



Summer 2021, volume XXV, issue 3

VETERANS FOR PEACE NEWS

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL VETERANS FOR PEACE, CHAPTER 27

Veterans For Peace News is published quarterly by Mpls./St. Paul Veterans For Peace, Chapter 27.

Veterans For Peace works to increase awareness of the costs of war, restrain our government from intervening in the internal affairs of other nations, end the arms race, reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons, seek justice for veterans and victims of war, and abolish war as an instrument of national policy.

We pledge to use democratic and non-violent means to achieve our purpose.

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"There won't be any trumpets blowing come the Judgement Day — on the bloody morning after, one tin soldier rides away..."
(Potter & Lambert)

Time to end endless war



"Condemning war has not curbed armed conflict. Religion and education did not eliminate war. Warfare did not terminate more wars. Armed conflict simply breeds endless wars." Kilroy J. Oldster

"People say the war in Iraq is a bad war and the war in Afghanistan is a good war, but what's the difference between them? Democratic people around the world cannot accept that this is a good war. This is just endless war." Malalai Joya



"The prescription for endless war poses a far greater danger to Americans than perceived enemies do, for reasons the terrorist organizations understand very well." Noam Chomsky



"Little Bush says we are at war, but we are not at war because to be at war Congress has to vote for it. He says we are at war on terror, but that is a metaphor, though I doubt if he knows what that means. It's like having a war on dandruff; it's endless and pointless." Gore Vidal.

by Barry Riesch

As we just commemorated the 20th anniversary of 9/11 and watched the fall of Afghanistan, this would be a good time to reflect on how America's decisions in dealing with the tragic deaths of almost 3,000 people and the destruction of the World Trade Towers in New York City have worked out. I had hoped that we as a country would have made a different decision after that day. Responding in retaliation and violence was not what I would have ordered.

The violence of 9/11 was not confined; it spread throughout the world as America lashed out both at home and abroad. The deaths of almost 3,000 in New York became hundreds of

thousands (if not millions) of deaths from wars the U.S. launched in revenge. Tens of millions lost their homes.

In the name of freedom, and of vengeance, the United States invaded and occupied Afghanistan. Twenty years of needless war. 170,000 dead. Over \$2 TRILLION wasted. The last two decades of the war in Afghanistan have already taken more than 2,400 U.S. military lives, and seen more than 20,000 others wounded, numbers that sadly increased the final week. Let us mourn all of these losses and continue to fully support the President's decision to bring U.S. personnel home.

The last few weeks have illustrated that

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The Prez says. . .

by Mike McDonald

As I near the end of my term as president of VFP chapter 27, many things come to mind. Mostly it has been a very enriching experience for me personally. Working with the many peacemakers in our group has been both challenging and rewarding.

We choose to fight the biggest battle there is: trying to bring about peace. It's disheartening at times, but we choose to keep doing this hard work. I find protesting to be something I really enjoy. There are so many things that need to be changed in our country/world.

The words from Lao Tzu some 2500 years ago still ring true:

*"If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart."*

Peace to you all.



Protesting the treatment of Palestinians at Snelling and Summit avenues in St. Paul.

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this war never should have happened, that it was always unwinnable, something U.S. military leadership has privately admitted for nearly a decade. Our service-members deserve much more than to die in an unwinnable, failed U.S. war.

And now, further heartbreak as fleeing families desperate to escape to safety cram into evacuation aircraft. We have seen this story time and time again: horrific, war-first, egocentric, nation-building U.S. military adventurism around the world, whether in Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

We stayed for 20 years. Based on lies of Saddam having weapons of mass destruction, politicians were bamboozled and manipulated into voting to invade and occupy Iraq, the worst foreign policy decision of the modern era. And the millions of peace activists who marched against war, wrote letters, and spoke out loudly and clearly against this invasion were ignored. The Executive Branch was given sweeping authority to make war across borders and without limits. The conflict in the Middle East expanded under both Republican and Democratic Presidents, leading to U.S. wars in Libya, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, and more. We created the greatest migration and refugee crisis since World War II.

The attacks on 9/11 were also used as an excuse to change the relationship of the U.S. government to its citizens. In the name of safety the national security state was given expansive surveillance powers, threatening privacy and civil liberties. The Department of Homeland Security was created and with it ICE, Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Words like 'enhanced interrogation,' a euphemism for torture entered the American lexicon and the Bill of Rights was tossed aside.

"Never Forget" became a common expression in the United States after 9/11. Unfortunately, it was not only used to remember and honor the dead. Like "remember the Alamo," "never forget" was also used as a rallying cry to war. Twenty years later we are still living in the age of the 'War on Terror.'

We must never forget the lessons of 9/11 or the lessons of the Global War on Terror, lest we risk repeating the pain, death, and tragedy of the past 20 years.

Interesting to note that the U.S. history is long in

Afghanistan, but at a U.S. Special Forces camp near Kandahar, Afghanistan, on December 5, 2001, the Taliban offered an unconditional surrender. Furthermore, they would disband and disarm: a military force would no longer exist.

