

10/27/11 CCHCC Press Conference to Launch the Campaign for the American Dream

Statement By Scott Kimball Board Member of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW)

My name is Scott Kimball and I'm a veteran. I served in the Army from 2003 to 2007 and I was deployed to Iraq from 2005 to 2006. I'm here to talk to you about the wars, the issues veterans are facing, and how they are related to the core problems our society faces today.

Let me be clear: like the majority of veterans of contemporary war veterans, I am against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That's why I joined Iraq Veterans Against the War. This nationwide organization of veterans who have served since 9/11 has been fighting since 2004 for immediate withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, repartitions for the people of those countries, and full benefits for returning service members.

Now there are many reasons why we should oppose these wars. They are illegal, immoral, and are destroying our relationship with the world community. But they are also a choice our government has made as to where we should allocate our resources. We have spent about 1.2 trillion dollars on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan thus far. While appalling in its own right, this does not take into account the 600 billion dollars a year we allocate to the DoD, the cost of intelligence agencies like the CIA and the NSA, or the legacy cost of providing for disabled veterans. In the end, the wars will have cost us trillions of dollars, with no benefit to Americans or to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now what does it mean when we spend trillions of dollars for war instead of investing it in the people? It means that we build fighter jets instead of building schools. It means that we send our young men and women to war instead of college. It means that we spend trillions of dollars on instruments of death instead of providing healthcare for our citizens.

Here is something else to consider: while we continue to fund wars that we should have never fought to begin with, we are failing to take care of veterans when they come home. Over a hundred thousand veterans are sleeping in the streets every night. Veteran unemployment is at 22%. African American and women veterans have an unemployment rate of over 30%. Politicians repeat their patriotic platitudes about service members and Americans proudly display their yellow ribbon bumper stickers proclaiming that they 'support the troops.' Meanwhile our basic needs aren't getting met. Your yellow ribbon can't hide the shame you should feel for our nation's treatment of its veterans.

Our government has the audacity to provide billions of dollars for wars and for corporate welfare while millions of Americans are in poverty. I'm not afraid of terrorists; I'm afraid of getting sick because I can't afford healthcare. What a sad state we are in when the financial sector receives hundreds of billion dollars in bailouts while Americans are losing their homes and jobs because of corporate greed and negligence.

Americans have to make a choice. Are we going to allow the ruling class to dictate policies that benefit the rich at the expense of the poor or are we willing to take a stand? Will we allow our government spend billions of dollars on the military and corporate welfare while they cut social programs? The answer has to be no. Those of us who care, and I think most of us do, must renew our commitment to social and economic justice; to speak truth to power, and to fight for real change. This change won't come from the top down but from the bottom up. It will come when we collectively say 'we had enough' and we are willing to fight back.