

OPINION

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A Great Nation, Poisoned by War

Paying a heavy price for oil and empire

BY WILLIAM A. COLLINS

The full-page Army ad in the NAACP magazine reads, "You made them strong. We'll make them Army Strong." Besides

focusing on these vulnerable minority parents, recruiters are nowadays even trolling homeless shelters, their lures baited with offers of \$20,000 to leave

"home."

Further, enlistment standards have been lowered for intellectual capacity, emotional stability, and criminal record. These are our own homegrown mercenaries, sifted largely from among the poor.

And while such troops may sound expensive to muster, they're a bargain compared with the real live mercenaries we hire for Iraq and Afghanistan. American civilians over there get paid like generals, and foreign workers command princely sums compared to the scrabbly farms or brutal sweatshops back home. Like the Romans and British before us, our imperial military has become totally dependent on private workers.

Halliburton and Blackwater are the new Hessians. Locally a heroic-looking young man has just returned from early boot camp to start his senior year in high school. He wants to give something "back" to his country. His dad's not worried. After all, he survived war in his native El Salvador. His son probably will sur-

vive too. Maybe. Battlefield care is surely outstanding now, and only 3,800 troops have actually died at the front. Unfortunately, we don't keep such close tabs on the wounded. Too depressing.

If we did publish true figures of the emotionally maimed or the economically disabled, it might discourage some of our potential cannon fodder from

Expo. An impromptu peace demonstration ensued, where the vets discovered that the recruiters were not soldiers at all, but civilians looking military. Such is our shortage of troops.

For Iraqis, of course, the war is infinitely worse. We don't even count their casualties. We just assume that everyone we kill is an al-Qaida "suspect." Iraqi

tagon and the Veterans Administration for data on who will be returning in need of care. Unfortunately, such recordkeeping conflicts with a White House policy of downplaying the wounded, so as not to sap enthusiasm for the battle.

And now, verifying what we already knew in our hearts, Alan Greenspan, of all people, has confirmed that the war is actually just about oil. No kidding. Good thing our potential high school recruits don't read the financial pages. They might begin to wonder just what it is they're giving "back" to their country.

This poisonous oppressing of another country is quietly doing its insidious work on our souls. We're becoming hardened to dead and dying foreign civilians, homeless refugees, Muslim bashing, and destroyed cultures. Such forsaking of conscience is a heavy price for a little more oil and empire.

William A. Collins is a former state representative and a former mayor of Norwalk, Conn.

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enlisting. That in turn could undermine the \$700 million we spend each year on recruiters and the \$583 million for advertising and promotion.

But even recruiting has now gone mercenary. At the Veterans for Peace convention in St. Louis this summer, a group of Iraq vets stumbled upon an army recruiting team at the adjacent African American

wounded are simply assumed to die of their injuries in the privacy of their own battered homes. This is probably not a bad guess, since we have contrived to demolish their hospitals and water purification plants, and to chase their doctors abroad.

Our own wounded remain nearly as uncounted. Governors and veterans officials continually plead with the Pen-

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No Surprise on Southwick Vote

Smith always sides with Bush on judges

BY JEFF MERKLEY

It isn't surprising that Gordon Smith has given the thumbs-up to another one of Bush's judicial nominees.

Smith's vote last week to confirm Judge Leslie Southwick to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals is very troubling because of Southwick's history on the Mississippi Court of Appeals, routinely deciding against plaintiffs in cases involving racial discrimination, injured workers, and consumers.

Southwick has built his judicial career on denying justice to workers and minorities. His decisions include one reinstating a white employee who was fired for using a vulgar racial epithet in reference to a black co-worker. He also joined a court opinion which found that a mother's sexual orientation alone was grounds for denying her custody of her children.

When the President packs the bench with judges like

Southwick, he pits the government against the very people it should be serving.

Gordon Smith has voted in favor of every controversial nominee to the federal bench that Bush has offered during his term in office. They include J. Leon Holmes, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas who as past president of Arkansas Right to Life wrote that "concern for rape victims is a red herring because conceptions from rape occur with the same frequency as snowfall in Miami."

He voted for Charles Pickering to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Like Southwick, Pickering also had a very checkered past on civil-rights issues. He favored strengthening Mississippi's laws against interracial marriage, appealed for leniency in a cross-

burning case, and personally opposed the Democratic Party's integration of Mississippi's national convention delegation.

Smith backed Bush on the nomination of Miguel Estrada to D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals and William Pryor to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. Estrada had a long history of opposition to worker's rights, civil rights and the environment; and Pryor called the Voting Rights Act an "affront to federalism," opposing a provision that protects minority-voting rights.

Like 90 percent of the votes he casts in D.C., Smith is in lockstep with President Bush, but way out of step with the people he represents. He had a chance to take a stand for fair treatment of all Americans. Instead, he stood up for the kind of divisive politics that is tearing America apart.

Jeff Merkley is the Oregon Speaker of the House and a Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate seat held by Republican Gordon Smith.

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