George W. Bush ignored the offer and continued attacking the Taliban until the end of his term. If only in self-defense the Taliban fought back, eventually regaining the battlefield initiative. Barack Obama fought the Taliban for eight years more. Donald Trump did so for the next four.

George Bush launched a war for oil and empire, invading two sovereign nations without provocation. He violated international law.

Twenty years later, after the squandering of thousands of lives

and trillions of dollars, President Biden withdrew American troops from Afghanistan and was blamed for the chaotic exit that followed.

The Taliban, who once offered to disarm and disband, have taken control of Afghanistan. The national media acknowledge the defeat, but trumpet "the end of America's longest war" as recompense. That is grossly misleading: American military violence rages on in the war on terrorism. U.S. combat troops remain stationed in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Kenya, Somalia, Yemen, Jordan, Kuwait, Djibouti, Qatar, the UAE, Turkey, the Philippines, and Cyprus, and we conduct counterterrorism operations in 61 additional countries around the world.

So, who are the real winners in the aftermath of 9/11? War profiteers. If you purchased \$10,000 of stock evenly divided among America's top five defense contractors on September 18, 2001, the day President George W. Bush signed the Authorization for Use of Military Force in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and faithfully reinvested all dividends, it would now be worth \$97,295.

This is a far greater return than was available in the overall stock market over the same period. \$10,000 invested in an S&P 500 index fund on September 18, 2001, would now be worth \$61,613.

That is, defense stocks outperformed the stock market

Peace is where the bells are

by Larry Johnson (Armistice Bell Maker)

Chapter 27 annual Armistice celebration is, as always, November 11, and once again we invite churches and other centers of worship to join in. When bells rang around the world at the end of World War I, it was mostly in churches because they had the bells. St. Joan of Arc in Minneapolis holds an Armistice Day service on November 11, whether or not it falls on a Sunday, but we encourage all Spiritual Centers to at least ring bells 11 times at 11 a.m. on the day you worship closest to November 11. VFP members are pleased to speak at events, and this, or a similar statement, can be read and printed in the bulletin:

The Armistice of 1918 ended the horrendous slaughter of World War I, called THE WAR TO END ALL WARS. When the Armistice was signed, exuberant joy erupted around the world, with bells ringing then and for many years at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. That practice slowly faded away, especially in the U.S., but now we ring bells again, many bells, 11 times at that sacred moment. With a moment of silence, we remember the soldiers and civilians killed in warfare in every country. We commit to honor Veterans by working and praying for Peace until this assault on the Will of the Creator of us all is finally over.

VFP, chapter 27 revived this practice in 1991 when the first President Bush justified the Persian Gulf War, saying, “Sometimes you need a war to end wars.” Chapter co-founder, Steve McKeown (Armistice Bell Maker), with other early members, said, “World War I was already called the war to end all wars, and it hasn’t gone well.” They responded by renewing the practice of bell ringing on November 11.

In 2007 we began asking places of worship to join in, ringing tower or hand-held bells 11 times, on or around that powerful 11-11-11 moment. We know of over 200 churches joining in, many of them continuing each year. Please let us know if you will observe this commitment with us this year by calling 612-821-9141.

In 2011 we rang a bell 11 times on November 11 at Hennepin County Government Center. Eleven of us then slept on the Plaza, in freezing weather, taking turns standing guard for the right of young people to OCCUPY for a more just and peaceful community and world.

In 2012 we worked with Move to Amend and our

national Veterans for Peace to promote Armistice nationwide. Today there are November 11 ceremonies all over the country, each committing to work for Peace to end the unnecessary sacrifice of veterans, and the suffering of civilians in warfare. You can click on TAKE ACTION at www.veteransforpeace.org to access a myriad of Armistice resources

In 2013, 11 local members of VFP worked with sculptor Gita Ghei, on a State Arts Board grant, to design and cast our own Armistice Bells for Peace. Since that time many of those bells ring in unison at events, or individually when a VFP bell maker speaks.

In 2018, the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice, we hosted the national Veterans for Peace convention in St. Paul on Kellogg Boulevard. The street is named for Frank Kellogg, the only Minnesotan to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for working with Aristide Briand of France to ratify the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact to outlaw war. Also in 2018, traditional veterans’ groups, like the American Legion, followed our lead, replacing their 21 gun salute with 21 bells ringing at the 11th hour on November 11. Sadly, this was a singular event, as the next year bells “melted” back into guns, even as so many bells for centuries have been literally melted down to create weapons of warfare.

