

Where’s the results?

THE ISSUE | The president wants a “return to success” in Iraq.
OUR OPINION | Enough of the catchy slogans and incentives. Bring our troops home.

We’ve had enough.

Enough of President Bush and his “hell no, we won’t go” attitude about the Iraq War.

Despite calls from many in Congress and a majority of Americans, the president isn’t budging on his Iraqi agenda. Instead, Bush wants our troops to “return to success.”

That was his message Thursday in response to a report issued earlier in the week by Gen. David Petraeus that recommended a partial withdrawal of troops.

In his address to the nation Thursday night, Bush once again rejected calls to end the war and instead embraced Petraeus’ plan, which would have 5,700 troops home by Christmas and 21,500 by July. That would leave approximately 130,000 troops still fighting.

That part of his speech was expected. We give the president credit, when he hatches a plan, he sticks to it - in this case for 4.5 years.

What was most disturbing about the president’s speech was that call for a “return to success.”

“The more successful we are, the more American troops can come home,” Bush said.

Just what our weary, ill-equipped soldiers need: An incentive plan.

And how are they supposed to achieve that success? Well, Bush didn’t have much to say about that. That’s because he doesn’t have a clue - and by the current state of things, no one else seems to, either.

Truth is, our troops are sitting ducks in a civil war that has waged on and off for centuries. They battle suicide bombers funded by al-Qaida, not platoons of soldiers wearing uniforms and stationed behind enemy lines. In Iraq, there are no more lines left to cross as insurgents terrorize civilians and our troops seemingly at will. Anyone, even a smiling child on the street corner, can be the enemy.

And how can our troops fight that? We’re not sure. But we do know it will take more than an incentive plan.

Forget a “return to success.” The only return we want to see is our troops coming home.

NATIONAL VIEW | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Poor Pakistan

In Pakistan the only thing worse than a civilian government is a military government, and vice versa.

The strange tango between President Pervez Musharraf and former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif makes you wish for a third kind of government there.

Bhutto was ousted from power in 1990 and again in 1996, to the cheers of Pakistanis. She has been in exile ever since. Sharif was kicked out of power in 1999 by Musharraf, commander of the army, who then set himself up as president. Musharraf, who once vowed that Bhutto would go to prison if she returned to Pakistan, has recently been negotiating some kind of power-sharing deal with her. Sharif, who precipitated the 1999 coup when he tried to block a plane carrying Musharraf from landing in Karachi, wants to stake his claim to running things.

By one measure, all that plotting might be considered progress. At least the plotters are all still alive. In 1977 the Pakistani military overthrew the elected prime minister and later put him on trial and hanged him.

But Musharraf, Bhutto and Sharif are political survivors, and it is likely that at least one of the three will be in charge after elections that are expected to be held by mid-October.

Sharif landed in Pakistan on Monday after a seven-year exile, buoyed by a recent decision by Pakistan’s Supreme Court affirming his right to return to the country. But within hours, he was charged with corruption and deported - in possible contravention of the court decision.

Just a few hours later, Bhutto announced that she would return to Pakistan from her exile. Sharif’s lawyers filed a petition Tuesday with the Supreme

Court claiming that his deportation constituted contempt of court. It demanded that the Supreme Court compel the government to fly Sharif back to Pakistan again and let him tell his side of the story.

Oh, to have the landing-rights fees at the local airport.

The return of Sharif and Bhutto would, by rounding out the electoral field, at least help firm up the bona fides of the coming elections. But it is worth remembering that in Pakistan, which has only twice in its 60-year history enjoyed a peaceful and democratic political succession, good and bad aren’t always so easy to parse.

Bhutto and Sharif have faced charges of pervasive corruption in their administrations.

Though Musharraf has seen his popularity fall precipitously in recent months, he has generally been considered one of the better leaders Pakistan has had. (Except for that little business of the coup.) He has made an effort against corruption and presides over a country that is enjoying strong economic growth.

