

## CRIBBS NOTES – October 7, 2007

My dear friend, the late Jay Lintner, former head of the United Church of Christ Office of Church in Society Washington, DC bureau, the political advocacy arm for our denomination, used to say, “If you want to know what is actually happening (in Congress), just follow the money.” He said that nearly two decades ago and it is as true today as it was then.

In the past week, several remarkable and revealing events occurred. President George W. Bush addressed the United Nations’ General Assembly and lectured on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted by the UN on December 10, 1948.

Erik Fernandez, a member of Christian Fellowship UCC in San Diego, wrote, “It just lacked credibility both because of the messenger and because of our human rights record on the four great evils (economic exploitation, militarism, discrimination, and environmental degradation) even prior to President Bush's being in office.”

The President’s speech was diminished further when he threatened last week to veto a five year proposal for children’s health care. At the same time, Defense Secretary Robert Gates went before Congress with his hat in hand begging for another \$42.3 billion in “emergency” funds for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If approved, that would bring the war bill for 2008 to \$190 billion. Experts now project the war in Iraq will outspend the Gulf War, Korean War, and the American War in Vietnam at nearly \$800 billion. By the way, that children’s health care coverage bill Mr. Bush says he will veto, is estimated at \$35 billion, far less than what we are paying to prosecute an undesirable, unpopular, and misguided war.

Where is all that blood money going? According to the New York Times on September 27, 2007, “Military officials recently revealed that contracts worth more than \$90 billion are being investigated - \$6 billion for possible criminal charges, the rest for financial irregularities.”

Although members of Congress like Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-WV), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, say they won’t give a “blank check” for the war in Iraq; few have withheld tax dollars or acted to end the war. Public funds flow like oil through a pipeline out of our pockets into the coffers of private contractors via the Pentagon. In the meantime, poor children without health care are cruelly tossed aside and told to wait.

The other day while taking my son to school a crossing guard struck up a conversation and expressed her hurt about her son’s job. “He’s an engineer for a major railroad company and they only pay him \$16 an hour,” she complained. “They make him drive their trains for 300 miles and the union takes a lot of his money but it doesn’t do anything to protect or help him.” Her voice cracked as she continued talking about how she felt her son was being unfairly treated; and not just her son but other workers as well.

Given the rate of inflation and cost of living, people go to work everyday and still earn less than what is required to meet basic needs. They are the “working poor.” Who stands up for them? Where are the public funds to alleviate their stress?

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “*Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his (sic)*

*family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.”*

*Further, Article 25 says, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his (sic) family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”*

Political rhetoric falls from the lips of those in high office. We need public servants who have courage to protect all people from harm. How do we guarantee everyone is extended human rights? If we follow the money where will it lead us? It is time to take better care of our children and families, and stop spending our money killing other people, their children, and their families.