we respond

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

6 Carls and Katrina relief - a photo essay
9 One student’s encounter with British bigotry
12 A sobering tale from the Astrodome
Mr. Navratil also accused MPIRG of relying on apathy and indolence to obtain its revenue. It is unfair and pretty darn insulting to call most of Carleton's student body lazy. However, there are apathetic college students out there, which is why MPIRG actively seeks to motivate and empower students.

MPIRG's structure allows students who prefer to take concrete action through lobbying and organizing with an avenue through which to do so. At the same time, those students who care about public interest issues, but don't have the time to actively participate, can still support MPIRG with their small contribution. And those who prefer not to participate at all can simply check "no" at the beginning of the year, or receive a refund anytime afterward. MPIRG does not use the term "democracy" as a buzzword. MPIRG truly is student run and consequently, student funded.

-Now, we will give credit where credit is due. Thus we concede that Mr. Navratil's observation that no other student organization at Carleton is funded through an optional charge is true. They are in fact funded through a mandatory charge, called the student activity fee. MPIRG gives students the right to choose whether or not they want to contribute to the organization. Unfortunately, we students cannot choose whether we give our money to other organizations, such as publications like The Observer, even though, as I'm sure its editors would tell you, truth ain't cheap.

It is also true that MPIRG is not subject to the financial guidelines and oversight of the CSA Senate, as we are not a chartered organization. The CSA senate does not have the power to regulate MPIRG, although it has certainly tried. But Mr. Navratil is wrong in implying that we are not subject to any guidelines. In fact, MPIRG is subject to slightly more stringent guidelines than those of the CSA by-laws. Our contract is with the college itself, and therefore, we must follow college by-laws.

Mr. Navratil was also correct in asserting that Carleton students prefer to think and act for themselves, which is why every year (for more than 30 years) the student body has voted to keep MPIRG's funding mechanism. Last year, the same students who elected the current CSA senate, a body that handles hundreds of thousands of dollars of student money, voted overwhelmingly in support of the MPIRG fee.

Frankly, we at MPIRG are really sick of using our meeting times to counter constant attacks from a handful of vocal opponents every term instead of focusing our energy on real political and environmental issues. So sure, you could spend $7.50 on any given item on Mr. Navratil's list of worthless crap, or you could put less than ten dollars towards an MPIRG contract is with the college itself, and therefore, we must follow college by-laws. MPIRG's structure allows students who prefer to take concrete action through lobbying and organizing with an avenue through which to do so. At the same time, those students who care about public interest issues, but don't have the time to actively participate, can still support MPIRG with their small contribution. And those who prefer not to participate at all can simply check "no" at the beginning of the year, or receive a refund anytime afterward. MPIRG does not use the term "democracy" as a buzzword. MPIRG truly is student run and consequently, student funded.

-Now, we will give credit where credit is due. Thus we concede that Mr. Navratil's observation that no other student organization at Carleton is funded through an optional charge is true. They are in fact funded through a mandatory charge, called the student activity fee. MPIRG gives students the right to choose whether or not they want to contribute to the organization. Unfortunately, we students cannot choose whether we give our money to other organizations, such as publications like The Observer, even though, as I'm sure its editors would tell you, truth ain't cheap.

It is also true that MPIRG is not subject to the financial guidelines and oversight of the CSA Senate, as we are not a chartered organization. The CSA senate does not have the power to regulate MPIRG, although it has certainly tried. But Mr. Navratil is wrong in implying that we are not subject to any guidelines. In fact, MPIRG is subject to slightly more stringent guidelines than those of the CSA by-laws. Our contract is with the college itself, and therefore, we must follow college by-laws.

Mr. Navratil was also correct in asserting that Carleton students prefer to think and act for themselves, which is why every year (for more than 30 years) the student body has voted to keep MPIRG's funding mechanism. Last year, the same students who elected the current CSA senate, a body that handles hundreds of thousands of dollars of student money, voted overwhelmingly in support of the MPIRG fee.

Frankly, we at MPIRG are really sick of using our meeting times to counter constant attacks from a handful of vocal opponents every term instead of focusing our energy on real political and environmental issues. So sure, you could spend $7.50 on any given item on Mr. Navratil's list of worthless crap, or you could put less than ten dollars towards an organization that, for more than 30 years, has given college students a voice in important policy decisions. The point is that the decision is yours.

