

NWCPJ in the News

The following article from the November 14, 2007 Chicago Tribune quotes NWCPJ member Rita Maniotis and details the struggle to reinstate anti-war protesting students, a struggle that NWCPJ supported and helped to publicize.

Joseph Ruzich | Special to the Tribune
November 14, 2007

Morton West High School officials, under fire recently from parents and free-speech advocates for threatening to expel students involved in an anti-war sit-in at the school, announced Tuesday that they will not expel any of the protesters.

District 201 Supt. Ben Nowakowski said in a statement that 14 of the 18 students who faced expulsion will be cleared to return to class Wednesday and that four students who bore more culpability for the disruption can return to class Friday. "The incident that led to the suspensions had nothing to do with our students' 1st Amendment rights," Nowakowski said in the statement.

School officials charged 38 students with "gross disobedience and mob activity" for taking part in a Nov. 1 sit-in at the school cafeteria to protest the war in Iraq.

Parents and students immediately complained that the penalties were too severe overall and unfair because certain students, such as varsity athletes and students with good grades, got lesser penalties.

"It's wonderful news," said Rita Maniotis, president of the Parent Teacher Organization, who acknowledged the unfairness of her daughter -- a junior honor student with a 4.5 GPA -- getting a less severe penalty than other protesters. "But it's not like our kids are walking away with nothing. Most have already served their suspensions. I'm just glad they aren't going to be expelled."

Parents' next concern, she said, is to talk to the school board and make sure the penalties don't appear on the students' records.

Nowakowski and school officials interviewed students who faced expulsion and their parents at appeal hearings during the last week, district spokesman Dan Proft said.

Punishments had to be given on an individual basis because some students were more disruptive than others, he said. Those penalties ranged from 5-day suspensions to 10-day suspensions.

Parents and students protested outside the Berwyn school Nov. 6, then attended a District 201 school board meeting two days later, which also drew free-speech advocates and anti-war activists.

"Some with political agendas have tried to cloud the matter with politically charged appeals about policies over which this district has no authority,"

Nowakowski said in the statement. "It is unfortunate that they would seek to use children to advance their political agendas. The fact is that Morton students are encouraged to think for themselves and to express their views, whatever those views may be."

The American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois urged school officials to reconsider the penalties.

"No matter how one viewed the incident ... none of what happened really merited an expulsion," spokesman Ed Yohnka said.

Nowakowski said the suspensions were doled out because students disrupted the school day. "While we respect the rights of students to express their views, that must be done in such a way as to respect the rights of the other 3,400 students at Morton West who are entitled to a peaceful, disruption-free school day," he said in the statement.

He went on to quote a Berwyn police report of the incident describing how 20 to 30 protesters refused to leave the cafeteria, sat on the floor, locked hands, arms and legs and said they were going to remain there until the end of the school day.

Students insisted the protest was peaceful and didn't disrupt classes.

At last week's school board meeting, Jonathon Acevedo, who faced expulsion, said: "We were holding hands and singing 'Kumbaya' and the song 'Give Peace a Chance.'" Teacher Gale Holmlund told board members that her classroom and others were not disrupted by the protest.

Nowakowski thanked parents and students. "Although that might sound odd, as we went through our appeals stage of the adjudicative process, we found the parents to be forceful advocates for their children, of course, but also reasonable and respectful of the gravity of the matter at hand," his statement said.

Tuesday, July 17, 2007

Riverside/Brookfield Landmark publishes a courageous editorial defending NWCPJ's right to march in the Riverside July 4 parade.

Parade
politics

Everybody loves a parade, right? Well, for the past couple of years in Riverside, not everyone has loved a parade. At least not everyone has loved everyone participating in the parade.

For the past two years, The Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice, a political activist group, has marched in the parade and has clearly stated its dislike for the Iraq War and its dislike for President George Bush. Their appearance has made many people uncomfortable and many downright angry.

In response,
there have been calls to eliminate this kind of political protesting in the
parade, which ought to be a unifying event.

But while such
demonstrations of free speech may be offputting to many, it would be simply
impossible-and downright un-American-to forbid them in, of all things, the July
4 parade.

The Declaration
of Independence, which we celebrate every July 4, was one of the most
subversive, brazen political acts in Western history. It was, as we know,
revolutionary.

