

# Vital Elements

Why I voted for the HR 4939 spending package.

I am writing in response to a recent *EW* letter (6/8) asking for an explanation for my vote in favor of funding our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am happy to provide the explanation.



If the vote on HR 4939, legislation that included \$67 billion for U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, had been a straight up or down vote on whether to continue with an open-ended commitment to the war in Iraq without a plan or timeline to bring home our troops promptly, I would have voted against it. But, that's not what the vote was about.

I have a lengthy history of opposition to the Iraq war. I was one of 133 in the House to vote against authorizing the war in October 2002. I first called for a timeline and a strategy for bringing our troops home more than a year ago in February 2005. I am one of 67 cosponsors of HJ Res. 55, a bipartisan bill calling for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. And I am one of 103 cosponsors of HJ Res. 73, a resolution introduced by decorated war veteran Rep. John Murtha (D-PA) calling for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Perhaps the letter writer should spend less time ranting at members of Congress who share her views and more time trying to persuade the vast majority of members who have not gone on record in favor of withdrawing from Iraq.

## I will not walk away from these and other volunteers serving our country in the military.

I have attended funerals of Oregon soldiers killed by roadside bombs due to inadequately armored vehicles. I have visited soldiers in the hospital who were gravely injured due to inadequate armor. I've sat with grieving mothers and dads who shared their concerns and loss. I just participated in the deployment ceremony for the 850 members of the Oregon National Guard deployed to Afghanistan, a mission I fully support funding. I will not walk away from these and other volunteers serving our country in the military.

Although I did not support the war in Iraq and believe our troops should come home this year, as long as they are deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, I will not vote to cut off vital supplies and benefits. For example, HR 4939 included: \$465.9 million in additional body armor; \$890 million for new up-armored Humvees; nearly \$2 billion to procure and develop countermeasures against roadside bombs; \$850 million over the president's request to make sure National Guard units deploying and troops currently in the field have upgraded vehicles; and nearly \$10 billion in bonus pay for troops and enhanced benefits in the event of death or traumatic injury.

While the letter writer may not care about ensuring our troops have adequate protective equipment and the benefits they've earned and deserve, I do.

In addition, the bill included \$300 million to sustain the African Peacekeeping force in Darfur and to transition to a U.N. force and \$66.290 million to meet humanitarian needs in Darfur. Apparently the letter writer believes Darfur refugees do not deserve aid and protection and that I should have voted against this critical funding. I disagree.

HR 4939 included several billion dollars for Hurricane Katrina victims to construct houses, repair levees, improve flood control, restore wetlands and ensure local governments can fund essential services. Apparently the letter writer believes that the government's obligation to the residents of the Gulf Coast has ended and that I should have voted against this critical funding. I disagree.

The bill also included an amendment that for the first time established a U.S. policy against permanent military bases in Iraq. Perhaps the letter writer thinks it isn't important for the U.S. to set a policy against permanent bases in Iraq. I think it is important.

As long as the Republicans control the Congress and set the rules – control that will hopefully end after this fall's election – they will meld critical humanitarian aid, essential funding for our troops and disaster aid into one take-it-or-leave-it package without ever giving members the opportunity to vote on a real bill, like Rep. Murtha's, to end our involvement in Iraq without undermining our troops.

While I remain opposed to the war in Iraq, HR 4939 funded too many important things for me to vote against it. You can be assured, however, that I will continue my outspoken efforts to bring our troops home in 2006.

*Peter DeFazio is a member of Congress representing Oregon's District 4.*

### THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### LEADERSHIP IS LAGGING

Oregon Democrats had their state convention in Eugene the weekend of June 2-4. Some 800 delegates, plus alternates and guests, came to renew political ties, listen to party leaders lead, and create a platform for November.

I was an "active guest" at the convention, working with a group of Eugene activists to put a meaningful anti-war statement into the Democratic agenda. During the convention I talked individually with nearly 100 people, listened in workshops to 150 more and attended two plenary sessions. I was impressed with the delegates' breadth of knowledge, experience and depth of commitment not just to their party, but to Oregon and the country.

The delegates were way ahead of their party leadership on two important issues: immigration and the war in Iraq. The original draft "Platform" and "Legislative Principles and Actions" were carefully ambiguous and non-committal in most instances where immigration was an implicit issue, and nearly silent on Iraq. The Democratic delegates put their own stamp on these documents, and stamped on them repeatedly.

Time and again, phrases would attribute rights and benefits to "citizens." In nearly every relevant instance, the language was amended to include "all people" in order to address the rights of undocumented immigrants. Phrases guaranteeing rights regardless of "age, disability, ethnicity, gender" were amended to include "legal status." Immigrants, with or without papers, were declared to have basic human rights.

War and peace was another area where delegates were out front.

Betsy Steffenson and Todd Huffman of the Lane County Democratic Party Peace Caucus succeeded in establishing a statewide Peace Caucus.

The Democratic Party leaders' original statement on Iraq was indistinguishable from the administration's stated policy (except for removal of American bases). Delegates re-

placed this with Peter DeFazio's five-point approach to withdrawal:

*Negotiate a timeline for withdrawal ... having U.S. troops out of Iraq within six to 12 months; renounce any U.S. interest in permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq; schedule a prompt and orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops from front line combat positions ... accelerate reconstruction spending and grant the bulk of reconstruction contracts to local companies employing Iraqis; reduce the Baghdad embassy to normal size and authority.*

One delegate remarked that what this country really needs is a five-point exit strategy from the military-industrial complex.

A "platform" is mostly useful to stand on so we can reach higher. The delegates, the people of the Democratic Party, stood up and spoke out, but the platform still does not reflect the needs and desires of an increasing number of voters.

*Michael Williams  
Eugene*

### REAFFIRMING RIGHTS

On June 12, at Mayor Kitty Piercy's behest, the Eugene City Council considered and passed a resolution (No. 4881) reaffirming the city's commitment to protecting the human rights of all community members, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. The resolution also reaffirmed the City's intention to continue its compliance with Oregon state law that prohibits local law enforcement agencies from "detecting or apprehending persons whose only violation of law is that they are persons of foreign citizenship residing in the U.S. in violation of federal immigration laws."

The mayor and City Council are to be commended for taking this principled stance. The current debate over immigration reform has unfortunately led some parties to engage in strong anti-immigrant rhetoric, including the use of demeaning stereotypes about members of the immigrant population. Such