The return of Bhutto would hardly promise the dawn of a new era in Pakistan. She is seeking to strip the Pakistani president of the power to dismiss parliament and the government - which is how she was ousted twice - and she wants corruption charges against her dismissed. Her allegedly ill-gotten gains, which Pakistan has been trying to recoup, reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

What a mess. As long as Musharraf clings to control of the military and the government, Pakistanis are likely to grow more frustrated. But they don’t seem to have fresh leaders who could set a new direction. So Musharraf and Bhutto try to negotiate a power-sharing deal, Sharif lurks, and no Thomas Jefferson is in sight.

LETTERS POLICY | THE LEADER

■ Letters should be typed or neatly printed.

■ Letters must be kept to a maximum of 250 words. Letters longer than that will not be considered.

■ Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. No letters will be published unless verified with the author in person or by telephone.

ARTIST’S VIEW



COMMENTARY | LEONARD PITTS JR.

Changing the world

The consensus was that Tom Cousins was either crooked or crazy.

The former opinion was held by residents of the gritty East Lake Meadows housing project who didn’t believe him when he said he wanted to tear down East Lake and erect a mixed-income apartment complex in its place. The latter opinion was held by observers who did.

The residents thought it was just a land grab. They thought Cousins, a wealthy developer and philanthropist, was lying when he said they would be able to move back into nice apartments at subsidized rates and that the drug gangs that had held East Lake in thrall would be banished.

The observers thought it was nuts, this idea that you could effect change by tearing down a crime factory and building an apartment complex where the poor and the middle class would be neighbors. Charles Knapp, then president of the University of Georgia, told Cousins it was a bad idea. “He looked at me and said, ‘Professor’ - which he always called me when he was trying to make a point - ‘I have wasted a lot of money on other people’s bad ideas, including some of yours. And now I’m going to waste some on one of mine.’”

Fifteen years later, Cousins’ “bad idea” has produced miracles. As detailed in my last column, crime is way down, income is way up, chil-

dren’s test scores have exploded. Knapp is now board chairman of the East Lake Foundation.

This is a What Works column, part of my series on programs that are successfully attacking dysfunction that plague black children. The success of East Lake suggests you can win that battle by not isolating poverty.

At East Lake, says Executive Director Carol Naughton, a child sees examples he might not see in places where poverty is concentrated. “You see people going to work. You see people going to school, working on whatever plan they have for their life.”

“What did we do differently?” says Cousins. “We built in role models. Every other apartment is a middle-income family.”

Also, middle-income communities tend to attract better services, says Naughton, pointing out the new grocery store and bank that recently opened nearby and the increased police patrols. You didn’t see that when everyone here was poor. Nor, she says, is the benefit one-sided. East Lake, with its spacious apartments, pre-K learning center, excellent charter school and mentoring programs, is just a good, safe place to live, income notwithstanding.

Cousins has been seeking to solve poverty for years. He built low-income housing under the old urban renewal program that razed the slums. That didn’t work. “We go out three or four

years later and they’re slums again. We hadn’t changed the environment.”

Hence, this approach. Change the housing, change the schools, change the services, change the expectations, change everything.

Because Cousins was morally offended by East Lake. “A child has no control over where he or she is born,” he says. Yet for children there, the “future was set and hopeless. To grow up in that environment, which was just drugs and crime and illiteracy and poverty ... I had two very strict parents and I still got in a little trouble. I can’t imagine what I would have done had I been in that environment.”

As Naughton sees it, “The unfairness of it all and the lack of a relatively even playing field just sat in his craw.”

Cousins believed in his heart, she says, that “had been born in East Lake Meadows, he wasn’t special enough to have made it out. And shame on us for allowing a community to have developed and continued where the average guy or the average girl didn’t have a shot.”

There’s a word for that. It’s not crazy and it’s not crooked. It is, rather, conscience.

■ **Leonard Pitts Jr., winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, is a columnist for the Miami Herald, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, Fla. 33132. Readers may write to him via e-mail at lpitts@miamiherald.com.**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hunter ‘will never let you down’

TO THE EDITOR | Even though the Steuben County Clerk is an elected position, it can also be identified as an elected civil servant who works at the discretion of the Steuben County taxpayers’ and with the support of the Steuben County Legislature.