-KJERSTIN JOHNSON, '08
RIVKA BURSTEIN-STERN, '06
Four years of reflection

STAFF EDITORIAL

It started when we noticed that the date of publication for the Freshman Issue of The Observer was September 11, 2005.

It was fascinating that an event which so altered our consciousnesses, as individuals and as a nation, could now be just another date four years later. Much like the JFK assassination, almost everybody remembers where they were when they heard that the Trade Centers had been struck by planes, that the United States of America was under attack.

But we seem to have moved on – a psychological progression largely motivated by the clichéd nature of 9/11 references. Our elected officials, our celebrities, even our country music singers seem to have beaten the moment into the ground. What was once described as a “national eye-opening” experience has almost become passé.

We always knew that, at some point, we had to move forward from grief to acceptance; we could never afford to be emotionally crippled as a nation for long. It just sometimes seems that it has moved too fast – maybe because we’re so young.

Most of the things our generation remembers begin roughly ten years ago. We, the students, don’t recall the 1980s beyond what we see on VH1. A few years, or maybe even months, from now, Katrina and Rita will be dimmer for all of us who weren’t directly affected by the storms. Our emotional and sympathetic memories are short, and they’re certainly not getting any longer.

It’s hard for someone in his or her college years to reflect meaningfully about the past because none of us has any real perspective on it. Often, we don’t even try anymore. Everyone cares about the now, or about the future, as if times past have ceased to exist as we barrel forward. Maybe ten years from now we’ll understand better what a contextual look into our individual pasts entails.

September 11, 2001 was over four years ago. Yet we still remember exactly where we were when it happened. Maybe you walked in, late, to your European history class, or maybe your English teacher turned on the TV and explained that Hamlet would still be there tomorrow, even if the Twin Towers were not.

No matter what you were in the middle of, the reality of the situation seemed imposing, unbelievable in its scale, but undeniable in its effect.

Today, the tragedy of September 11th, and even the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, seem less real. The reaction we once had seems mute and faded. Shared tragedy can’t define a national identity because tragedy is never going to really be shared. So what defines us?

The staff editorial represents the majority opinion of the editorial board.

[editors’ note]

It’s a new year and a new start for The Observer. When our new editor-in-chief, Wells Harrell, has been approached by his more liberal friends, many ask him, “Why on Earth would you want to work for The Observer? It’s the conservative paper, isn’t it?” These are fair questions. After all, Mr. Harrell is liberal and makes no bones about it. Why, then, did a paper known for its conservative viewpoints choose to make Mr. Harrell its editor-in-chief? And why did he accept, much less embrace, the position?

It’s because the Observer is a paper without a political agenda. No, really. Our goal is not to spread some sort of Republican gospel. We showcase conservative opinions because most of the campus tends to be liberal. We believe that no one should be able to breeze through four years at Carleton without having their most fundamental worldviews questioned. Our articles often go against the grain not only to get people thinking about alternative views, but also to prompt responses and, therefore, generate debate.

Staying true to our mission means not being afraid to tackle dicey issues or defend unpopular opinions. In keeping with our ultimate goal of spurring dialogue and discussion, our third issue, due to hit the stands on October 28th, will take on a topic that many are uncomfortable discussing honestly: race. That’s right, the entire third issue of The Observer will be devoted to an open and honest discussion of race. We encourage all of you, no matter your ethnicity or skin color, to give us your thoughts on the role race plays at Carleton and in society as a whole. Let taboos be damned.

“Truth is the most sacred virtue of the human heart.”

-SENECA THE YOUNGER
Natural disasters, national responses

Natural disasters seem to be more common today than they were five years ago, and international aid has become a barometer for good will across the globe. The pledges from our government alone to aid in Tsunami relief amounted to $950 million (over 25 percent of the total international assistance). That amount doesn’t include any of the personnel or materials sent, or the over $700 million raised by former presidents Bush and Clinton from corporate donors in the United States. All told, the U.S. has given over $1.6 billion to a purely humanitarian cause.

Last January and February, many believed that this outpouring of U.S. aid for Tsunami victims would engender more good will towards America. It seemed reasonable, after all, that nations which value humanitarian endeavors would respect the U.S. for undertaking such endeavors. Hurricane Katrina is the test of that good will, and the results are not what you might expect. Many European nations have eschewed donations of money in favor of material support, which is gratefully received, but still considerably less than forecasted. As a point of fact, the largest (and most interesting) donations have come, not from traditional allies or nations with a shared priority of humanitarianism, but from past beneficiaries of U.S. military assistance.