Throughout
time, that revolutionary aspect of July 4 has lost its impact. But it was that
political act that spawned the Constitution and the Bill of Rights-the first of
which guarantees freedom of speech, especially political speech.

To us the act
of political speech making at the parade is not what's surprising, it's the
discomfort with it being allowed at all.

Tuesday, July 10, 2007

Riverside/Brookfield Landmark publishes our letter on NWCPJ and the 4th of July.

July 4 parade all about politics

Thanks
to all who supported the Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice Fourth of
July Peace contingent in the Riverside parade, the scores of
folks who clapped and cheered and talked to us and the overwhelming majority
who listened. It has been my hope to see a message of peace on every main street
of every town in the U.S., starting with my own.

The peace contingent in Evanston's Fourth of July parade drew 150 participants and the one in Oak Park, led by Veterans for Peace, headed their parade.

Ours, though smaller, underscores the message on the stickers we passed out: "Peace takes courage."

Riverside is a challenge. It's important we be here, even to take flak from the few folks who don't want to see a message with which they don't agree. Since the invasion of Iraq over four years ago, many have heard nothing but pro-war communication and spin every single day.

Our plea for peace in Iraq was branded as "poison politics" by one, and another called a Veteran for Peace member "terrorist and traitor." One man argued we should keep "politics out of the Fourth of July" and said we had no right to be there, although the parade was led by two Republican politicians, Tony Peraica and Judy Baar Topinka.

I would argue that there is no holiday more political than the Fourth of July, in that it commemorates the quintessential political act that was the Declaration of Independence. If these "anti"s succeed and stifle our voices, then that attack on freedom of speech will end with everyone's being curtailed.

I'm very optimistic by how our message was received here in Riverside, a town that appreciates that good, old-fashioned values include the rights we hold dear. May we live to see a more peaceful compassionate world. See you next year.

Laurel Lambert Schmidt

Riverside

November 2006:

Congressman Dan Lipinski finally meets with NWCPJ: Representatives of Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice (NWCPJ) met with Representative Dan Lipinski at his Archer Avenue office in Chicago, November 22, where they presented him a copy of George McGovern & Wm. Polk's new book, *Out of Iraq: A Practical Plan for Withdrawal Now*. The Congressman assured the representatives that he would read the book and agreed to further meetings with NWCPJ, a neighborhood peace group based in the Third Congressional District. The meeting took place one week after an "Open Letter to Dan Lipinski" appeared in the Riverside Brookfield Landmark. The open letter referred to an overwhelming vote for Iraq withdrawal among constituents in the November 7 election and documented the numerous attempts made by NWCPJ representatives to meet with the Congressman over the previous fifteen month period. Although the meeting was cordial, a press representative from Chicago IndyMedia (and NWCPJ member) was denied permission to tape the proceedings. Present were constituents from Berwyn, Lyons, and Riverside and Lipinski aides, Jerry Hurckes and Chris

Jutton. These were the points of the forty minute discussion:

NWCPJ pointed out that a peace referendum passed in the Townships of Berwyn by 71% and Riverside by 61% (Riverside being the most Republican area of the 3rd Congressional District). As well, a county wide referendum on withdrawal passed by 73% in the whole of Cook County. However, an analysis of the Wards within the City of Chicago within the 3rd Congressional District showed support for withdrawal ranged from 69.1% to 91.3%.

Rep. Lipinski asked for the exact wording of the referendum question! NWCPJ told him: "Shall the United States Government immediately begin an orderly and rapid withdrawal of all of its military personnel from Iraq, beginning with the National Guard and Reserves?" with a preamble statement for the Berwyn Township question.

NWCPJ opined that the peace referendum and national wins for Democrats represented a sweeping mandate for peace.

Rep. Lipinski countered that he thought it represented a desire for "some change."

NWCPJ noted that each day in Iraq represented between \$200 and 250 millions dollars lost to the US economy. (NWCPJ did not mention the staggering human cost--but hope it was understood).

Rep. Lipinski denied ever using the term "stay the course." He then conceded that he no longer believed that it would be possible to establish a Western-style democracy in Iraq.

When asked for more particulars, D.L. stated that he believed our presence in Iraq was necessary for "regional stability." He said Democrats had no plan and was looked for guidance from Majority Leader-elect Pelosi as well as considering the plans from Sen. Biden and Sen. Obama.

The Congressman admitted he is unfamiliar with the differences between Shiite and Sunni religions in Iraq.