In 2021 we encourage all to create your own Armistice Remembrance, and/or attend our VFP event at Sheridan Park Veterans Memorial in N.E. Mpls. Discovered by member and Armistice Bell Maker, Bruce Berry, the space holds a huge “world at peace” sculpture (my interpretation), surrounded by plaques representing our wars from the Civil War thru Afghanistan and Iraq. The plaques approach the truth more than most “war memorials” – e.g. on Iraq, a N.E. Mpls. Veteran is quoted: “Saddam was a bad man, and we did our job, but in the end, I think it was mostly about oil.” The walking path quotes Eisenhower: “Only justice, fairness, consideration, and cooperation can lead us to peace.” He is joined by Mother Teresa saying: “If we have no peace, it’s because we forget we belong to each other.”

Finally, if your November 11 is not complete without walking, some of us will leave the World War I Memorial at Xerxes and Victory Memorial Drive at 8 a.m. to follow the river to the 10:30 ceremony. The Victory Drive Memorial includes trees and markers to remember 568 Hennepin County residents who died in World War I. There is also a concrete line on the ground where the flagpole casts a shadow at 11 on November 11. In 2019 we walked 11 miles,

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The most dangerous organization in the world

by Steve McKeown

This is what the noted linguist and long time anti-war author/speaker Noam Chomsky said of the Republican Party in 2016, and he repeated it again in 2018. Since then it is as though the Party has tried to cement the case Chomsky was making; i.e., the continuous trashing of the environment, voter suppression, denial of Covid and effective treatments for it, the hatred in tone and policy on our Southern border, the vilification of Asians, especially Chinese, and the refusal by most Republicans to hold accountable the Capitol attackers and their head cheerleader.

Chomsky is not known to be a fan of the Democratic Party, and is often a thorn in its side, but when asked in an April 18, 2021 interview with Mehdi Hasan, Chomsky was asked if he still felt the same about the Republican Party.

He replied, "They're the only organization in human history that is dedicated, with passion, to ensuring that human survival, survival of organized human society, will be impossible. That's exactly their program since 2009, when they shifted to a denialist position under the impact of the Koch Brothers juggernaut."

The denialist position Chomsky meant was that of climate change.

Given the existential threat of climate change and the United States contribution to it, along with the local and global cooperation needed to turn things around, this cannot be the thrust of any political party's plank since it would make all of us walk their plank, as it were.

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overall by 58 percent during the Afghanistan War.

Moreover, given that the top five biggest defense contractors (Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics) are of course part of the S&P 500, the remaining firms had lower returns than the overall S&P returns.

These numbers suggest that it is incorrect to conclude that the Taliban's immediate takeover of Afghanistan upon the U.S. departure means that the Afghanistan War was a failure. On the contrary, from the perspective of some of the most powerful people in the U.S., it may have been an extraordinary success. Notably, the boards of directors of all five defense contractors include retired top-level military officers.

According to a Brown University report, between 2001 and 2019, the U.S. war in Afghanistan caused the emission of 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases and resulted in deforestation and the toxic burning of munitions.

What's happening in Afghanistan is a devastating reminder of the enormous consequences ahead if we fail to stop this cycle of endless war and forced displacement from repeating yet again.

Here's one way we can do this: we dismantle the war machine and CUT the \$750 billion annual defense budget. Here's another: we STOP centering elite and corporate needs, and instead center human rights and dignity in U.S. foreign policy. More? We work to address the root causes of migration, like our forever wars, and support the resettlement of refugees. And here's yet another way: we END congressional authorizations for endless war anywhere in the world.

As Rep. Barbara Lee put it so powerfully: it's time for the U.S. to "engage in the world in a way that shows our leadership, our values, and our respect for human rights. It's important that we recognize that we have more in common with the rest of the world than not."

It's time to end endless war.

Thank you for working for peace,

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way below freezing, from Minneapolis to the Capitol where City of Bells, www.cityofbells.com, rings the replica Liberty Bell rung 11 times at 11. This is only 6 miles, and expected temperature is 38, so let me know if you want to be there at larryjvfp@gmail.com. I'll keep you up to date on the details.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Three days of remembrance and response, 2021



Members and friends of Peace Ribbon Minnesota hold colorful banners with messages of peace.

by Joan Johnson

In 1945, the U.S. detonated nuclear weapons over two cities in Japan; Hiroshima was targeted on August 6th, and Nagasaki on August 9th, killing up to 226,000 people, mostly civilians. In the horrific aftermath, many more died from their injuries and radiation sickness.

In the early morning of Friday, August 6th, Veterans for Peace, Chap. 27, along with WAMM and the St Paul - Nagasaki Sister City Committee, helped commemorate the 76th year anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. As part of a 3-day remembrance series, “Ceremony of the Cranes” was held at the Lyndale Park Peace Garden and was emceed by JoAnne Blatchley, who heads up the Hiroshima/Nagasaki Commemoration Committee.

Strong Buffalo (a.k.a. Thomas LaBlanc) was our keynote speaker. Having both Native American (tribal affiliation: Sioux and Dakota) and Japanese American heritage, he had visited Hiroshima many times over the years, and has been an outspoken critic of nuclear weapons and war in general. (See Craig Wood’s article on page 8). He spoke eloquently, yet in simple terms, about “recycling peace,” “standing in balance,” “trying your best as a human being every day to be peaceful,” and the idea that “from peace comes love.” He closed his talk with a Dakota prayer honoring the four directions.

