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CONGRESSWOMAN DWYER'S

REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

OF THE UNION-ESSEX SUBURBS



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THE VIETNAM MORATORIUM -- WHAT NEXT?

Last week, in response to a request for my views on the then-approaching Vietnam Moratorium, I replied as follows:

So long as it remains peaceful, so long as it provides a constructive forum for debate and education and persuasion, so long as it adheres to the American tradition of free expression and assembly, I support the October 15 Vietnam Moratorium.

An end to the killing and destruction in Vietnam must be our country's primary objective, just as I am certain it is the President's. Whatever our differences concerning the ways and means of ending the war in Vietnam, the American people can be united, and should be united, on the basic goal of peace.

The war in Vietnam affects us all, and the fruits of peace will benefit us all. We are all involved. As a free people, participating in an open and democratic society, we each have the right and the responsibility to speak out.

This week, just three days after the Moratorium, I believe it is fair to say that the hopes reflected in my statement have been more than confirmed.

Whether Moratorium participants numbered a million or ten million or, as one enthusiast estimated, half our 200-plus million population, and whatever one's views about the war may be, the events of Wednesday, October 15, were a deeply impressive manifestation of convictions about the war which an increasing proportion of our people hold very strongly.

A MEMORABLE EVENT

One gets the impression from press and television that there was much that was memorable about this Moratorium. For me, however, the most striking single aspect of October 15 was this: that the two sides commonly called hawk and dove seem now to be closer together than ever before. Even among the counter-demonstrators, there was no call for an expanded war. Everyone spoke, sang, shouted and prayed for peace. Each in his own way. Though Americans still express two opposing views of the war -- that it is now and always has been morally indefensible, or that our intervention in Vietnam was legitimate and necessary to prevent communist aggression -- we generally agree that the time has come to disengage. Our differences are largely ones of when and how: now or later, immediately or gradually, unilaterally or in concert with the South.

The question remains, however, whether the Moratorium position was or is the right one. It would not be evasive to reply, "yes and no." They were right to involve our people in this massive dialogue about our common problem. They were right to appeal to the national conscience. They were right to trust to freedom of expression and assembly. They were right in objecting to the killing.

THE ISSUE IS NOW

But to immediate and unconditional and total withdrawal, I must answer "no." Because it wouldn't work! It wouldn't accomplish anything. Phased withdrawal, yes; faster disengagement, yes; an immediate end to the killing, by all means! But even if it were logistically feasible, immediate abandonment of our position in Vietnam would surely remove any remaining hope of stability and peace and independence in a country which has already suffered too greatly.

The issue is what is best for us, for the people of Vietnam, and for peace in the world. That issue can only be defined in terms of present circumstances and present possibilities -- not the past.

If we can end the war and stop the killing -- the first priority -- without turning the country over to the communists or without unleashing a new and bloodier civil war there (and both consequences would likely follow a too-abrupt U.S. departure), then I believe we have an obligation to do so. I believe this is President Nixon's objective, just as it has been mine for several years. And I believe we can accomplish it.

In our natural anxiety to end our tragic entanglement in Vietnam, it is easy to minimize the extent to which this President has brought us back toward peace. He has firmly resisted all pressures to escalate the war. He has continued the halt in the bombing of North Vietnam. He has withdrawn substantial U.S. forces. He has significantly reduced the U.S. offensive in the South (both bombing and search-and-destroy missions). He has increased funds and personnel for the pacification and rebuilding of the country. All this in 9 months and, by all the evidence (including reduced casualty lists), with considerable success.

FARTHER TO GO

I am not suggesting we should be satisfied with this rate of progress, encouraging as it is. We have much farther to go and little time left. Every day of unnecessary fighting and killing is a further burden on our national conscience.

This is why, for more than three years now, I have returned again and again to plead for a course of action which, to me, holds the greatest promise of the earliest end to the war -- a mutual and enforceable ceasefire.

The ceasefire idea is not a new one, either for me or for many others -- and, happily, the numbers of those who see the promise of this course are increasing. The President, himself, after an early repudiation of ceasefire, has recently been alluding more often and more hopefully to this possibility.

But it isn't as simple as it may sound. It's not enough to say we're for it. It won't suffice to ask the Communists to initiate it. And to try to use it as a one-shot ultimatum could be self-defeating.

At this stage of the war, above all else we have to be convincing -- convincing to ourselves, to the world, and to the enemy. Which is why I have proposed that we take the initiative, that we make the first move -- and not just once, but three or four or five times, if necessary.

HOW TO GET THERE

More specifically, I have proposed that we announce to all concerned that on a date and time certain the U.S. will suspend all offensive military operations in South Vietnam; that we will hold our fire long enough (at least 3 days) for the enemy to respond affirmatively, though remaining prepared to defend ourselves against attack; that we will prolong such an informal ceasefire so long as the other side does the same; and that, even though hostilities resume as a result of communist action, we shall, as of another early and specified date, again cease military action -- and again and again.

I do not pretend to be a military strategist. And obviously, the bare outline I have sketched above would require much careful planning. But I have been persuaded for more than 3 years now that something like this plan might work. Though there can be no assurance of success, it would seem well worth trying. For it would be convincing. It would demonstrate dramatically our desire to end the fighting. It would make it increasingly difficult for the North Vietnamese to say no. And it would entail relatively little risk, especially in light of the already lowered level of conflict. We have so little to lose and so much to gain.

If such a plan succeeded, it would encourage more fruitful negotiations in Paris. It would buy time to withdraw our forces in a more orderly fashion and to permit the assumption of greater responsibilities by the South Vietnamese. It would provide greater opportunity for the Saigon government to broaden its political base and attract new and stronger internal support.

Above all else, it would stop the killing.

Note: College students who would like to receive this Report at their college residences during the school year are urged to send me their addresses.