

ISSUES AND ACTIONS

July 2006



"Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life."

John F. Kennedy

This July 4, 2006 will have a different mood than previous years. Oh, there will be the usual pyrotechnics on the TV, parades, barbecues and picnics, some things will be "the same," but the odd ingredient this year is the growing awareness of expanding Federal powers, the diminishing of civil and privacy rights, and the presence of those identified as "threats" to our nation, to mention a few, as the courts and our elected officials minimize important checks and balances that our founding Fathers crafted into the Constitution after the Declaration of Independence was published.

THE PATRIOT ACT

In the wake of September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States government overwhelmingly approved tools to protect its citizens by intercepting or obstructing other terrorist actions. Thus the PATRIOT ACT became law on October 26, 2001, less than two months later, without the usual hearings or debate from Congress. Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wis.), cast the solitary vote opposing the measure warning that the act infringes on constitutional freedoms. The dilemma we face, now that the Act is law, seems to be "how to protect our country and not endanger our liberties." (Senator Richard Durbin (D-Ill.))

ENDANGERED LIBERTIES

Five years have passed since October 2001 and the Senators' fears and concerns are being realized. Many of our civil rights have eroded and we are not the only ones affected. Non-citizens due process rights have been affected as untold numbers of people are being detained indefinitely, without charges or trial, in detention centers with no counsel or access to representation. (www.aclu.org/safeandfree) Now if that isn't enough, the United States is struggling, as are other countries, with the complex issues of non-documented immigrants, the "ILLEGAL ALIENS," as some call them. Elie Wiesel, author and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, has something to say about those two words....

"You who are called illegal aliens must know that no human being is 'illegal.' That is a contradiction in terms. Human beings can be beautiful or more beautiful, can be right or wrong, but illegal? How can a human being be illegal?"

After all is said and done, the bottom line remains -- to find "an answer that is humane, realistic and responsible while also serving our nation's economic and security interests." California Catholic Bishops' statement, California Catholic Conference, March 21, 2006.

As the war continues there are daily reports of killings and brutality with Baghdad the epicenter of violence. On June 7, 2006, Iraq's Health Minister said that during the first five months of this year, Baghdad's main morgue had received 6,000 bodies, most of whom had met violent deaths. Afghanistan suffered a loss of more than 400 who died in fighting during the month of May 2006. As of June 2006 the U.S. military has reported 2,482 members who have died in Iraq.

Three names of Iraqi casualties and three of Americans follow, lest we forget that all the others had names also.

Mohammed Siddik, a driver and part time security guard who worked for Voice of America, shot and killed by an unknown assailant near his home in the Doura section of Baghdad.

Anwar Turki was driving Amjad Hameed, the head of Iraq's state television channel Al-Iraqiya, when their car was ambushed in central Baghdad by gunmen. Hameed was hit in the head and chest and died instantly. Turki died later.

Marine Cpl. Ryan J. Cummings, 22, Streamwood, IL

Army Staff Sgt. Darren Harmon, 44, Newark, DE

Army Spc. Issac S. Lawson, 35, Sacramento, CA

Let us remember... *"Encourage and support mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation among all peoples and within and among nations."* Earth Charter