Kuwait, the nation saved by US military intervention in the Gulf War 14 years ago, has pledged $500 million in cash and oil products.

Their assistance comprises a whopping 53 percent of total international aid, by far the most pledged by any nation. South Korea, whose borders our military has protected for decades, gave $30 million. Kosovo (GDP per capita: U.S.$1000 in 2002), a nation which benefited tremendously from the U.S. and NATO’s military intervention, has pledged $500,000 for aid after Katrina. Other international aid has come from Israel, Afghanistan and Iraq, nations which already receive significant U.S. support. Kuwait has, by far, offered more help continued on pp. 11

Katrina shows need for society

Hurricane Katrina reminds us why we need civilization. Not the tangible results of civilization like the floodwalls, which were ineffectual in preventing damage to New Orleans. I’m talking about the intangible results of civilization, the partial breakdown of such can be seen in the looting and horrors that plagued the city after Katrina passed. We too often take for granted the easy order and stability of our daily lives in America and thus forget why such order exists in the first place.

The average American tends to believe that his fellow citizen is a decent sort, good at heart, inclined to help rather than to hurt. It’s easy to go through life with this rosy impression; that is, until the veneer of civilization is stripped away from a place, as has happened in New Orleans. Then we discover that removing the structure of civil society does not result in a proliferation of virtuous behavior. On the contrary, more likely than not those inclinations that are worst in man are unleashed into wretched action. Examples in New Orleans abound: looters attempting to break into the children’s hospital, shots fired at helicopters evacuating sick and injured individuals from the Superdome, trucks full of relief supplies being held up, the list goes on. Instead of liberating individuals, the partial collapse of law and order removes the chains that bind an individual’s baser instincts and hurls society into chaos.

You might ask, “What about all the good that occurred?” You could point to just as many examples of virtuous and good acts. These good acts, though, accompanied the bad, and we should not be surprised. The innate coexistence of good and evil within individuals is the essential tension that underlies all efforts to create a political community. Though our politics today stress the importance of ideas like justice and moderation – the virtues of the human soul – we must also recognize that these ideas often come into direct conflict with the more savage parts of our nature. Living in a just society demands that we become more than we would otherwise be if we were savages in nature.

And so we are caught in a constant conflict; our desire for order and reason on one end, and our instincts for survival and greed on the other.

Humans act with virtue and vice every day; the conflict inherent in the soul is exposed in every action of every individual. If those who see only good in humans do not recognize the conflict occurring day to day, then New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina will hardly serve as a road to Damascus experience.
Hurricane Katrina may have caught the nation by surprise, but our campus was ready to spring into action.

The administration’s first priority was its students. Carleton authorities, including Dean of Students Hudlin Wagner and PERC program director Douglas Mork worked hard to get in touch with all Carleton students in the affected areas. Once these students had been successfully contacted, the College provided for their needs as best it could. “Students were offered assistance getting out of the cities, the resources to come up here early, and if necessary, the opportunity to bring their families with them,” says Mork. “We could provide for their housing and basic needs for whatever period seemed appropriate.” Several students and at least one family took advantage of this offer. “Carleton is pleased to be able to provide ongoing aid to those among us who need it,” Dean Wagner said. “We are working hard not only to support them, but to let them know that we at Carleton are here for them.”

Carleton administration offices were not the only ones who responded quickly to the crisis. The ACT office and one student organization were prepared to coordinate the campus relief effort before fall term even began. Spearheading the relief effort was a group called AWARE, standing for “Activating World Awareness, Response, and Education.” The program’s mission statement says it all: AWARE is designed to be a driving force in the Carleton community behind efforts to raise awareness of and respond to disasters that occur around the world. “We wanted to have a group here on campus that could act as an organizing force for big disaster relief efforts,” says program director Nathan Kennedy. “That way, we wouldn’t have the same early period of chaos that we had when we tried to organize Tsunami relief projects. This time, we wanted to be ready.” Sam Estes, Mr. Kennedy, and Molly Klane were appointed by the ACT office to spearhead the effort. “At the beginning,” says Kennedy, “we had all these ideas and no way to get them all together. But we got back to campus, we had a big student meeting, and we started making things happen.”