Next, Larry Johnson and Elaine Wynn related the story

of 12-year-old Sadako Sasaki and the 1,000 paper cranes. The detailed background information they gave us about her life on the outskirts of Hiroshima —her family, neighborhood, school, interests, and friendships— made you feel like you really got to know her. She could be your 12-year-old daughter, niece, sister, granddaughter or friend. Young Sadako did not view her radiation-caused leukemia as a death sentence, but was instead determined to beat it. After being encouraged by her friend, along with her hospital roommate, she began folding 1,000 paper cranes. She believed that doing this would ultimately help her to recover and be whole again. Sadly, she never left that hospital bed, but her legacy lives on. Sadako and the cranes have become a symbol for world peace in Japan after her death in 1955. A statue of Sadako holding a golden crane was erected in 1958 in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. A plaque on the statue says: “This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace in the world.”

After the story about Sadako, we heard music from Joe Alfano and Cheryl Paschke. VFP members then rang bells 11 times, remembering the Nov. 11th, 1918 signing of the Armistice which ended World War I, and which the world viewed at that time as “the war to end all wars.”

This was followed by a moment of silence and reflection at 8:15 a.m. which was the time that the Hiroshima

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bombing commenced 76 years ago. We thought about and prayed for so many who have been affected by this bombing, the dead, their grieving families, and those who still suffer from physical damage and disfigurement, as well as emotional and psychological trauma.

After this time of silence, our group of over 70 attendees were given paper cranes (folded at the Tea Ceremony the day before), which we carried with us in a procession down a hill, winding between shrubs, flowers, greenery and trees in this very unique and picturesque park. We were led by members and friends of Peace Ribbon Minnesota, who held colorful banners with different messages of peace and pictures of people and things they cherish and hold dear, which could be lost were there to be a nuclear incident again. They led us to the area by the Peace Bridge, which holds in its foundation two stones given by Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing survivors. As in the past, this year's Hiroshima ceremony was once again a very sobering reminder of why we need to speak out against nuclear war and its preparations. This event personalizes its enormous tragedy and makes us realize that war IS hate, while, in the words of Strong Buffalo, "peace IS love."

After the program, several participants stayed at the garden to take part in a healing meditation, led by Nancy Hyvarinen.

The Hiroshima Nagasaki Commemoration Committee hosted two other events —a Japanese Tea Ceremony in the same location on August 5th, and a Nagasaki Commemoration on August 8th at Como Park in St. Paul. The cities of St. Paul and Nagasaki are "sister cities." Sister Cities International is an organization created after World War II, which pairs two cities together to promote peace and cultural exchanges. St. Paul and Nagasaki were officially declared "sister cities" on December 7, 1955, being the first such relationship between an Asian and an American city. Through these community events, they encourage reflection on the past and hope for the future through action in the present. They call for the total abolition of nuclear weapons throughout the world as one measure of ensuring a just and lasting peace.

For further information on their organization, contact: www.stpaulnagasaki.org or MSPHNCC@gmail.com or phone: 952-261-3891

To read Strong Buffalo's poetry, check out his website at oyatehotanin.org, and to learn the complete story of Sadako, visit sadakosasaki.com.

The national perspective

by Dave Logsdon

"If we want to fight people in this world, we should fight them with pillows, pillows filled with food, medicine and music ...that would be much cheaper than bombs."

Alice Walker

Stating the obvious, these are vexing times. Veterans For Peace, nationally and locally, is trying not to lose our focus with so many fires to be put out and not enough fire-fighters to put them out! What we can do, and have done successfully, is leverage our limited numbers, amplify our voices in the struggle for peace and justice.

"It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

Eleanor Roosevelt

The very accomplished crew at our national office is doing an incredible job of leveraging and amplifying your voices. There is still work to do, bridging the gap between the older, predominantly white vets and a ever increasing group of younger vets. We have much to learn from each other. As an older white guy, I need to continue to decolonize myself before I try to decolonize others. Younger vets can learn from us as well. Veterans for Peace has survived and thrived for over 35 years. We have a great mission statement and a great logo, but more than that is a moral fortitude that rises from passion and compassion of its membership. I'm in this struggle to the end and I have the tattoo to prove it.

"The future ain't what it used to be."

Yogi Berra

Yogi makes perfect sense, it ain't what it used to be. Our expectations for ourselves, our children, our grandchildren have been lowered. If we don't stop the environmental oblivion express soon, what kind of world will future generations have. Think of VFP as a toolbox that you can use to create awareness. For example, National VFP has started Gamers for Peace to meet military recruiters on the cyber battlefield for the hearts and minds of teenagers. This is just one of the creative ways that we can communicate our messages of peace. The toolbox does nothing without your imagination. Imagine, create, leverage, amplify! Peace out.

"Tears of joy are like the summer raindrops pierced by sunbeams."

