

Merriam Park NEIGHBORS FOR PEACE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Neighbors for Peace to "Raise the Bar" for Democratic Candidates

St. Paul, MN – June 17, 2003 – When national Democratic leaders visit St. Paul next week, Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace and other Minnesota organizations will be on the scene to question presidential candidates, raising the electoral bar for peace, justice, and environmental issues. The Association of State Democratic Chairs and the Democratic National Committee will convene this weekend at the Radisson Riverfront Hotel at 11 East Kellogg Boulevard in St. Paul. Gearing up for the 2004 presidential elections, Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace will be outside the hotel on Friday, June 20, from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. to invite the candidates to join concerned Minnesota Democrats in dialogue about critical issues.

"People are leaving the Democratic party in droves, because in recent elections the candidates have become so centrist that they are almost indistinguishable from the Republicans," comments Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace co-founder, Anne Benson. "We want to see the Democratic party return to its progressive roots—to stand up for working people and poor people, and to fight against the regressive domestic and foreign policies of the Bush administration."

The neighbors from the Merriam Park area of St. Paul hold that in recent elections, Democratic candidates have lost their chance to take office because they've neglected the concerns of their own voters.

"It has always been said, 'There are more Democrats than Republicans; we just need to get out the vote,'" states member, Steve Schwarz. "We, however, need a reason to get out the vote. Many Democrats have felt alienated and misrepresented by the party and have looked instead to other alternatives. We believe in the principles that made the Democratic party what it was and still can be today. Remember, we in Minnesota have supported a long line of Democratic politicians who voted on principle and not on predictions of popularity. We expect our candidates to make peace and justice issues a priority."

Adds Benson, "We're encouraging candidates to ask themselves the hard questions: Where are the weapons of mass destruction? Was I misled by the administration when I voted for the War Powers Resolution? How do we get out of this quagmire in Iraq? Does the PATRIOT Act infringe on too many civil liberties?"

Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace has invited all Democratic candidates to meet with them after their sessions conclude on Friday to answer a series of fourteen questions regarding issues of pre-emptive war, international relations, arms development, military spending, V.A. benefits, U.S. economy, social programs, employment, globalization, education, health care, civil liberties, terrorism, and environmental policy. They invite all Minnesotans with these concerns to join them in St. Paul on Friday in addressing the candidates.

"We're not endorsing a particular candidate," group member, Jeanne Schnitzen, notes. "We're giving them all a chance to look us in the eye and answer to the issues we vote for. If they're really in this race to turn the tides, we'll make sure they get that chance. I want to believe there is a Democratic candidate who is capable of sowing the seeds of change."

For additional information about Friday's event, visit the Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace web site at <http://www.mppeace.org/events/raisethebar.htm> or contact:

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RAISE THE BAR

FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

Democratic leaders from all fifty states will gather in St. Paul, June 19–21, for a meeting of the Association of State Democratic Chairs and the Democratic National Committee.

Show Democratic candidates that we expect their leadership on issues of peace and justice if they want to earn our votes in 2004! Help present the hard questions to determine where the candidates stand.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 20, 2003
2:30–5:30 P.M.**

**Radisson Riverfront Hotel
11 East Kellogg Boulevard, St. Paul**

Bring signs with positive messages promoting peace and justice issues. We'll be there to support these issues to raise the bar for *all* Democrats, not to promote a particular candidate, so please do not single out individuals.

**WE VOTE FOR
PEACE & JUSTICE!**

**Sponsored by Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace
<http://www.mppeace.org/events/raisethebar.htm>**

RAISE THE BAR FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

Dear Democratic Candidate:

The members of Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace and many other Minnesota organizations believe that in recent elections, Democratic candidates have lost their chance to take office because they've neglected the concerns of their own voters. Many Democrats have felt alienated and misrepresented by your party and have looked instead to other alternatives. Democratic representatives at every level have betrayed the core values of peace, non-violence, and social and economic justice.

We now encourage you to ask yourself the hard questions listed below and let us know where you stand on these important issues. We would like the opportunity to meet with you outside the Radisson Hotel during your St. Paul, Minnesota, convention on Friday, June 20, between 2:30 and 5:30 p.m. If you're in this race to turn the tides, we'll make sure you get that chance.

Sincerely,
Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace and the rest of the Minnesota progressive community

- 1) What actions will you take to denounce pre-emptive war and pursue non-violent solutions?
- 2) How will you reconcile the rift between the U.S. and other U.N. member nations?
- 3) How will you prevent another U.S.-supported regime from misusing funds, committing human rights violations, and emerging as a new enemy with arms and training we have provided?
- 4) How will you serve to mediate a peaceful, fair resolution to the Israel-Palestine crisis?
- 5) What actions will you take to bring the U.S. into alignment with international laws and treaties such as the International Criminal Court, Kyoto Protocol, and Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty?
- 6) Can you justify the use of depleted uranium munitions and the continuing development of nuclear weapons?
- 7) How will you support veterans in the face of recent V.A. benefits cuts?
- 8) How will you sustain social programs within a balanced budget to prevent the disadvantaged of our country from becoming the victims of our wars abroad?
- 9) How will you protect jobs at home to prevent working families from becoming the victims of unfair trade agreements and irresponsible international corporate behavior?
- 10) What will you do to elevate K-12 and higher education to a critical national priority?
- 11) How do you justify the use of tax dollars to kill people in other nations while denying health care for many of our own nation's people?
- 12) How will you secure our freedoms established in the Bill of Rights in the face of the PATRIOT Act?
- 13) How will you work within the international community to promote conservation and fair allocation of natural resources to advance both ecological and political stability, thereby reducing the pressures that lead to terrorism and war?
- 14) How will you honor the Geneva Convention obligation requiring an occupying power to provide for the well-being of the occupied people while allowing the reconstruction of a free, self-governing Iraq and Afghanistan?