NWCPJ asked that he read and consider George McGovern's plan for Iraq withdrawal. NWCPJ also requested he vote on no more appropriations for the conduct of the war and occupation.

NWCPJ also asked the Congressman to take some leadership for peace and justice in the Congress by introducing, sponsoring or co-sponsoring a bill to repeal the Military Commissions Act of 2006. NWCPJ thanked him for his initial vote against the bill which passed in October. Rep. Lipinski made no reply to this request.

The following open letter to Congressman Daniel Lipinski appeared in the Riverside/Brookfield Landmark on Tuesday, November 14, 2006. He agreed to meet with NWCPJ one week later.

The following open letter to Congressman Daniel Lipinski appeared in the Riverside/Brookfield Landmark on Tuesday, November 14, 2006. He agreed to meet with NWCPJ one week later.

Lipinski needs to change tune on Iraq: An open letter to Congressman Daniel Lipinski:

Congratulations on your victory in winning re-election to Congress. Your victory, however, was no less significant than the mandate this election brought for peace.

Last Tuesday, voters in Berwyn by 71 percent, Riverside by 61 percent and the whole of Cook County by 73 percent, cast their ballots in favor of this referendum question: "Shall the United States Government immediately begin an orderly and rapid withdrawal of all of its military personnel from Iraq, beginning with the National Guard and Reserves?"

This overwhelming vote (including traditionally conservative constituent areas) should send you a clear message. Also, by voting out pro-war Republicans and changing control over Congress, the whole American people have repudiated war policies and issued a mandate for new policies that promote peace and international cooperation.

It is time that you stopped your support of the Bush administration's policies and stood with your constituents for peace. More and more of us understand that the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq has sullied our reputation around the world and made us less safe at home.

For months now, polls have shown that a majority of Americans (including active duty troops in Iraq) want the U.S. troops

to come home. Several polls have shown that the vast majority of Iraqis also want all foreign occupation forces to leave their country.

We urge you to represent the will of your constituents by immediately passing legislation requiring the prompt removal of all US troops from Iraq and discontinuing funding for military purposes in Iraq except the safe withdrawal of all U.S. forces. Almost four years into this debacle, it's time for the troops to come home now!

Additionally, Congress should:

- Make real its existing stated commitment to no permanent US military bases in Iraq.
- Support an Iraqi-led reconciliation process to shape a peaceful, post-occupation transition.
- Investigate and punish companies engaged in illegal war profiteering.
- Commit significant funds to the reconstruction of Iraq, under the control and direction of Iraqis.
- Provide funding for full benefits, adequate healthcare, and other support for returning servicemen and women.
- Make every effort possible to ensure the peaceful resolution of conflicts with Iran and North Korea.
- Repeal the Military Commissions Act of 2006 so as to restore humanitarian treatment of prisoners and Habeas Corpus.

We at Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice have asked to meet face to face with you since last November. We ask for your consideration in coming together to end this war and occupation now. We count on you to take immediate action for peace and await your response for our request for a meeting.

Laurel Lambert-Schmidt

Riverside

<http://rblandmark.com/main.asp?SectionID=3&SubSectionID=17&ArticleID=1982&TM=50344.39>

Also from the Tuesday, November 14, 2006 Riverside/Brookfield Landmark:

Riverside Twp. voters say 'bring troops home'

Voters countywide support tighter gun laws, higher minimum wage

By BOB UPHUES

The pedestrian tunnel referendum was not the only one on the ballot for local residents. All Cook County residents were asked to vote on advisory referendums calling for an immediate, orderly withdrawal of troops from Iraq, tougher gun control measures and a higher minimum wage.

In Riverside Township, which includes Riverside and parts of Brookfield and North Riverside, residents were asked to vote on the Iraq referendum twice-in response to both the county's question and the one placed on the ballot in Riverside Township by anti-war residents, who voted to include it on the ballot at the township's annual meeting last spring.

The results? Riverside Township residents want out of Iraq-mirroring the sentiment across Cook County-and the solid majority of Cook County residents want tougher gun control and a higher minimum wage.

As advisory referendums, the results of the vote are not binding.

By late Wednesday afternoon, with 90 percent of county precincts reporting, 65 percent of voters said "yes" on the countywide referendum to "immediately begin an orderly and rapid withdrawal of all its military personnel from Iraq, beginning with the National Guard and reserves."