AWARE’s main goals are fundraising and education. A student information meeting, a candlelight vigil, and tabling in Sayles were among the first ideas to come to fruition. Bigger plans soon followed. They began organizing a Katrina Relief Week, kicked off a benefit concert with the band Khubla Khan. Though bad weather forced the event to be moved inside, AWARE still considers the event a success. Various student organizations set up tables and publicized further ways to get involved with the relief effort. Carleton’s art department donated pieces of student art for sale. A silent auction allowed students to purchase used goods. Even the Northfield community got involved. Kennedy says: “Lots of local businesses were out either accepting donations or advertising their own charity efforts. We took in donations from them totaling about $500.”

The concert event raised over $2,000, most of which will be donated to the Red Cross. This week, the CSA suspended its bylaws to approve a $2000 donation directly to the Red Cross, bringing the grand total thus far to between $4,000 and $5,000 dollars. As Kennedy put it, “It’s not a bad start.”

Meanwhile, Carleton administration set its sights on a different kind of relief: helping students and faculty from schools in the New Orleans area. Through mutual trustee Arnold continued on pp. 6
Donald, Carleton focused its efforts on Dillard University, a small liberal arts school badly hit by the storm. From the beginning, Mork knew that Carleton might not be particularly well-equipped to take in students directly. “Of course, we offered to talk to students and work with them if they wanted a place here,” he says, “but we are fairly far away. We’re a college with different sorts of tools, which is sort of focused on the educational side of things. We may not be equipped to offer that kind of aid, but there are many different kinds of ways to help.” Given these reasons, Carleton made the decision to focus on reaching out to Dillard’s faculty. “We expressed that we would be happy to make space for up to a half-dozen or so of Dillard’s professors here. We could provide research and office space, and set up a research and residency program. It depended upon what they needed,” says Mork. At this time, Dillard has not responded to Carleton’s offer, but Carleton is eager to help should the need arise.

The Carleton relief effort will not end once Katrina Relief Week is over. Says Kennedy: “We don’t want to raise all this money then just forget about it. People will be needing things for a long time.” AWARE plans to set aside some of the money it has raised in a special account, whose funds will go towards whatever long-term relief efforts the organization chooses to support. “We hear that some families from the affected areas are going to wind up moving to Northfield and settling down. We can use at least some of the money to provide for their long-term needs, like clothing, food, school supplies – stuff to help them start over,” says Kennedy. Dean Wagner adds: “We want to go beyond Carleton, beyond the initial impact and try to put together a program that will be beneficial in the long-term.” For the time being, the administration and student organizations agree: The best thing anyone can do is donate money. Says Dean Wagner, “Every little bit helps.”

There are also plans in the works for sending Carleton volunteers down to the New Orleans/Mississippi areas over winter break to lend direct aid. This program has not taken shape just yet, but administration officials say that it looks very promising. “We’ll probably put this program together through either the Minneapolis/St. Paul Red Cross or Habitat for Humanity, with which we have a long and successful partnership,” says Mork. “Either way, we’ll work with them to determine how and where our help is really needed.” Dean Wagner concludes: “We want to go beyond Carleton, beyond the initial impact and try to put together a program that will be beneficial in the long-term.

“If there’s anything I love about Carleton, it’s the way we say: ‘Let’s pull together; let’s maintain people’s dignity and integrity through this project; let’s make sure that what we’re doing is what’s really needed – and most of all, that it’s going to matter.”
Katrina Benefit Concert 9/24/2005

Sayles-Hill 9/27/2005
1. **SO, WHAT IS IT ABOUT CARLETON STUDENTS THAT YOU LIKE SO MUCH?**

No one here dresses alike. These students are eccentric Renaissance people and I seem to fit in quite well. I fell in love with Carleton immediately. The first thing that struck me, what I really loved about this environment, is that this is a place that really takes pride in individuality. It’s true today, and it’ll be true tomorrow. I was surprised to find in 1989 how much I loved Carleton and the young adults in this community.

2. **AS DEAN OF STUDENTS, WHAT ARE YOUR EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR THE COLLEGE?**

Discomfort is the essence of a true education. I see myself as an advocate for students, but also as someone who can create dialogue about critical issues, especially those people are uncomfortable talking about. I also want to encourage everyone to create different paths for themselves.

