

IN MY OPINION**Caroline Porter****Economic crisis intertwined with Iraq War**

I may not be an economic genius, but it doesn't take an "expert" to understand that the unjustified war in Iraq has drained this country of hundreds of billions of dollars that should have been invested here at home. No wonder our economy is failing. We are not only sending our precious resource of bright and patriotic young people to Iraq, we are spending 1.5 billion dollars a week on that war — funds that should be invested in the United States for education, highways, bridges, electrical grids, new energy sources and most importantly, human beings. President Dwight Eisenhower has been widely quoted on this issue, but it's worth repeating:

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signified, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."

Citizens in our country are no longer the tallest among those of industrialized countries. Why? Because our health care system is so lacking, far too many of us are not getting the nutrition or health care needed. What a shame. What a disgrace. Conservatives scream about government health care programs, but everyone aged 65

and over in this country is on a government health care program called Medicare — and conservative recipients say not a word. Why not Medicare for all citizens? It's a universal health care plan and the government runs Medicare quite well, thank you. In fact, those of us on Medicare can choose our own doctors and hospitals and don't have to wait for treatment or surgery. That's more than one can do with an HMO or PPO private health care plan.

And while we are being embarrassed by the squandering of our vast resources, we might consider the latest news that one out of every four homeless people in this country is a combat veteran. We are also discovering that our returning veterans are getting extremely poor care at places like Walter Reed Hospital in Washington D.C., right under the collective nose of Congress. Does the non-veteran population know the Veterans Administration is giving benefits hand over fist to veterans who have never been overseas? And that every state has different standards for who gets benefits and who does not?

There are two ways we can alleviate this problem, 1) stop sending our young people into harm's way and 2) allocate more money



for returning combat veterans.

It seems as though the last priority we have in this country is human beings. We talk, talk, talk about our respect for human life, but that's just for the lives we like. The so-called "pro-lifers," for example, honor the lives of unborn fetuses, but have no respect for the judgment, health or welfare

of women. President Bill Clinton concerned himself with the lives of farmers, business owners and corporations, but trashed the individual lives of factory workers and the middle class through enactment of NAFTA and CAFTA. We minimize the value of the lives of our immigrants, legal or not. Most of the twelve million undocumented immigrants in this country, with their fake social security cards, are hard-working and contributing to Social Security and paying taxes through their paychecks. And they are human beings who deserve a humane solution to their situation.

Our government has invested hundreds of billions of dollars in a war that has not only caused four thousands deaths of our young men and women, but hundreds of thousands of deaths of Iraqi civilians. Directing that kind of money into our own economy would not only have saved many lives, but vastly improved our country's economic health. The two issues cannot be separated.

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