Voters in Riverside Township nearly matched the countywide result vote for vote. By late Wednesday, with 18 of 19 precincts counted, about 62 percent of voters had voted "yes" to the township referendum on troop withdrawal.

Laurel Lambert-Schmidt, a Riverside resident and member of Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice, was one of the voters who attended the Riverside Township annual meeting to get the question on the ballot.

"Foremost in voters' minds when they went to the polls on Tuesday was the debacle of our policy in Iraq," Lambert-Schmidt said.

Other Near West Citizens members were able to get the question on the ballot in Berwyn Township as well. In Berwyn, the measure received the support of 71 percent of voters. The group failed in its bid to get the question on the ballot in Proviso Township and Stickney Township.

"This has to send a real strong message to Congressman [Dan] Lipinski to work with the new House and Senate leadership to get out of Iraq as soon as possible," Lambert-Schmidt said.

Cook County voters passed Advisory Referendum 1, which asks the Illinois legislature to pass a comprehensive ban on the sale, delivery and possession of assault weapons and .50-caliber sniper rifles. The referendum passed by 84 percent, according to Cook County's Election Department Web site.

Jennifer Bishop, Illinois field director for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, which supported the referendum, said the campaign was "enormously gratified" by the county's "unprecedented" response. Because Cook County represents suburban as well as urban voters, Bishop said, the referendum is a mandate for state legislators to pass an assault-weapons ban that stalled in the state senate last spring.

"Now, any legislator who votes against the ban is not listening to the desires of the people of Illinois," Bishop said. "Loud and clear, the numbers are saying these assault weapons do not belong in civilian hands."

Cook County Voters also passed Advisory Referendum 2, which asks legislators to increase the minimum wage for Illinois workers from \$6.50 to \$7.50 in 2007.

Becky Dodson of Medill News Service contributed to this report.

<http://rblandmark.com/main.asp?SectionID=1&SubSectionID=1&ArticleID=1992&TM=45856.53>

Content © 2006 Riverside Brookfield Landmark

The following was published as an op-ed guest piece the Monday prior to the November 7, 2006 election.

The following was published as an op-ed guest piece the Monday prior to the November 7, 2006 election. Daily Southtown

Guest Columnists ::

Vote for peace on Cook County ballot

October 30, 2006

By Laurel Lambert Schmidt

Voters in Cook County have the opportunity to answer the following question on the Nov. 7 ballot:

Shall the United States Government immediately begin an orderly and rapid withdrawal of all its military personnel from Iraq, beginning with the National Guard and reserves?

The question appears on the Cook County ballot thanks to the work of volunteers who collected thousands of petition signatures.

I urge you and your readers to take this opportunity and cast a vote for peace! By voting "yes," we will send a clear message to our representatives in Washington that the American public has had enough of the Bush administration's Iraq debacle.

If we figure the consequences of this war and occupation so far, the stakes could not be higher:

- Its human cost has resulted in almost 2,800 deaths and more than 20,000 wounded U.S. military personnel. A new study estimates an astounding 600,000 Iraqis have been killed.
- We've spent \$336 billion already. Iraq may cost \$2 trillion when the long-term effects are added up. To put this in perspective, the cost to Cook County taxpayers alone could have given us 127,000 new schoolteachers.
- Multiple polls of U.S. citizens, U.S. soldiers, Iraq citizens and others around the world show opinion strongly against our continued occupation of Iraq.

The chaos we were supposed to contain has been compounded by our presence. "Staying the course" means more of the same.

We have not become safer in a world complicated by this war and occupation. We entered Iraq on false pretenses. Now we need to do the right thing and vote for peace this November so we can begin to leave as quickly as possible.

Laurel Lambert Schmidt, of Riverside, is a member of Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice

Riverside/Brookfield Landmark

Letter to the Editor: Tuesday, October 24, 2006 Vote against the Iraq war on Nov. 7

Voters in Cook County have the opportunity to answer the following question on the Nov. 7 ballot: "Shall the United States Government immediately begin an orderly and rapid withdrawal of all its military personnel from Iraq, beginning with the National Guard and Reserves?"

The question appears twice on the ballot in Riverside, Berwyn and Oak Park townships, because representatives from local peace groups attended annual township meetings last April and voted to put a referendum question on the township ballots. The question was later added to the Cook County ballot by submission of thousands of petition signatures from volunteers.