Judy Hunter has always made decisions for the best interest of the Steuben County constituents, clients and taxpayers. Judy’s main ingredient for a successful formula, meeting her goals and objectives are you, the people of Steuben County. Judy has really brought the county clerk environment out of the “dark ages” into the 21st century. She has computerized the county clerk procedures, generating new revenue for you, the taxpayer, helping to keep your taxes down; she has written

grants that had positive outcomes, generating another source of new revenue for the taxpayers in Steuben County.

Judy Hunter has found many avenues to modernize the Steuben County Clerk’s Office and the Department of Motor Vehicles, following all the New York state procedures and achieving state audits of 90+. Judy should be applauded for all of the creative and professional methods she has introduced into the county clerk’s and the Department of Motor Vehicle’s offices. All of these initiatives were created for the good and the betterment for you, the constituents, the backbone of your wonderful and successful Steuben County and the clerk’s office.

Well, I am happy and honored to know that Senator George Winner, Assemblymen James Bacalles and Thomas O’Mara, support our New York State Association of

County Clerks, made up of 62 county clerks throughout New York State. We have a legislative agenda every year and our Honorable Senator and Assemblymen support us whenever they can; we do have a very positive outlook. Judy Hunter, Steuben County Clerk, is part of this association, serving as a member of the executive board and participating on the Courts Committee and the Department of Motor Vehicle Committee, working diligently to make the proper decisions that will have a very productive outcome for you the constituents and the taxpayers of Steuben County.

I am respectfully asking and requesting that you, the voters in Steuben County, vote Sept. 18 for Judy Hunter for Steuben County Clerk. She will never let you down.

Catherine K. Hughes
Chemung County Clerk | Elmira

Another controversial episode

Mayor Frank Coccho has dodged another one.

The CSEA decided last week to drop its claim against the mayor that he harassed and tried to intimidate workers after meeting with his political opponent,

Republican Tom Reed.

CITY BEAT

The reason, according to an ad that appeared in Friday’s edition, was that the issue was clouding the

upcoming mayoral election. “Your workforce believes that in this election year, the debate among candidates for city offices should be about solutions and who has the leadership skills to guide Corning,” the ad read.

It then ends with, “Let’s focus on the future.” There’s a few ways of looking at this, and, judging by the blogs, folks are saying plenty. There are those who say the union decided to drop its case because it realized it was baseless. Coccho and his supporters probably feel that way, even though the mayor hasn’t yet commented on the news. Those in Coccho’s corner are saying the case was politically motivated and another effort to tarnish the mayor’s image. Frank should feel vindicated.

Conversely, there are those who believe union President Steve Pantone when he said: “We feel the claims are valid, we’re not retracting the claims. We’re just choosing not to move forward.” In short, union members said enough is enough. They’re sick of the whole affair and simply want to be left alone to do their jobs. Ultimately, their hope is that the results of the Nov. 6 election will solve the problem much quicker than prolonging the issue through the Public Employee Relations Board.

So there’s definitely a few ways to interpret the union’s decision. What is indisputable, however, is that damage has already been done. Coccho, a former union boss and big union supporter, has seen his relationship with the CSEA ruined. Hard feelings exist and you can bet the union won’t support Coccho like it did in 2006.

Beyond that, this marks another episode in what has become a trend for the mayor. Controversy always seems to find him, perhaps because he brings it on himself. Since taking office, he’s fought with the union, Republicans on the City Council, downtown merchants, the press and this editor, to name a few. What that’s done, beside keep Coccho’s name on Page 1, is distract the public from focusing on the important issues.

Who can think about fluoride, potholes and higher taxes when Coccho’s on the front page facing another allegation or council vote for censure?

Smoke screen? You bet. But who created it?

What the CSEA said in its ad Friday is that with less than two months before the mayoral election, it’s time to focus on issues and not smoke screens. It’s hard to argue with that no matter what side you’re on.

■ **Joe Dunning is managing editor for The Leader. He can be reached at jdunning@the-leader.com or 936-4651, Ext. 362.**