Hosea Ballou

Taking the long way home poet and activist retraces steps from Vietnam to today

by Craig Wood

"If you don't remember your heritage, you don't know where you came from — consequently, you don't know where you're going."

Jim Northrup, Anisihinaabe poet, author and story teller

Tom LaBlanc, aka Strong Buffalo, didn't know if he was Native American until he sneaked a peek at a document on his social worker's desk when he was 15. Until then, the only clue about his identity came from the grandmother of two brothers he'd met in South Minneapolis at a Catholic boys home. He remembers vividly sitting on her lap while "she patted my head like a dog and listened to her Ojibwa words as her daughter translated them into English — this little boy is Indian...look at his eyes... he looks like lost deer that come out of woods. You boys take care of him — he's your brother — we take care of lost children. That's his name — Little Lost Deer."

Even though his unmarried mother was a Dakota Sioux from the Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota, LaBlanc knew nothing about Indians. All he knew, was that the old, wrinkled woman with white hair who wore a beaded headband and a buckskin dress with a brain-tanned scent, looked beautiful and made him feel like he was part of a family, and that to him, felt powerfully good.

He never met his father who was presumed to be Japanese-American and he was taken from his mother who was sterilized without her knowledge four days after his birth in Minneapolis. After that he was sent away to be raised by the Catholic Welfare Association in Hennepin County where he bounced back and forth between foster care facilities throughout south and north Minneapolis. His earliest memories are being tied to a chair when he was three and beaten and called derogatory names by a WW2 Veteran who didn't like the way he looked and remembers his surrogate mother in a bra and panties drinking beer in the living room. LaBlanc said the vet screamed, "I fought your kind in the war" and "Why do I have to take care of you?" at him.

Offensive remarks about how he looked hounded him for much of his life, recalling a teenager who repeatedly teased him about being a fish-head or a chink until an Ojibwa foster brother told LaBlanc those words were bad. Not understanding all the implications of ethnic slurs, the ten-year-old LaBlanc sat in his chair seething until school was out and then chased down the teenager and fought him



until he ran away. Not content to win the fight, he followed the kid home and ended up getting swatted in the backyard with a straw broom by the boy's mother who told him he was a "damn savage."

It wasn't long before he got really good at winning fights and became a Minneapolis (North Side) City Champion in Junior Golden Gloves for two years. He said his boxing coach told him he had "the killer-instinct like Rocky Marciano."

There was little applause outside the ring. He got into trouble frequently, received poor grades and was playing with cigarettes and alcohol. He'd even lost his part-time job climbing up drainpipes or trees so he could crawl through upper story windows and open ground floor doors for a North Side burglary ring. A home visit from two detectives with reports, he said, about "a little brown monkey" involved in area break-ins ended that.

He'd had it with adoption interviews too after noticing that white orphans were getting placed in foster homes and he wasn't. It got to the point where he became reluctant to show up for interviews because those who were looking to adopt were almost invariably white and they wanted white kids. Sometimes he wouldn't hold back his contempt for what he considered to be a charade and would snarl or growl at potential foster parents.

It wasn't long before there was talk about sending LaBlanc, who had been through 105 social placements, to a state correctional facility in Minnesota until he was 21. Not wanting to spend the next eight years in jail, he was given the option of going to a Catholic boarding school in Nebraska called Boys Town. About a week later he was put on a Greyhound bus to Omaha with a note pinned on him

that read, "To Whom it May Concern."

The new school found a spot for him on their football team which gave him a chance to take buses and planes to cities around the country. During the summers he'd travel back to South Minneapolis to an ongoing seasonal romance with the widow of a friend who he thought of as a brother. Their relationship with plans to marry ended abruptly a few months before he was supposed to graduate prompting the bewildered and enraged star football player to run away from Boys Town, steal a car and break into a family's house and eat food.

He was caught later in suburban Minneapolis, but was able to escape extradition back to Nebraska after then Attorney General Walter Mondale intervened on his behalf. While still on probation he skipped town and rented a dumpy apartment in Chicago where he fathered a child who died shortly after birth from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). This brought about an inquest and spurious accusations from policemen who thought the couple murdered their baby.

The sorrow of living in a place where the baby died became too much for him. He began drinking heavily and wound up taking a job on a Kansas ranch for a year or so and learned how to ride horses. His boss who LaBlanc said liked him, fired him after he got into a mean fight with

another Native American from an Oklahoma prison.

Back in Minneapolis and not believing he had much to live for, he joined the Marines. He had hoped to be an infantryman, but the Marines had other ideas when he scored high on a technical ability test. Making matters worse, was his new girlfriend's naval captain father who hated his guts. "Her dad made me stand at attention for maybe 45 minutes while he yelled racist things in my ears," said LaBlanc.

Thinking the captain would find more ways to punish him, he went AWOL and walked or hitchhiked through Tennessee, Arkansas and Texas until he was picked up by the highway patrol and sent to the brig in San Diego. He was released a few days later by a lieutenant who remembered him from Boys Town on the condition that he play football for the Marines. He started boxing again, too.

