

Vermont town meetings vote against Iraq war

David Walsh
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Forty-nine Vermont cities and towns passed resolutions at town meetings this week calling for an investigation into the use of the state's National Guard in the Iraq war and for the withdrawal of US troops from that country.

Resolutions along these lines were placed on the ballot in some 57 communities, about one-fifth of Vermont's total. The antiwar resolutions were defeated in four locales and "passed over" (no vote taken) in another four. The nonbinding measure was passed by 65 percent of those attending the town meeting in Burlington, the state's largest city. Other significant communities that passed the resolution included Brattleboro, Middlebury and Montpelier (the state's capital). Five percent of the voters in a given community had to sign petitions to place the measure on the town meeting agenda.

Vermont has a population of 619,000, second smallest in the US. Some 1,200 Vermont National Guard members, 42 percent of the total, have served in the Iraq war, with at least one person coming from 200 of the 251 towns in the state. Vermont is second only to Hawaii in the per capita number of Guard and reserve units sent to the war. The state has the highest per capita number of deaths in the US.

The model resolution proposed by the organizers of the campaign—the Vermont Network on Iraq War Resolutions, Green Mountain Veterans for Peace and the Vermont chapter of Military Families Speak Out—argues that “the United States Congress adopted a ‘Joint Resolution to Authorize the use of United States Armed Forces Against Iraq,’ relying on statements that were untrue, when in fact the United States was not threatened with attack by Iraq; Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction; Saddam Hussein had no role in the 9/11 attacks.”

It further asserts that, “in going to war, the President did not meet the conditions imposed by Congress,

failing to show Congress why he decided that diplomatic or peaceful means alone would not protect the national security of the United States or lead to enforcement of Security Council resolutions on Iraq; why he decided that going to war was a necessary action against Iraq on the theory—never proven—that Iraq authorized, committed, or aided in the 9/11 attacks.”

It notes that “the costs of the call-up of Vermont National Guard members for deployment in Iraq has been significant, as reckoned in lost lives, combat injuries, psychic trauma, disruption of family life, financial hardship for individuals, families, and businesses, interruption of careers, and damage to the fabric of civic life in many Vermont communities” and, furthermore, that “these are costs which would be suffered willingly were there a threat to our nation, but which are not tolerable where there is none.”

The resolution concludes by calling on the Vermont congressional delegation “to urge Congress to restore the balance between the federal government and the states” and limit federal control over the state's National Guard units to cases where the US is threatened with attack or “a plausible threat of insurrection.” It further asks the state legislature to “investigate and discuss whether members of the Vermont National Guard have been called to active service and assigned to duties relating to the war in Iraq in conformity with the U.S. Constitution and federal laws, including the 2002 Congressional Resolution on Iraq.” Finally, the resolution calls on Bush and Congress to “take steps to withdraw American troops from Iraq, consistently with the mandate of international humanitarian law.”

Some of the town meetings were brief, some turned into heated debates. In numerous towns the resolutions passed unanimously. According to the *Washington Post*, “In postcard-perfect Strafford ... it passed with

hardly a whisper of dissent, minutes after residents authorized \$12,920 to buy a used backhoe loader. And in Bethel, a mill town that is conservative by this blue state's standard, residents narrowly endorsed a version of the measure, against the urging of a soldier who returned last week from the war."

The *New York Times* commented, "Leaders of some towns, like Middlebury and Bethel, tried to keep the resolution from being considered at the town meeting, only to be told by the Vermont secretary of state that they had no choice.

"Some places, like Thetford, after emotional wrestling matches, watered down the antiwar language to get something that would pass. And in Starksboro, which has had two of its soldiers killed in Iraq, such a passionate debate erupted among the 65 or so people who showed up that the town decided not to vote."

In a radio advertisement, available at the Vermont Network on Iraq War Resolutions web site, Sherry Prindall of Barre, Vermont, whose son is a National Guardsman in Iraq, denounces this "\$150 billion war, justified by lies and deception, [which] is being perpetrated in our names with our tax dollars and with our sons and daughters."

The following is the list of Vermont communities voting "Yes" on some version of the Iraq war resolution: Bethel, Brattleboro, Burlington, Cabot, Calais, Cavendish, Dummerston, East Montpelier, Fayston, Greensboro, Guilford, Hinesburg, Huntington, Jamaica, Jericho, Johnson, Marlboro, Marshfield, Middlebury, Middletown Springs, Monkton, Montgomery, Montpelier, Moretown, Ripton, Rochester, Rockingham, Roxbury, Salisbury, Sharon, Strafford, Thetford, Tinmouth, Waitsfield, Warren, Weathersfield, Westford, Westminster, Weybridge, Wheelock, Windham, Worcester, Woodbury.



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