Obama's failure to order the withdrawal of troops, I felt it logical and correct to support the vote as I had in 2004 in the Bush/Kerry election. The difference between then and now is only that President Obama has not only NOT recalled the troops but has ESCALATED the military presence threefold in Afghanistan! Of course this does not include the excessive use of drones far beyond George Bush and killed hundreds of civilians indiscriminately in sovereign lands - even those of our allies.

The latest extrajudicial killing of a U.S. citizen is added proof of the alleged criminal actions of this president. That authorization by Obama came before the Oregon convention but the extrajudicial killing came after.

What bothered me most during the debate was when good people argued against the motion because of they feared that the African-American community would become incensed with our organization. I find that argument racist and inappropriate. And I have heard it since returning to Minnesota.

In truth, we realized that the impeachment process would never be implemented, but that silence is complicity. As I have said, I always maintain that to expect any legislation to develop from our resolutions is like expecting the ant crawling up the elephant's rear end with the intention of rape. Resolutions can change the governance of an organization. They DO NOT MAKE LAWS! ***

What we also have to remember in resolutions, the Whereases do NOT matter. Only the resolved is what is official. Prior statements to the "resolved" are only feelings and thoughts, NOT official statements.

Was the convention to end without any criticism of President Obama's record on the occupations or other actions that violated our "statement of purpose"? Given that no one, even though they, including our own chapter members, were given plenty of forewarning and opportunity to submit a resolution on any subject about which they felt strongly, AND, given that I sent out the link to those resolutions a month prior to the convention and had asked for feed back, and that I HAD presented both resolutions that the chapter voted LATER to disassociate themselves from, I find it sad that only ONE person had made the effort to express his thoughts on any of them prior to the convention: that person was Andy Berman.

The fact that ONLY he responded was disappointing but the interesting part is that in voting on the Palestine/Israel resolution in dispute, I thought I was voting for what he wanted the U.S. not be part and that was contained in the "resolved" that states: "

"The U.S. government to recuse itself from "peace process" negotiations due to its reflexive, unconditional support for Israel and allow more objective international mediators approved by all negotiating parties." (My underline)

I thought Andy and I were in agreement that the U.S. should not be involved in the discussion, that it was only up to the parties involved, Israel and Palestine. If anyone read the whole resolution, I am sure they would conclude as I did

that by insisting that the U.S stay out of it would be CONSISTENT with our "Statement of Purpose" that we "restrain government from intervening in the internal affairs of other nations."

But what convinced me, in addition to believing what I assumed Andy and I had agreed to, was the strong support of board member Leah Bolger and Ann Wright** who spoke to the resolution and who had spent an enormous amount of time in the Middle East as well as Ken Mayer* who voted for the resolution.

The other point that should be recognized is that this subject is divisive, but must be discussed. That's what makes us the great democracy that we are. If we have to worry about offending someone for expressing what we believe, then I guess we should just forget about supporting democracies and let the king rule.

Additionally, while I knew the futility of passing such a resolution, I was aware that there was NO OTHER resolution introduced that was critical of President Obama's actions. Had there been EVEN ONE resolution presented from the thousands of members, present or not, I suspect much of the disappointment over Obama's actions could have been expressed by voting affirmatively on those motions. But they were not presented.

*Ken Mayer was a flotilla member on the *Audacity of Hope* and has been a strong Jewish peace activist. He was a board member and was arrested at Quantico in the Bradley Manning protest. He has been carrying on a email dialogue with Andy explaining his affirmative vote on the Israel/Palestine resolution.

**Ann Wright, a retired colonel and later State Department officer who resigned from the State Department over her opposition to the invasion of Iraq She was a flotilla member on the *Audacity of Hope* and was one of the sponsors behind the attempt to bring humanitarian supplies to Palestine.

So, friends, I hope, given this information, you will reconsider. I know how deeply Andy feels, because I have spoken at some length with him and have enormous respect for him as I know you all do. But that respect has to include a differing of opinion.

*** For your information, the following is my report of our national convention's impeachment motion to the Assistant U.S. Attorney at our meeting with him at the Federal Building September 7, 2011. Seven of us, members of WAMM's T3 committee, met with him and his aide. He works directly for U.S. Attorney, B. Todd Jones who reports directly to President Obama. The following is my report sharing the concerns of many veterans who demand that President Obama begin to investigate the alleged criminal acts of the Bush administration. To date, we have received NO reply regarding our national VFP motion.

To John Marti, Assistant U.S. Attorney:

*I thank the Obama administration for attempting to shut Guantanamo and black sites as well as stopping torture. **Are you aware that President Obama's failure to address the use of illegal torture by the past administration was listed as one of the reasons Veterans for Peace passed a resolution to impeach him at our convention in Portland, Oregon, in August 2011?***

While I am not a victim of torture, I support the concerns of Commander Phil Butler, a VFP member, Viet Nam veteran and the eighth longest serving POW in U.S. history. Justice must be meted out (by this administration) to the past administration regarding their criminal use of torture. Phil has written a book detailing the eight years he was held prisoner.

*Phil's credibility commands belief on a number of important issues: On torture by the United States Phil says, "Ironically, we Vietnam POW's received moral encouragement and strength from telling each other that we were different from the Vietnamese. We took the moral high road in assuring each other that Americans would never torture prisoners the way they were treating us." "Now I wonder if those responsible (for U.S. tortures) will be investigated and brought openly to justice. - - I think we should investigate everyone who is involved from top to bottom. Those who wrote the memos, those who sanctioned them, those who gave the orders, and those who carried them out." **

"If we are to get America back on moral track, there should be an independent investigation of the Bush administration to show how involved they were in violation of our constitution. And if they are proven guilty, they should be punished for their criminal behavior."

"Now I wonder if those responsible will be investigated and brought openly to justice. I know there is lots of resistance from CIA Director Leon Panetta and his predecessor who don't want the American people to know what took place and who set the policies. But that doesn't seem right to me."

We owe Phil Butler and all veterans no less for themselves and for future military personnel.

From Phil Butler's autobiography, *Three Lives of a Warrior

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September 7, 2011 for presentation at meeting with John Marti, Assistant U.S. Attorney