I urge you and your readers to take this opportunity and cast a vote or two for peace! By voting yes, we will send a clear message to our representatives in Washington that the American public has had enough of the Bush administration's Iraq debacle.

If we figure the consequences of this War and occupation so far, the stakes could not be higher:

Its human cost has resulted in almost 2,800 deaths and more than 20,000 wounded of U.S. military personnel. A new study, whose results were published in the Washington Post two weeks ago, estimates an astounding 600,000 Iraqis have been killed.

Its human cost has resulted in almost 2,800 deaths and more than 20,000 wounded of U.S. military personnel. A new study, whose results were published in the Washington Post two weeks ago, estimates an astounding 600,000 Iraqis have been killed.

We've spent \$336 billion already. Iraq may cost \$2 trillion when the long-term effects are added up. To put this in perspective, the cost to Cook County taxpayers alone could have given us 127,000 new schoolteachers.

Multiple polls from here in the U.S., among U.S. soldiers, of Iraq citizens and around the world show opinion strongly against our continued occupation of Iraq.

The chaos we were supposed to contain has been compounded by our presence. Staying the course means more of the same.

We have not become safer in a world complicated by this war and occupation. We entered Iraq on false pretenses. Please do the right thing and make your vote for peace this November so we can leave as quickly as possible.

Laurel Lambert Schmidt

Riverside

The following letter to the editor responded to criticisms of NWCPJ's work in securing a referendum question on the War and Occupation of Iraq on the November ballot in Riverside and Berwyn Townships as well as our marching as a peace contingent in the Riverside Fourth of July parade.

Riverside/Brookfield Landmark

Tuesday, July 18, 2006

Questioning Iraq war not unpatriotic

In response to the July 12 letter to the editor that was critical of "protestors" making their views known through legitimate tools such as the referendum or participation in parades ("Those not 'in the know' should butt out," Letters), I have only one response: Pre-World War II Germany!

My ancestors all came here from Germany in the 1800s, so I was especially interested in studying the causes of WWII and the Holocaust, as well as the German and French resistance. In Germany in the decades leading up to WWII, it was considered "un-German" and "unpatriotic" for people supposedly "not in the know" to criticize Hitler and the Nazis and try to "backseat drive."

Prayers for peace notwithstanding, most German people didn't speak up or act up in public, and the criminals who ran the country plunged the world into war and terror.

Protestors went underground, and although the pockets of resistance in Germany-and more famously in France-helped many individuals to survive the war, discovery meant death. My father and uncles served in the U.S. Army in Germany during and after WWII, so I grew up in the tradition of being an active participant in our democracy. Resistance through public protests is very American, totally

patriotic and is still legal in the USA. Let's keep it that way.

President Bush has told the nation that, indeed, there was no direct connection between 9/11 and Iraq and no cooperation between Osama bin Laden and Sadaam Hussein. In fact, in one TV address, I heard him wonder how people could actually make that connection. The only real connection is that the United States wanted revenge for 9/11 and Iraq was a seemingly easy target.

If people who question the war, like me, don't participate as citizens by using the power of the tools of our democracy, such as electing principled leaders, educating them as to our opinions, placing referenda on the ballots and publicly questioning the direction our country is taking, then we might as well just put up a "For Sale" sign on our country, sit back and watch our freedoms vanish.

Our country is divided in two on how best to leave Iraq (according to last week's Chicago Tribune, more than 60 percent of Americans polled are unhappy with this administration's handling of the war). All of us should let Rep. Lipinski and our other elected officials know what we are thinking and encourage them to work a lot harder for peace before it's too late.

Cheryl Orth Chapman

Brookfield

WBBM News Radio 780

July 4 through 6, 2006

A radio news clip concerning NWCPJ's peace contingent in the Riverside Fourth of July parade and was played for three days following the parade.

[MP3 Content to appear soon. Until then, you may access clip at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nwcpj/files/>]

Riverside/Brookfield Landmark

July 5, 2006

Iraq War resolution to appear on November ballot

Riverside Township voters will be asked opinion on withdrawal

Riverside Township electors voted 14 to 3 at a meeting earlier this year to place a question on the November ballot asking voters whether they support U.S. Troop withdrawal from Iraq. Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice, a political group based in Riverside, led the effort to put the issue before voters.

