

## A Last Ditch Peace Effort

By Doug Dobmeyer

**(Chicago, IL...) February 16, 2003 News item:** Millions of people demonstrated worldwide against an expected war with Iraq led by the United States. The demonstrators included 250,000 or more in New York City, 750,000 in London, over a million in Barcelona and a hundred thousand in Paris on February 15. Those participants in New York included contingents from Chicago as well as many other areas in the Eastern part of the US. One bus caravan from Chicago brought 300 protestors to the Big Apple. North Hampton, Massachusetts mobilized 23 busses to the New York event.

News reports on February 16 reported the demonstrations reshaping the second resolution the US is attempting to get passed by the UN, by softening the war related language. The numbers of demonstrators met expectations of organizers and surpassed originals estimates of US government officials.

**Our story:** I had never gone on a trip to a large social issues rally before. At age 53, I decided now was the time. Taking my 16-year old son, Paul, helped make that decision so much easier. He's opposed to a Mid-East war as I am.

The idea of taking a bus to New York, spending six hours on the ground there and getting back on the bus for the return trip seems as close to the trip from hell as could be. But, I figured you could sleep on the bus, there would be interesting people to talk with and some of the scenery would be good.

The war is no longer being talked about if it's going to happen, but when it will occur. I saw this peace rally as a last ditch effort to stop a war brought on by a cowboy in the White House.

I also faced for the first time outside of a Cold War setting, the idea that the US is the aggressor nation with this war effort. Before, the political cover was we were carrying out a policy of containment against another form of political entity. But, now we have a president bent on fighting a war that will put the US in the driver's seat of aggression in a very vague war on terrorism. Many would argue he has failed to make the case that Iraq is truly an enemy by threatening the United States. This is especially true when compared to a US position of negotiation with North Korea, a nation with potential capacity to strike the US Pacific coast with a missile.

The Afghan war we fought may have had justification due to 9/11 and the treatment of the Afghan people, especially women by the Taliban rulers. The first Iraqi War was based on an invasion of Kuwait and burning oilfields by the Iraqi military. The Second Iraqi War is based on fabrications. The prospect of other wars after the Iraqi War also seemed probable. The course is being set now and why the war must be halted.

**The trip to New York:** We left Evanston at 5:00 pm on Friday, February 14 with 46 people on board. The ages ranged from 16 to 78 and included White, Black, Hispanic and Asian people. There were professional protestors, high school and college students, teachers, a handy man, retired and other professional people. Channel 7 and the *Evanston Review* showed up to capture the sendoff for the public.

The seats were small or I was too big. The 30 hours of the roundtrip ride seemed much longer all of a sudden. There were a lot of announcements from the organizers. The most distressing was New York City officials had prohibited porta-potties and a parade permit past the UN Building. Those two announcements to newbie's like me caused some rise in blood pressure.

But by 7:45 we were passing the microphone around for people to say why they were here. The most poignant reason came from a person who said, "I love my country and don't want it to lose its soul through a war with Iraq." The person finished by saying, "To be quiet would be complicit."

Another person voiced the fight was against the "war machine." A high schools student said, "No one has the right to take someone's life." We were heartened by numbers that exceeded a half million for London and Paris. We listened to a tape of Kathy Kelly's (co-founder of Voices in the Wilderness and currently in Iraq) interview on WBEZ's World View program.

Later after 7:00 people woke up, ate fruit, nuts and other food while they got subway maps and detailed instructions on moving from New Jersey to New York City by the Port Authority subway system. I was acquainted with New York and except for the minute details the instructions were familiar.

Paul went to Ground Zero with a group before the demonstration. He later described it as a construction site with a memorial site. The memorial site was a long wrought iron fence where people put any kind of memorial from all over the world.

After crossing to New York, I went by subway north to 53<sup>rd</sup> and Third Avenue to finish walking another five blocks to the demonstration site. However, when I left the subway at Third Avenue a massive sea of people that spilled over from the sidewalks to capture most of the street. So despite New York's iron fist no to issuing a permit, the numbers of people compelled that the streets become the avenue of movement.

Despite the cold temperatures, people were laughing, carrying signs, dressed in many different costumes and exercising their democratic rights in a peaceful, but forceful way. They weren't overwhelmed by a threat of Bush, level Orange security threats or the tremendous force of New York Police present on the street. The march north moved at a steady flow, with no trouble from the police or the arrests of demonstrators.

The demonstrators presented their message that Bush failed to make the argument for war in a manner the complete opposite of the administration's pro-war argument. The demonstrators used humor expressed in signs, costumes, chants laced with sarcasm to drive home the point that dead Iraqi's and Americans don't equal a better world. One popular sign read: **"Empty warheads found at the White House with a caricature of Bush as a warhead broken apart."**

I decided as the crowd moved north that I would buy this sign from a peace vendor on the sidewalk and stand at a corner and hold it due to problems of walking distances. I did that for \$3.00 found a safe corner at 56<sup>th</sup> and Third Avenue to stand. I wanted to advertise that the Chicago City Council had passed a resolution to oppose the war. So I hastily made a sign using a borrowed black marker that read: **"Chicago Says No to the War."**

For the next two hours an estimated 120,000 people passed by seeing my hastily made sign. Many acknowledged it by waving, calling out, giving a thumb up or coming over and talking. Many were not aware of the resolution. Some were natives of Chicago who moved to New York or elsewhere many years ago. They expressed a sense of pride at the city council action. Several media outlets, a radio station from Connecticut and a Latino newspaper from New York did interviews. It turned out to be a worthwhile educational effort and made a small contribution to the day's events.