3. **DO YOU HAVE A PLAN IN MIND TO ACHIEVE THOSE GOALS?**

One of the long term plans is to honor student voices – how do we deal with the tough issues? How do we talk about things like alcohol and drugs? How do you have ethical conversations about healthy behaviors, individual rights, the community standards, and where the law is? How do we work together? The other way is to be supportive, be visible, and be accessible. And to help students develop the life skills to tackle major issues. There will be times when you have uncomfortable conversations about accountability for actions that harm others in the community. But again, that’s an educational conversation because as we’re all struggling to maintain a healthy community. The third way is to make sure we keep a sense of humor. This is a great place! I’ve had so much joy being here. A good healthy community laughs at itself, laughs with one another, and remembers to smile because that’s what makes us unique - our sense of humor.

4. **ANY CHANGES PLANNED FOR THE ALCOHOL POLICY?**

No. I’m thinking of the conversations we began last year about what creates a healthy space. Now, we have laws, whether we agree with them or not. As a Dean, I’m not going to move away from that. I think that we’re doing right; we have very powerful messages about staying safe and accessing resources when you find yourself in trouble. If individuals make a choice, as adults, that they want to experiment in different ways, we still have the message about federal laws. I think we’re balanced right, and I’m not going to be hiding in bushes tracking people down.

5. **IS THERE ANYTHING UNIQUE, INTERESTING, OR QUIRKY ABOUT YOU THAT YOU’D LIKE TO SHARE WITH THE STUDENT BODY?**

I have a wicked sense of humor sometimes. Once when I first came, I had a radio show with a fellow student. We did some music and some humor. People would often call in about their relationship problems and we would make a decision about whether they should “kick ’em to the curb” or not. It got us in some trouble, so we didn’t do it anymore.
A
dmittedly, the Roberts hearings were a moot point. As columnist Ellen Goodman wrote in a recent column for the Boston Globe, “barring some last minute photo of John Roberts popping out of a cake at a KKK rally smoking crack, he’s going to be confirmed.” However, just because we know the ultimate end of these hearings doesn’t mean we can’t enjoy the process. No, Roberts hasn’t said anything of value beyond infinite repetitions of “stare decisis,” yes, his own wife fell asleep during questioning the other day, and no, his hair still hasn’t moved, but the Roberts hearings and accompanying debate were nothing if not entertaining.

Consider the commentary of Senate heavy hitters Russell Feingold, Dianne Feinstein, and Ted Kennedy. Feingold remarked: “This is a confirmation proceeding…not a coronation.” Feinstein later referred to Roberts as a “legal automaton.” And Ted Kennedy remarked in his September 21 floor statement denouncing the nominee (brace yourselves) “Supporting or opposing nominees to the Supreme Court should not be a partisan question.”

Silly leftists. Unfortunately for the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy, Republican fawning over the nominee was not nearly so amusing. Republicans’ lackluster display of committee-room wit was especially notable during last Wednesday’s baseball banter. Sen. John Cornyn responded to Democrats’ continued use of the baseball metaphor with the remark that “Yesterday we were talking about baseball, but today we’re talking about dodgeball.” Hah! Senator Cornyn, what a joker you are.

In all seriousness, however, the Roberts hearings point to a stark partisan divide in the way of wit and professionalism. In terms of Fun on the Floor, the Democrats win hands down. Jerks.

---

**LETTER 1: A lesson in bigotry**

You Americans are all crackers. Go back to your own country.” Imagine the surprise I felt when I was verbally assaulted – and nearly physically attacked – on the London subway by an “enlightened European gentleman.” This exchange may surprise many on the far left who put Europe, its public policies, and its supposed tolerance on a pedestal. They see America as a racist nation that fails to care for its citizens. Well, here’s a newsflash: there is just as much, if not more, racism and bigotry in the United Kingdom as there is in the United States.

When I came to London two weeks ago, part of me expected to find a more tolerant society than I knew back home. London is one of the most diverse cities in the world. Walking the street one hears not only English but French, German, Spanish, Hindi, Chinese, and a multitude of other languages spoken on a regular basis. People from every corner of the globe live and work here. But that alone does not make it a tolerant place.

What I have found so far is not the enlightened, tolerant culture I anticipated. Quite the opposite, in fact.

