

We Pay *More* for Young People To Die, Than To Live

The following exchange between Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.), who served in the Korean War, and former Sen. Max Cleland (D-Ga.), who served in the Vietnam War, occurred during the Sept. 15 hearing convened by Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.) on finding an exit strategy for Iraq.

Rangel: . . . [W]hat supprises me is that there's no outrage in this country for the young men and women that are there, the 1,800 that have died . . . over 12,000 that are wounded. And the fact that they come from the inner cities and the rural areas, and the Pentagon says with great pride that we are *increasing the bonuses from \$10- to \$20-, and \$20- to \$30-, and now \$40,000* because these people "*want to fight.*"

Now it just seems to me that since they come from the area of the highest unemployment, that if indeed the President was sincere in bringing liberty and freedom throughout the world, and especially in the Middle East, the sacrifice should be made by a broader cross-section of Americans, who believe that that is our mandate. Whether it's a draft, or whether the President can make an appeal to the children of the CEOs or the Pentagon or the Congress, where everyone would believe that this is a mandate.

But it just seems to me that, when the President says we're going to stay there until we *win*, and not one day longer—and the whole world knows that we cannot find a military victory, it bothers me that the country is willing to use other people's children to wait to see what happens politically, and what happens diplomatically. . . .

[T]he taking of life—unlawfully and immorally—when it's not in defense of you or your country, is probably one of the greatest sins that could possibly be committed. And this would include the tens of thousands of Iraqis, that have committed *no wrong*.

And so, Senator [Cleland], it seems to me that we could really end this war overnight, if we had a draft in this country, where *everybody* had to serve, and everyone had to be placed in harm's way while we go through this diplomatic procedure.

I'd like to get your views on it, because you and I know, that whatever your motivation was to join the military, your job is not political, it is to kill or be killed. So therefore, they are the patriots, but we are the people that are placing them there.

Cleland: . . . You pointed out something that has bothered me, and that is that now *we're paying more money for young men and women to die, than to live*. I think we have to be very careful about that. I happen to believe in the concept of the citizen soldier, which is why I volunteered for Vietnam, and why I was in ROTC, and those kind of things. There was a draft over our heads in my generation, but I figured it was my responsibility to take my place in the line. It was a moral choice to do that, and a tough choice. And, I paid a price for it.

That draft does not hang over the heads of the young men and women of this generation. I have often wondered about, where's the anger, where's the passion out there, when their young friends, most of whom, that I have come across, are just good young men and women who would like an opportunity, and see the military as that. . . .

Fifty percent of all the casualties come from rural America. *Fifty percent of the casualties in Iraq come from rural America*—part of our country that probably has the least opportunity for jobs and investment in higher education. So, there is a disproportionate sharing . . . and we're seeing the American military, and the civilian leadership at the Pentagon want to pay more and more for people to "re-up." I understand that a Special Forces sergeant will get \$130,000 to re-up. That's moving very closely to a mercenary force—kind of an American foreign legion! You have the total disconnect—and it's all volunteer, and they're paid big money to go wherever we send them, for whatever cause. . . .

That's not America. That's not the American military; that's not the American way. We should examine this at another time, because there is a powerful disconnect here, between the sacrifice that is being made now, and those who are getting the tax breaks. Those who are getting the most tax breaks are not sending their young men and women to war in Iraq. . . .

And, I happen to think, and one of the reasons I'm here for plugging an exit strategy, that it is immoral, *immoral*, and violates the right to life for these young men and women, to send [them] into combat, without a strategy to win, and without a strategy to get out. And it is immoral, and that's exactly where we are. The President calls that, "staying the course." I call it, immoral. . . .

I supported, believe it or not, the concept of moving to an all-volunteer force, at the end of the Vietnam War, in '73, when President Nixon could not go to the Congress and re-up it, because the draft had been so abused. I knew it was. . . . So, I supported the concept of the all-volunteer force because, [among other things], you will limit the power of any future President or Congress, to commit this country and its troops to an open-ended war, because sooner or later, you're going to run out of people, and that's exactly what we're facing now.

There is no way we can maintain the occupation of Iraq at the current level. There's no way we can "stay the course." We're throwing in almost everybody that is able-bodied in the Guard and Reserve, and now we realize we need the National Guard down in . . . Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana. So, we have committed our Reserves, and our bottom-line defenses, all in this so-called war in Iraq; but that's not where the terrorists are! They're using that as a training ground, to go in to other places. The al-Qaeda is morphing into 60 different countries. . . . In the Guard, recruiting is down 43%. . . . Reserves, now they are going into the *inactive* Reserves . . . people who are 50 and 60 years old; they're sending them to Iraq! This is insane. . . .

[T]here was no strategy to win. There was a strategy to take out Saddam Hussein, and a strategy to occupy the oil fields. That's the only strategy that there was. Let the 25 million people just go, fire the [Iraqi] Army, disband every element of the social structure in Iraq. Now, we're living in the mess that we created. That is generating more terrorism, that is creating more insurgents. . . .

[Our soldiers] are attacked by people they don't even know. There's not even a name for them. We just call them "insurgents," and that's whoever blows me up—today. And then, what blows you up—an "IED." You know, the Army, just like the Marine Corps, comes up with all kinds of nomenclatures—if it happens, it must have a nomenclature. "IED," improvised explosive device. What in the world is that? In Georgia, we call that a homemade bomb. So, here's the biggest, most-strike, capability the United States has ever maintained, and we're bogged down in Baghdad, and in Iraq, with people we don't even know, attacking us with weapons that our youngsters can't even hardly name.

Now, that is immoral. Anybody that wants to talk about "right to life," I argue that those young men and women out there have a right to life, and one of the ways that we can maintain that, is to have an exit strategy that brings them home.