At one point, the New York mounted police appeared and galloped east on 56<sup>th</sup> through the crowd toward the bigger rally on First Avenue. Later others on our bus related how the horses were used to do harsh crowd control on people trying to exercise their Constitutional rights.

By this time my son found me and we left to do what anyone does in New York, have lunch and go to some stores on the way back to the New Jersey subway line. We met so many other Americans from Connecticut, Baltimore, Virginia and Philadelphia who had participated in the rally and felt they had made a contribution to a difficult issue.

The ride back to Chicago, as you might surmise was less exciting than coming to New York. People were exhausted by the cold and activities that sleep was a welcome partner for much of the way. Arriving back in Evanston Sunday at 9:30 AM was a pleasant ending to this story.

Would Paul and I do it again? Absolutely, if I felt there could be a positive impact. The alternative is to sit by the wayside, watch events unfold and abrogate your democratic responsibilities to political leaders making the wrong decisions. The inaction only strengthens the hand of the wrong doer.

(Doug Dobbmeyer is the principal of Dobbmeyer Communications, a PR group that works on hard-to-place social issues. Doug has been active on the state and national political scene for many years. His website is [www.dobbmeyer.com](http://www.dobbmeyer.com).)

### **Statement Issued on February 14, 2003**

#### **Mission to New York Aimed at Peace and Adverting War with Iraq**

(Chicago, IL...) Today several busloads of Chicago and area residents travel to New York City to participate in a peace demonstration. The purpose is to advert a war with Iraq that will only kill people and lead to the United States' dishonor.

The following is the statement by Doug Dobbmeyer:

"The mission to New York is aimed at adverting a war of disaster for the United States and the people of Iraq. The issues between the US and Iraq can and should be settled through diplomacy.

The US government has been less than forthcoming in recent months. When they call on Iraq to open their doors to inspectors, that occurs, then the government says that is not good enough. When American and allied support waivers, the government says we have a terrorism alert at level orange, but that is not true. When questions are asked of the government, they say the answer is secret.

The credibility of the US government on the Iraqi issue does not exist.

The alternative is for the US government to withdraw the troops moved to the Middle-East so far and return to diplomacy. If the Bush Administration can not or will not seek a peaceful solution, they the government should resign and let others take over who will seek peace."

**Dobbmeyer Communications, P.O. Box 268617 Chicago, Illinois 60626, 773/338-9825,  
FAX: 773/338-9859, Cell: 312/315-6887, E-Mail: [dcdobbmeyer@aol.com](mailto:dcdobbmeyer@aol.com), [www.Dobbmeyer.com](http://www.Dobbmeyer.com)**

## Responses:

- 1.) [Good piece Doug.](#) – ed
- 2.) Doug Dobmeyer, one of our local treasures, has written a terrific short description of his experience traveling to New York with his son this weekend. His text follows. – Michael O'Connor
- 3.) Doug, Thanks for the account of NY march and Byrd's speech. We've got to get some more in Congress to stand up. Will a letter writing campaign do anything? On another note, I ran into your son, Paul at Sullivan. He's in a class taught by a student teacher I'm supervising. I think I met him back in Oct. when we leafleted before a march though I must admit I had forgotten it at the moment he spoke to me. I am forwarding you this information about these student speak-outs. Perhaps Paul would like to organize something at Sullivan. - Paula Baron
- 4.) Doug, Someone forwarded to me your essay on your trip with your son to New York to attend the anti-war rally. What a powerful piece! I was particularly moved by the story of your hand-lettered sign advertising Chicago's resolution against the war. When I first agreed to take the lead in sponsoring that resolution I had no idea it would pass by such an overwhelming vote, nor did I contemplate the significant impact its passage would have on people from across the nation. Quite frankly, it's been one of the highlights of my twelve years in office. Thanks for sharing your experience with us. – Joe Moore (alderman, 49<sup>th</sup> Ward) P.S. I know I owe you a return call. I'll try to call you tomorrow.
- 5.) Doug, Way to go! Wes
- 6.) this is somewhere around the 20th or so 'aggressive' war the us has waged. if you think its the 1st either your standards are different from mine or your knowledge of us history in the western hemisphere is lacking. please, contain your emotions - especially liberal indignation!!!  
jm Answer: Jim, No, its not the first, but its the first of a new era - post communism containment policy era. And maybe its no different, but at present there is no power to contain us. – Doug
- 7.) Doug:□the neatest thing about your trip to New York is that you took your son. - Nancy
- 8.) Hi Doug, Just read your account of the NYC march. I took a bus to DC in October and January and had much the same experience. It was very hopeful and a terrific outlet for all my frustrations. I learned about toe warmers and also about how to sleep sitting up. - Mary Rickard
- 9.)