

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Opinion

### What do we want? Peace.

Blown the New Year resolutions yet? It's not too late to make another one. This one is not just for you, but for the whole world. Make a resolution to help bring peace to the world. Sounds like a big chunk to chew, doesn't it? Here are some ideas for small beginnings:

- Join Columbia County Citizens for Human Dignity (CCCHD); for only \$10 you can help promote social justice in Columbia County and fight against acts that diminish the human dignity of any person or group. Or, go to their Winter Gala on January 27, only \$25, or go join their weekly Vigil For Peace every Sunday at 1:00 p.m. at the Scappoose Totem Pole. Learn more at [www.ccchd.colcenter.org](http://www.ccchd.colcenter.org).

- Buy a Mercy Corps Peace Kit for \$50 to help children and families in areas like Afghanistan and Sudan, at [www.mercycorps.org](http://www.mercycorps.org).

- Read the news at [www.antiwar.com](http://www.antiwar.com). Open your mind to other viewpoints.

- Join [www.truemajority.com](http://www.truemajority.com), a grassroots education and advocacy project, founded by Ben Cohen, Co-founder of Ben & Jerry's.

- Spread the message and prayer, *May Peace Prevail on Earth* from [www.worldpeace.org](http://www.worldpeace.org).

- Are you a Veteran for Peace? Join [www.veteransforpeace.org](http://www.veteransforpeace.org) or join Forest Grove resident and Vietnam Veteran Walt Wentz as he stands for peace on Pacific Avenue, across from the Forest Grove Library, every Thursday from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. with a sign that says, "BRING OUR TROOPS HOME."

- Are you a woman for peace? see the website, [www.codepink4peace.org](http://www.codepink4peace.org).

- <http://oregonpeaceworks.org> and other sites offer ideas, including these two; 1) Email, call or write your elected representatives and tell them to bring the troops home now, 2) Write a letter to the editor and take a stand in your community.

- Take the Voters For Peace Pledge at [www.democracyinaction.org](http://www.democracyinaction.org).

- Tell your friends and family what you are doing to help bring peace to the world and let them know what they can do to help.

It doesn't matter whether you are a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or Other; whether you believe in the current war in Iraq or don't – you can still hope for and work toward a goal of peace.

### When do we want it? Now.



### Out of My Mind

By Noni Andersen

While we are watching the devastation caused by warfare over people's religious preferences, Virgil Goode, a U.S. Congressman from Virginia, and a few others, are calling for a ban on elected officials if they are not Christians.

The trigger for this outcry was the election of Keith Ellison as U.S. Representative from Michigan. Ellison, who is Muslim, announced that he would swear his oath of office with his hand on a Quran (or Koran), instead of a Bible. The only surprising element of Ellison's choice, was that the Quran he would use had been owned by Thomas Jefferson, our fourth president and one of our Founding Fathers.

Those who were outraged that Ellison wouldn't swear on the Bible obviously want a religious test for national office, something that Jefferson probably would have found appalling.

Realistically, and ethically, Ellison should not swear on the Bible because he is not a Christian.

The custom of swearing on the Bible is not to show religious loyalty, but for people to subject themselves to a higher authority. The idea is that breaking an oath to the people is easy; breaking an oath to God is not. People cannot see what you do behind closed doors. God can.

Ellison has sworn to his higher authority that he will uphold the Constitution and the laws of the United States. Let's hope he takes the Constitution more seriously than those who wanted to force him to swear on their religious book.

Article VI of the U.S. Constitution states that

"no religious test shall be required" for any public office. Asking a Muslim congressman to be sworn in on a Bible is repugnant. We would not consider asking a Christian to swear on the religious book of any other religion.

Goode even managed to use Ellison's election to attack immigration policy, writing to his constituents: "... The Muslim Representative from Minnesota was elected by the voters of that district and if American citizens don't wake up and adopt the Virgil Goode position on immigration there will likely be many more Muslims elected to office... We need to stop illegal immigration totally and reduce legal immigration... to preserve the values and beliefs traditional to the United States of America..."

Speaking of tradition, Ellison was born in Detroit and can trace his family in America to the 1700s, when they were brought here as slaves. He was raised Catholic and converted to Islam in college.

James Madison, one of the authors of our Constitution and our third president, explained the reason this fledgling nation chose to prohibit any merger of religion and government:

*"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe with blood for centuries."*

We can now add the Middle East, plus parts of the Far East and Africa to that example. We would be foolish, even reckless, to ignore his words.

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