Leadership skills emerged after he joined a tough, advanced-infantry outfit. At the request of his superior and after winning the respect of troops for his fighting skills, he helped train them. He was "Marine of the Month" before going to Vietnam.

The first of his seven military operations was in Vietnam's Central Highlands in 1968 where he first saw fellow Marines ripped apart by bullets. That scenario along with adrenaline rushes and feeling his leg shake uncontrollably during a firefight changed his mind about not caring if he lived or died.

His excellent eyesight along with his ability to analyze predicaments didn't go unnoticed by higher-ups who started including him in briefings and he was put on point by the battalion commander. He saw a lot of action and used crumpled napkins and pastry plates at our coffee shop table as

LeBlanc, Continued on page 10

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**"When we Glorify War,
we are not honoring the dead,
we are enticing the living to
join them."**

Smedley Butler
Four-Star USMC General

LeBlanc, from page 9

visual aids to show me combat strategies he'd devised. He also wrote about 250 poems while in the service that he left on a bus.

His views on the war's legitimacy started to change after he caught a glimpse of an enemy who looked remarkably like him plus, he was beginning to feel sorry for unarmed and starving Vietnamese he saw creep out of the jungle at night to get food. He began to talk out loud against the war and became more disgusted with his deployment after he was assigned to guard a Coca-Cola plant and a Mobile Oil refinery near the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Plans for his promotion and awards including medals were canceled after word of his open dissent got back to headquarters. He left Vietnam disillusioned, but with thousands of dollars that he'd saved from monthly checks and some clandestine side-deals.

More about LaBlanc and his journey to activism in our next newsletter.

United Nations Treaty to Ban Nuclear Weapons Local Actions Update

by Steve McKeown

In our last newsletter I wrote an article about the National VFP's project Golden Rule sailboat that was to come here and sail down the Mississippi to raise awareness of the UN Treaty. Unfortunately, due to the low river depth, this won't happen until next year. On the good side, it will give us more time to plan for it.

I was on a Zoom meeting with other members from the End War Committee of Women Against Military Madness (WAMM) to discuss the UN Treaty with Senator Tina Smith's office and to request her to endorse the Treaty. We have not heard back yet, and we continue to send her post-cards in support of our request. These can be picked up at the WAMM office for you to sign and send.



Vfp chapter member Bruce Berry at the Governor's Mansion in St. Paul.

The Peace Index

Afghanistan war ends, but defense budget goes up

by Frank Fuller

According to Congresswoman Barbara Lee, the Defense budget since 9/11 has increased almost 50 percent (when adjusted for inflation). She adds that we have spent \$32 million every hour since 2001 on war. And the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost us over \$4 trillion.

So you might have thought that, since we left Afghanistan, the Defense Budget would go down a little, or at least stabilize and not go up. But you'd be wrong.

Last spring, Biden requested an additional \$11 billion for the basic DOD budget, but that wasn't enough for Congress. It decided, in its infinite wisdom, that the Defense Department needed an additional \$25 billion. The Senate Armed Services Committee voted for that increase in a bipartisan 25-1 vote in July. Sen. Elizabeth Warren was the lone vote against it. The House Armed Services Committee voted for that increase in early September.

And possible increases to the defense budget didn't end there. Sen. Mike Rogers of Alabama proposed an amendment to add five percent to the House version and then increase the defense budget five percent each year after that. Again, this passed on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis. If this happened, it would actually add over \$1 trillion to the defense budget over the next 10 years.

And, of course, since this is the defense budget, there are no tax increases or anything to pay for it. And news coverage of these votes is almost nonexistent.

Compare that with the coverage of the \$3.5 trillion budget reconciliation bill Congress is considering. Moderates and conservatives are, of course, outraged about the costs, even though tax increases and cuts are part of the bill and almost make it pay for itself. And media coverage of the bill is intense.

So it's worth looking at some of the specific items in the reconciliation bill. Specific items don't cost much, relatively speaking, and they would add a lot to the quality of life in 21st century America.

\$200 billion for universal preschool for children aged three and four. The Biden administration says this would

benefit five million children and save the average family \$13,000. Child care workers would earn at least \$15 an hour. And there would be additional funds to provide meals for children in need.

About \$100 billion for two years of free community college. The student debt crisis is a major drag on the economy as well as on the financial health of graduates.

\$110 billion a year to fund the child tax credit payments through 2025. As part of the Coronavirus relief acts of the last two years, parents have received enhanced benefits of up to \$300 a month for each child. Extending the benefits could decrease child poverty by 50%.

\$107 billion to provide permanent residency status to qualifying immigrants, and makes DACA (The Dreamers Act) permanent.

\$198 billion for clean energy initiatives.

\$332 billion for affordable housing and rent and down payment assistance.