For example, their white population seems to look down upon their Indian population. According to almost every white British citizen I have met, Indian immigrants are terrible drivers with little comprehension of traffic laws. They are also good for nothing more than low-paying manual jobs – mowing lawns and tending the gardens of upper-middle class white Brits. Just like in America, intolerance of immigrants is alive and well in London.

Other experiences suggest that white Londoners harbor contempt for foreigners in general. While taking the subway home from central London, I talked with two Germans and a Brit about the situation in New Orleans. After they left the train, a young male Brit walked up and insulted me for being an American.

“We don’t need you damn Americans,” he yelled. “You Americans are all crackers. Go back to your own country.” If that wasn’t enough, he spat in my face and continued: “Britain is for Brits. No one else. No Indians and certainly no damn Americans.” I just sat back and said nothing as he searched for a reason to beat me to a bloody pulp.

In fairness, such incidents probably happen rarely. The young man was likely drunk and in a bad mood. But the fact remains that I was judged, labeled, and attacked simply because I am an American. If that isn’t intolerance, I don’t know what is.

Europe has many great things to offer the world. But the next time you think of Europe, lower the pedestal a little. It’s not perfect. It’s not free of intolerance and racism. Like Americans, Europeans are human and subject to the same prejudices we are.

From across the ocean looking back home I can tell you that racism is a universal evil that plagues us all. I can also tell you that the United States of America, for all its faults and failings, may not be so bad after all.

---

**LETTER 2:**

**A lesson in nostalgia**

You must not think of Europe as a land of white stars. It is not a country of two allegiances. Europe is not a candidate for the United States of America. Europe is a multinational collection of peoples, and their home is not only the United States of America, but also the United Kingdom, France, and many other nations. Europe is a continent with a history and a future, and it is not a substitute for the United States of America.

Europe has many great things to offer the world. But the next time you think of Europe, lower the pedestal a little. It’s not perfect. It’s not free of intolerance and racism. Like Americans, Europeans are human and subject to the same prejudices we are.

From across the ocean looking back home I can tell you that racism is a universal evil that plagues us all. I can also tell you that the United States of America, for all its faults and failings, may not be so bad after all.
NATHAN KENNEDY/opinion  

D oes anyone remember early this summer to the beginning of the Cindy Sheehan story? Am I mistaken in thinking that back then, her goal wasn’t “bring our troops home now,” but was just to talk to President Bush? The first time she met with him, Sheehan felt the President wasn’t open with her and simply repeated his catch phrases and talking points. I recall that she was insulted by this, and that her original purpose for camping out in Crawford was to meet again with Bush and demand an honest and frank discussion of the war. Now it seems the idea of this discussion has been forgotten.

And then, back in August, Sena-

DEBATE ON IRAQ

Yet Senate recognizes that the system is far from perfect, and could use, at minimum, an examination of how we distribute money, and at maximum, a complete overhaul.

In response, this term we will be initiating a discussion with student organizations to evaluate the overall funding process and recreate the aspects in ways that are more favorable to the equitable flow of money to the groups.

It is always a tricky process, and undoubtedly the results will not be perfect, but by bringing in as many representatives from disparate perspectives and groups, we are hoping to bring Senate and Budget Committee to a better understanding of how to address the financial needs of student organizations, because they are such a vital part of student life at Carleton.

And to all the first year students, I say: stay tuned. Whether you’re appointed to a committee or run for Senate next term, you’re the ones who are going to be taking over the process in the near future. Get involved now, and you’ll have a major say in what happens not only right now, but in the upcoming several years.

I’m not ready to fall in line with his and Sheehan’s thinking quite yet. Iraq is a messy situation, sure, and the sooner we get out the better, but I cannot get past the fact that we created that situation. It’s our mess, and we cannot leave before we’ve cleaned it up enough that the Iraqis can take security and reconstruction effectively in hand.

Not only would success at this task be a first step in rebuilding our international reputation, I also feel that it is our duty. We already left Iraq in the lurch once – inciting rebellion after the first Gulf War and then standing back as Saddam Hussein crushed it brutally – and we must not do this again. Pulling out now would open the door to civil war and potentially even a new dictator. This would deny Iraqis the very benefits that our troops fought and died to bring them.

That many of us opposed the initial invasion does not mean we should oppose the current stage as well – delivering on the promise of these benefits for Iraqis. In fact, this should be exactly what we demand. It occurred to me, however, that the difficulty of many Americans like me
in accepting the idea of getting troops home soon – wanting first to ensure we’ve made enough progress – stems from our ignorance of what progress has actually been made in Iraq.