The ballot question will ask "Shall the United States Government immediately begin an orderly and rapid withdrawal of all of its military personnel from Iraq, beginning with the National Guard and Reserves?"

Similar resolutions will appear before voters in Oak Park, Aurora, Geneva, Downers Grove, DeKalb, Springfield and Champaign. More than 20 Wisconsin cities and towns have already expressed their support for withdrawal.

"What I hope is that the resolution will pass and it will become evident that a majority of the residents in the 3rd Congressional District favor peace," said Laurel Lambert Schmidt, co-founder of Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice. "It will be another lever to use with our Congressional representative."

Schmidt has opposed the Iraq War from the beginning.

"The war purported to be a response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and it wasn't so," she said. "There wasn't a connection, at least back then, between al-Qaida and Saddam Hussein."

In addition to campaigning for the approval of the November ballot question, Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice is circulating a petition to ask Congressman Daniel Lipinski to support an end to the Iraq War. The group also had a float in Riverside's annual Fourth of July parade.

-Alex McLeese

<http://rblandmark.com/main.asp?SectionID=1&SubSectionID=1&ArticleID=1590&TM=43587.73>

Suburban Life, July 5, 2006

Mixing protest and support: Area residents demonstrate against Iraq war, cuts in veterans' benefits

By Dan Petrella , Staff writer

Many rush hour commuters on Roosevelt Road honked their car horns June 29 in support as they passed a group of about 50 demonstrators outside the fence of the Department of Veterans Affairs Edward Hines Jr. Hospital. One Broadview firefighter even honked the horn on his fire engine and gave the group a thumbs up.

Several area anti-war groups gathered at Hines to oppose the Iraq war and support veterans' rights, including adequate health care.

Shortly before the 4:30 p.m. start of the rally, a small group of protesters arrived at the entrance to the hospital grounds at Fifth Avenue and Roosevelt Road and began to set up a make-shift stage of plastic milk crates and plywood.

Five security officers emerged from the hospital and ordered them to move to an area at Seventh Avenue and Roosevelt Road, outside an unused gate. The demonstrators told police they had permission from a hospital public relations official to be at the main gate, but the officers insisted.

"We're here trying to make the point that we're a peace group in favor of our veterans," said Mike Dzija, a La Grange Park resident and member of Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice, as he stood on the sidewalk holding one end of a large banner, reluctant to move down the road.

Dzija said he hopes people become aware of cuts that have been made to veterans' benefits in recent years, which he blamed on President Bush. He called it a "ridiculous irony, because he's sent so many people to war."

The group reluctantly moved to a circle driveway entrance at Seventh Avenue in front of a closed hospital gate. Hospital police stood behind the gate, observing the demonstration.

Organizing the event was Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice, a group of residents from Riverside, Brookfield, Berwyn, Lyons, La Grange, La Grange Park, North Riverside, Western Springs, Countryside and Stickney. Joining in were Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Veterans for Peace, Chicago Area CodePink, Oak Park Coalition for Peace and Justice, and Third Unitarian Church's social action committee.

Protesters ranged widely in age. John Bradley, an Oak Park resident in his 60s and a member of the Third Unitarian Church social action committee, said he was there because he thinks the war is unjust and that our troops should be fighting to "defend democracy."

Barbara Maniotis, a 14-year-old Berwyn resident, wore a T-shirt that read "War is costly" on the front and "Peace is priceless" on the back. She said her mother, a member of the Chicago Independent Media Center, is very active in the anti-war movement.

On the make-shift plywood stage, speakers used a bullhorn to address the assembled group about their views on the war

and the government's handling of veterans' issues. Speakers included Kathy Kelly from Voices for Creative Nonviolence, Scott Berman from Veterans for Peace and Ray Parrish from Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Folk singers Anna Stange and Dave Martin strummed acoustic guitars and sang anti-war songs.

Kelly told the group the employees of Hines Hospital should be "some of the most respected and appreciated people in our society" because of the work they do for veterans. She said the government needs to devote more money toward helping veterans like those inside Hines Hospital and that more U.S. wealth and productivity should be "directed toward solving problems without resorting to warfare."

"The military budget is like a vacuum. It sucks up wealth and productivity," Kelly said.

She encouraged the group to contact Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., to show support for his position that the United States should declare an exit strategy for Iraq, with an exit date in 2006.

Berman is a Vietnam-era veteran and an Oak Park resident.