Much of these funds would come from increased taxes on the wealthiest as well as on increased corporate taxes. The bill also would provide the IRS with funds to go after high income tax cheats. The wealthiest one percent of Americans are the nation's most egregious tax evaders, failing to pay as much as \$163 billion in taxes per year, according to a Treasury Department report released in September. The Biden administration says the amount of taxes the wealthy evade comes to \$700 billion a year. Whatever the amount, beefing up IRS enforcement would bring in much more money than it cost. It would also decrease the inequality in this country.

Ensure all Veterans access to the best healthcare available at the VA!

by Arlys Herem and Jeff Roy,
Chapter 27 SOVA Action Committee

One of the most promising pieces of Congressional legislation this year for expanding access for veterans to VA healthcare was the subject of our recent Call to Action Alert to SOVA activists throughout the nation. H.R. 4673 Ensuring Veterans' Smooth Transition Act or the "EVEST Act" would, if passed, require the VA to automatically enroll veterans in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) enrollment system.

It passed the House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on July 28, with all the committee's Democratic members in favor and all Republican members opposing. Over 124 VA SOVA activists and supporters across the nation sent letters to their Congressional Representatives last week calling for the bill's passage in the full House!

The legislation requires VA to provide veterans with a notice of enrollment and a way to opt out, if they choose. Veterans will still be required to demonstrate eligibility for care based on service-connected conditions, income, or other factors.

Given the tragic events in Afghanistan in recent days, it is especially urgent that Congress enact this legislation, including moving up the August 1, 2022, implementation date, as soon as possible. In addition to physical injuries veterans suffer from burn pits, traumatic brain injuries, and combat-related wounds, tens of thousands of veterans who served in U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other locations will be profoundly affected by the U.S. failure in Afghanistan. These veterans risked life and limb in support of the nation's military aims, and many of them lost friends. The psychological toll on all our veterans will be severe, and devastating for some.

The bill applies to all new veterans but has particular relevance to the approximately 175,000 combat service members who leave the military annually and qualify for five years of free VA medical care under the Dignity for Warriors Act of 2008 for conditions related to their service. A large percentage of them are unaware of their eligibility

for this care and never enroll to receive it. Automatic enrollment is the least Congress can do for those who served.

The reality is that many veterans still do not understand that they are even eligible for VA benefits, or the services VA provides. Some are influenced by the negative depiction of the VA promoted by conservative-corporate sources that do their best to influence the media. And yet, overwhelming evidence, from several large studies, shows that the VA delivers high quality care that is often superior to that provided by the private sector! Automatically enrolling all veterans will encourage them to seek the care they deserve from the VHA. This will be essential for veterans' well-being and successful adjustment to civilian life.

Rather than spending more funds in the private sector, which will eventually lead to more restrictive eligibility criteria due to insufficient funds, the VA should expand its integrated health care to all veterans.

And though there are some nine million veterans who are served by the VA, there are millions of

other veterans who have been denied this high-quality integrated and veteran-focused system of healthcare. These veterans are those who receive "bad paper" discharges. Discharge status can impact a veteran's life.

Military discharges include: Honorable, Under Honorable Conditions (General), Other Than Honorable (OTH), Bad Conduct, or Dishonorable. Honorable, General and Other Than Honorable discharges are "administrative" discharges done by the servicemember's military command and without a court-martial. Often a General or OTH discharge is related to LGBTQ status, PTSD or mental health related problems or Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Over 500,000 veterans with OTH discharges are barred from health care, housing assistance and educational benefits. Many are in the high risk for suicide group and many homeless veterans fall into one of those discharge types.

Although legally these veterans are eligible for care, benefits are denied under VA regulations put into place because there still aren't enough funds to care for all veterans. A veteran must fit into 'eligibility criteria' to receive VA health care. Congress is moving towards outsourcing veterans' care to the private sector and limiting care at the VA or closing VA facilities altogether. The current evaluation of VA health care should consider expanding to include

VA, Continued on next page

The bus gets a new paint job



Craig Wood repainted the VFP bus this summer and said of the experience: "Repainting the bus wasn't much fun — it was hot and oil paint tends to run on vertical surfaces. Beauty may only be skin deep, but that's deep enough sometimes. Just look at that pretty bus!" The bus has been parked at many key events throughout the summer

VA, from previous page

these veterans as well as others who do not meet current criteria. Rather than spending more funds in the private sector, which will eventually lead to more restrictive eligibility criteria due to insufficient funds, the VA should expand its integrated health care to all veterans.

Join us in our efforts to make this happen by going to our website at veteransforpeace.org/sova and signing up to receive our Calls to Action or email us for information at sovamail@yahoo.com. We are also planning our Second SOVA National Lobbying Conference in Washington D.C. for February 13-17, 2022. Like the first Conference in 2020,

we will gather to meet SOVA activists from across the nation, get training in lobbying techniques, and spend two days lobbying Members of Congress in small groups. We hope you will consider joining us there. But, even if you can't attend, you can always help us raise the needed funds by donating at the website link above. Thanks, and look for future email announcements for our in-person SOVA actions at the Minneapolis VA!