In fact, we don’t even know how we’ll know when the time is right, or how much progress is enough. Of course, Iraq has made great strides forward politically, but the constitution and elections alone will not bring our troops home, provide the basic services Iraqis need, or even guarantee true democracy. And this opposition is misplaced. As much as liberals loathe to admit it, this war has accomplished some good, namely getting rid of Saddam and bringing democracy to Iraq. Instead, shouldn’t honesty and openness be what we’re demanding? Where are all these Iraqi troops we’ve supposedly trained? Why, as recently as this summer, did some parts of Baghdad still lack reliable power? When will Iraqi oil revenues be enough to finance reconstruction, as promised? Maybe the answers are: fighting insurgents; it’s fixed now; and they have been. But whatever they are we ought to know. Feingold is right about the need for targets, though he called for the wrong kind.

What we need are targets for progress in Iraq to ensure that Iraq’s reconstruction achieves both short- and long-term success, and that American and other coalition troops are not committed for an indefinite period. So here’s my proposal: create an Iraq progress report. President Bush, with assistance from leaders of both parties, our coalition partners, and of course Iraqis themselves, needs to lay out a series of steps and goals along the path to the completion of the mission. And I don’t mean the vague concepts like “bringing freedom” he’s gotten away with so far.

I want specific goals: number of Iraqis fighting alongside and eventually replacing American troops in the field; how much oil money is funding Iraq’s reconstruction and development, and exactly how it’s being used; complete restoration of reliable water, power, garbage collection, and other services Americans take for granted; to name a few. It would be, in a word, a plan. This plan should include a tally of all American troops, contractors, and advisors left in Iraq, their role in accomplishing each goal, and if applicable, their diminished role after each goal is met. Such a set of goals would have many of the same effects that Feingold argued would come from setting a withdrawal date, with a few other advantages.

First, this way would greatly diminish the chances of us leaving without finishing the job. Also, American troops would still be around, providing assistance and serving as a force of stability – the latter being especially important considering the volatility of Iraqi politics. Finally, for the folks back home, it would accomplish what Cindy Sheehan wanted in the beginning by forcing President Bush to talk about what progress is actually being made on the ground.

We’re having the wrong debate about Iraq. Americans are blindly shouting “stay the course!” or “bring’em home!” and accomplishing nothing.

I have no idea what’s being done to accomplish any of these.

Which brings me back to Cindy Sheehan. When I first heard of her demand for a meeting with Bush, I was glad to hear a call for the President to can the bullshit and speak honestly about the war. Now that call has been replaced with outright opposition to the war.

In my opinion this opposition is misplaced. As much as liberals loathe to admit it, this war has accomplished some good, namely getting rid of Saddam and bringing democracy to Iraq. Instead, shouldn’t honesty and openness be what we’re demanding? Where are all these Iraqi troops we’ve supposedly trained? Why, as recently as this summer, did some parts of Baghdad still lack reliable power? When will Iraqi oil revenues be enough to finance reconstruction, as promised? Maybe the answers are: fighting insurgents; it’s fixed now; and they have been. But whatever they are we ought to know. Feingold is right about the need for targets, though he called for the wrong kind.

What we need are targets for progress in Iraq to ensure that Iraq’s reconstruction achieves both short- and long-term success, and that American and other coalition troops are not committed for an indefinite period. So here’s my proposal: create an Iraq progress report. President Bush, with assistance from leaders of both parties, our coalition partners, and of course Iraqis themselves, needs to lay out a series of steps and goals along the path to the completion of the mission. And I don’t mean the vague concepts like “bringing freedom” he’s gotten away with so far.

I want specific goals: number of Iraqis fighting alongside and eventually replacing American troops in the field; how much oil money is funding Iraq’s reconstruction and development, and exactly how it’s being used; complete restoration of reliable water, power, garbage collection, and other services Americans take for granted; to name a few. It would be, in a word, a plan. This plan should include a tally of all American troops, contractors, and advisors left in Iraq, their role in accomplishing each goal, and if applicable, their diminished role after each goal is met. Such a set of goals would have many of the same effects that Feingold argued would come from setting a withdrawal date, with a few other advantages.