"Veterans for Peace is an organization of people who, when it comes to training for war, preparing for war and fighting war, can say, with a certain contempt, four very credible words: Been there, done that," he said from the stage.

"War is always a horrible, emotional thing. It's ferocious and dehumanizing in the violence. ... It is right for you to feel that emotion and try to help other people feel the emotion of violence so that they can speak out against the war," Berman said. "But at the same time we must approach the wars analytically and try to think, what is causing them and where are they leading?"

While speakers spoke from the stage, demonstrators lined Roosevelt Road, holding signs and banners with slogans like, "Love the troops, hate the war," and flashing peace signs to drivers who honked their horns in support.

Maywood resident Robin Schirmer, dressed all in pink and holding a foam peace sign with cloth flowers attached, was one

such demonstrator. She is a member of Chicago Area CodePink, a women-initiated, grass-roots group that began nationally in the days leading up to the war.

Schirmer said the group has helped her deal with what to her is a very difficult time.

"It puts a humorous edge to what's otherwise a very heartbreaking situation," she said.

She said she believes the U.S. government has taken an attitude that says, "They hate us for our freedoms, so let's give our freedoms away."

The demonstration attracted some residents from the area who were not affiliated with any of the groups involved.

Standing on crutches because of a recent accident involving a semitruck, Dwight Payne was in the area when he saw the demonstration. The Bellwood resident served in the U.S. Army for three years starting in 1983. He was stationed in Lebanon and Grenada.

"In some cases, war can be a no-win situation, regardless of the outcome, because lives are taken on both sides," Payne said. "If we can find a means of resolving the situation at hand without war, the world would be a better place."

He said he believes the U.S. military's job is done in Iraq and Republicans and Democrats should be able to work together to bring troops home. He believes Congress needs to do a better job ensuring health care for veterans.

Maywood resident Cathy Steele, who lives near Hines Hospital, was cooking dinner when her daughter came in the house to talk about the demonstration.

"I turned my food off and rushed right over," Steele said.

She brought along two of her daughters, her granddaughter and other children from the neighborhood. When she arrived, demonstrators gave her a sign to carry.

"There comes a point in time where you say, well, we've done what we came to do and it's time to go on back home," she said, adding she believes the American people were deceived about the reasons for the war.

After the demonstration concluded, organizer Laurel Lambert Schmidt, a Riverside resident and member of Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice, invited all in attendance to a potluck dinner at her home.

Dan Petrella's e-mail address is:

dpetrella@libertysuburban.com

Suburban Life

Rally to show opposition to war, support for vets

By Dan Petrella

Staff writer

Published: 6/28/06

While two resolutions calling for troops to be withdrawn from Iraq failed to pass last week in the U.S. Senate, area residents are taking action to make their opposition to the war heard.

Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice will hold a rally and vigil from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Thursday, June 29, at

Department of Veterans Affairs Edward Hines Jr. Hospital, 2100 S. 5th Ave., near the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Roosevelt Road in Maywood.

Laurel Lambert Schmidt, a spokeswoman for the anti-war group, said the organization's message is two-fold: "support our troops: bring them home now" and "support our veterans: health care for all."

"Our message is that the war in Iraq is wrong and too many people are being injured and killed," Lambert said, adding that the group believes veterans and other citizens are not receiving adequate health care due to the amount of money being spent on the war.

The group is made up of residents from Riverside, Brookfield, Berwyn, Lyons, La Grange, La Grange Park, North Riverside, Western Springs, Countryside and Stickney, which make up Illinois' 3rd Congressional District. They will be joined at the rally by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Veterans for Peace, Chicago Area CodePink, Oak Park Coalition for Truth and Justice, and Third Unitarian Church Social Action Committee.

Schmidt said that the groups hope to "show the rush hour commuters and the people coming off shift at Hines that people who oppose the war really support our veterans and their need for health care and services."

One of the speakers at the rally will be Ray Parrish from Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Parrish is a counselor for GIs and veterans. He served in the U.S. Air Force in the Vietnam War. His mother and father are

both Air Force veterans, and his father also served in Vietnam.

"I think it's important for the public to realize that a lot of veterans agree with the reason for the event," he said. "So many people imagine that no veteran would support the anti-war movement."

The rally was planned to coordinate with The

Walk for Justice and Peace, a 30-day, 350-mile walk led by Voices for Creative Nonviolence, a Chicago-based activist group. The walk began June 7 at the Illinois National Guard Headquarters in Springfield and will end July 5 at the U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command in North Chicago.