Wednesdays at the Peace Bridge continues.

Graveyard for empires will lead to something better

by Ron Staff

Perhaps we could thank our Afghan international friends for providing a graveyard for empires. Possibly, the urge to empire, will finally be extinguished from the large littered field of political toys in our young democratic republic experiment.

The pandemic revealed inequity as well as “white, male privilege,” which needs rinsing out of the “body politic,” ought to give our governing committees enough to do while giving short shrift to phoney issues of “culture warring” to distract and divide us, one from the other, to the benefit of the united, bottom-line-bandit citizens [Can you say “corporate betters”?].

The energy devoted to international dominance, always colored as anything but protecting profits, has led affairs for a good portion of the democratic experiment we are all responsible for having let happen. When leaders do not hear the still small voice of humans, while being guided by some cash, flash for their power coffers, democracy loses.

In looking up the spelling of that word, which in my dictionary comes just before coffer-dam, it’s meaning draws

thought to the need for a political equivalent.

Once money is out of politics, there may be a way to build back an improved process for both local, regional, national and international governing. How to solve problems rather than create them.

How to build on kindness rather than dominance. For if governing comes from the consent of those governed, don’t they need to be “in” on all decisions. This would militate against any secrecy.

Wasn’t that one of the benefits of “the fall of communism” under President Ronald Reagan. Their KGB records were opened to scholars after the “fall of communism.” Yet, American secret agencies remained secret [in our land of the free?]. Was that anomalous or an overblown claim by the bottom-line-bandits?

Such political puffery from “foreign entanglements,” can be used (anything to get voter attention).

In Kabul a suicide bomber is matched by a robotic response without any PTSD [according to officers, who do not do it]. Killer robots to avoid personal injury? It is hard to follow the bouncing “war ball.”

EVENTS CALENDAR

ONGOING EVENTS

5-6 pm Weds. Lake Street/Marshall Ave. Peace Bridge vigil.

4:45 pm Weds., 50th and Halifax, Mpls. Grandmothers for Peace Vigil. (FFI call 612-927-7607)

3-4 pm Mondays. White Bear Lake peace vigil. Corner of 4th Street and Hwy 61.

Monthly VFP chapter meeting, 2nd Sun., 6 pm. They are now virtual meetings. Contact VFP at 612-821-9141 for information on how to connect.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 10, Open Streets, Lyndale Ave., Mpls

Oct. 11, 11 am. Indigenous Peoples Day, Mankato bell ringing ceremony. Reconciliation Park.

Oct. 19, 6 pm. Peacestock.

Oct. 24, Open Streets, Minnehaha Ave., Mpls.

Nov. 11, 10:30 am, Armistice Day event. Sheridan Park Veterans Memorial, 1300 Water Street in N.E. Mpls. (Behind the old Grain Belt Brewery building, north on Marshall from Broadway for one block, then left on Water Street and down to the River.) If you wish to join the Armistice Walk, we will leave at 8 am from the World War I Memorial at Xerxes and Victory Memorial Drive in North Minneapolis. We will walk by the river and arrive at Sheridan Park before 10:30.

Peacestock will be on Zoom Oct. 19

by Bill Habedank

Originally we had planned a live Peacestock for October 16th in Mankato, but due to the COVID19 re-emergence as a threat to health, Peacestock will revert to a Zoom event on October 19th at 6:00pm.

Peacestock is co-sponsored by VFP Chapters 27 and 115. We have retained our keynote speakers Adrienne Kinne, President of National VFP, and Gary Butterfield, VFP San Diego, to speak to our theme of "Militarism/Environment: Is militarism providing the security we seek." Both speakers are in the VFP working group Climate Crisis and Militarism.

Music will be provided by Parchouli as well as short addresses by other groups about their efforts including the Kessel Peace Institute in Mankato, MN.

Our website (www.peacestockvfp.org) will soon be brought up to date about how to register for this event and how to make donations.

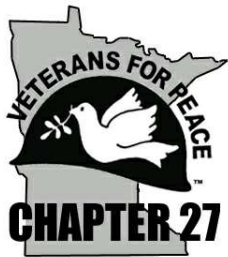
We feel this theme is an important topic that must be brought to peoples's attention. Hope you will join us for this informative discussion.

WORLD BEYOND WAR

VFP members Leah Bolger, Bruce Gagnon, and Paul Chappell
are among the impressive International Speakers Bureau,
headed up by David Swanson.

**It is worth CHECKING out and
SUPPORTING this bureau.**

www.worldbeyondwar.org/speakers/



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SUPPORT THE TROOPS! BRING THEM HOME ALIVE NOW!

As of Sep. 11, 2021:

At least 8,492 dead in Iraq and Afghanistan;
over one million injured veterans.

An estimated 22 veterans die from suicide each day,
amounting to over 24,090 over the past three years.



Friend Eric J Garcia on facebook or follow at [elmacheteillustrated](#) @instagram.