First, this way would greatly diminish the chances of us leaving without finishing the job. Also, American troops would still be around, providing assistance and serving as a force of stability – the latter being especially important considering the volatility of Iraqi politics. Finally, for the folks back home, it would accomplish what Cindy Sheehan wanted in the beginning by forcing President Bush to talk about what progress is actually being made on the ground.

We’re having the wrong debate about Iraq. Americans are blindly shouting “stay the course!” or “bring’em home!” and accomplishing nothing. The debate should be about making progress towards turning Iraq into a democracy that can protect and sustain itself. A set of goals would aid this progress by increasing the transparency of the process and the accountability of American and Iraqi leaders. This way we could ensure our troops are not fighting and dying for nothing, and for Cindy Sheehan and thousands like her, that at least would be some consolation.

Foreign aid continued from pp. 7 than any other nation on the planet (roughly 53 percent of the total), and it wasn’t because we sent money to aid Tsunami victims.

Many have criticized our use of force as heavy-handed, reactionary and ill thought-out. Yet the nations who have seen the most from our military forces are now our most generous supporters in our time of need. Good will does not only come from monetary aid during times of crisis; it comes from recognizing that our military is a force for good across the world. The use of military force to intervene in international conflicts, protect flowering democracies in barren wastelands, and remove brutal dictators from power are fundamentally good components of U.S. foreign policy which provide more than moral and military benefits. Fighting evil abroad is the best way to ensure good will toward us in the future. ■
The day after the formal evacuation of New Orleans, buses full of evacuees began arriving at the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. I was there.

Technically, I probably should not have been there at all. I was a walk-in, a young woman, and I definitely did not have my parents’ permission. But as a red-cross trained emergency responder, I didn’t feel right sitting around doing nothing. Having lived on the Texas coast all my life, I’ve seen the kind of damage even a weak hurricane can do. So I walked the mile-and-a-half from my house to the ‘dome with all the canned goods I could carry, hoping I could help.

Of course, I knew enough not to expect any kind of dreamy, romanticized experience. It was too much to hope for a scenario in which a host of impossibly prepared, ever-gracious rescue workers could immediately leap to the aid of flocks of grateful survivors. Nonetheless, I was still caught off guard by the scene that greeted me. I had been braced for a nightmare, but that wasn’t what I found. Nightmares aren’t real. The Astrodome was supposed to be a haven for the people of New Orleans. To me, though, haven looked a lot like Hell on earth.

When I was little, Houston used to host an annual summer Livestock Show and Rodeo. The Astrodome always housed the animals, and my mom and I went every year to see them. I never liked it much. The whole place would reek of sweat and filth. It was always dirty, dingy, and muggy, full of loud noise and bad country music. As I watched the harried-looking volunteers herd people through the Dome’s doors (shouting to be heard over “On the Road again”, which was playing on the loudspeaker), it struck me how similar the scene in front of me seemed. All you had to do was take away the animals and add people instead. The blood, the sweat, the tears, and the Willie Nelson were all the same.

For about three hours, I worked with a big, surly Red Cross volunteer named Reed, trying to sort out families and belongings as more and more buses poured into the ‘Dome’s parking lot. It was a very physical job. The people who got off these buses were scared, tired, hungry, dirty and hopeless. Everyone seemed to have a crying friend on one shoulder and a chip on the other. There was anger everywhere. But as the day wore on, I noticed something. Not one of the evacuees was alone. Everyone, young and old, black and white, man and woman, was holding on to someone else. They had nothing - no money, no belongings, no idea what they were going to do next. But they clung to the ones they loved, and somehow it was enough to keep them going. It was very emotional, very touching - and very terrifying. I left with tears on my shoulders and in my eyes.

I finally arrived back at my house around 4:00 p.m. I was sweaty, exhausted, badly shaken and worried that my parents would be home to discover where I’d been.

My fears proved unnecessary – nobody was home. A much-needed shower and change of clothes later, I wandered around the house trying to appreciate everything we owned. Anything I could possibly have needed, from a drawer of paper clips to a refrigerator full of delicious food, was right there within my reach. But something was wrong. I wasn’t doing a very good job of appreciating any of it. Alone in my house with all of our nice things and creature comforts, I still wasn’t satisfied. At that moment, there was nothing in the world I wanted more than someone of my own to hold onto.

A young man and child at the Astrodome in Houston, TX