On June 29, the walk is scheduled to depart at 7:30 a.m. from Wheaton College and end for the day at Hines Hospital.

Activist Kathy Kelly from Voices for Creative Nonviolence will be another speaker at the rally. She is the author of "Other Lands Have Dreams: From Baghdad to Pekin Prison," a book detailing her travels to Iraq since the Gulf War in 1991, as well as her three months in a medium-security federal prison in Pekin, Ill.

"What we are most interested in is being able to spur on dialogue among people who we feel have a lot to say ... but don't feel like there are a lot of people listening," Kelly said.

Kelly said because of the amount money being devoted to the war in Iraq, the government is unable to address other issues facing the country, such as alternative energy sources.

"I think it's important that we ask ourselves, what are we gaining by putting billions and billions, ultimately trillions, of dollars of U.S. productivity into continued warfare?" she said.

The walk is scheduled to continue Friday, June 30, beginning at Hines and ending at Cook County Jail, 2700 S. California Ave., where a vigil will be held. The walk will then proceed to Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, 820 S. Damen Ave., Chicago.

Dan Petrella's e-mail address is: dpetrella@libertysuburban.com

From: <http://www.chicagosuburbannews.com/story.php?sid=54595&pub=1>

Note:
In January 2006, members voted to change the name of Riverside

Brookfield Peace Group to Near West Citizens for Peace and Justice.
The following article was the first notice of what had been an idea
for a group.

December 13, 2005

Riverside Brookfield Landmark

Bob Skolnik

Lipinski says Iraq pullout would be risky

Fledgling Riverside peace group leader urges troops out now

First term Congressman Daniel Lipinski (D-Western Springs), who represents all of Riverside and Brookfield and part of North Riverside, held a town meeting Saturday in the basement of the Brookfield village hall and faced questions from those advocating that the U.S. withdraw its troops from Iraq as soon as possible.

Leading the questioning was Laurel Lambert Schmidt, a Riverside resident who is one of the founders of the newly formed, and still quite small, Riverside Brookfield Peace Group.

"I feel the sooner we get out the better for us," said Schmidt. "Start the process immediately. End all combat. Remove the combatants from Iraq. Start now. Our presence fuels the insurgency there."

However Lipinski, a Democrat who was elected in 2004 to succeed his father, longtime Congressman William O. Lipinski, told the crowd that while he agreed that things are tough in Iraq, he did not favor immediate withdrawal or setting a specific date by which all American troops would be withdrawn from Iraq.

In October 2002, the elder Lipinski voted against a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq.

"I believe that we cannot pull our troops out until Iraq is stabilized," Lipinski told the gathering. "I think it would be dangerous for U.S. security if we pull out our troops soon. For our safety and security we need to stay there. That is where I stand right now. I believe an arbitrary timetable, a specific timetable to take out our troops will not be helpful."

In response to questions from others in the audience about Iraq, Lipinski said, "It's a tough situation for me to be in. You're either for Bush or for bringing the troops home right now. I don't believe in either."

"There are no easy answers," he added. "One thing everyone agrees on is that we want to get our troops home and get them home quickly."

While Schmidt was not happy with Lipinski's answers she was pleased with the dialogue.

"I thought it was a good discussion," Schmidt said. "Perhaps if we keep up the questions and the presence and more and more people come out it will change attitudes and it will change his mind about what he does in Washington."

Yesterday, Schmidt delivered petitions to Lipinski's Chicago office to mark the 1,000th day of the war in Iraq and asking Lipinski to support resolutions introduced in the House of Representatives calling for withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

Schmidt said she has opposed the Iraq war from its inception and has worked with the Oak Park Coalition for Truth and Justice and Code Pink, a women's peace group. But Schmidt felt a need to bring her activism closer to her home.

As a result, she helped to create the Riverside Brookfield Peace Group in September. The group currently has only five members, Schmidt said, but is looking to grow.

"We wanted a larger local presence. [Many think

that] all the antiwar people and liberals are in Oak Park. They're not. They're all over," said Schmidt.

Lipinski answered questions for more than hour on topics ranging from funding for stem cell research to gas prices.

Before the town meeting, Lipinski staffers met with a crowd of more than 100 senior citizens to explain the new federal Medicare prescription drug plan.