

Evangelical support for Iraq war apparently wavering

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By Julie Sullivan

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DAMASCUS, Ore. (RNS)—Suzanne Brownlow shivers on an Oregon highway overpass as a cutting wind whips her sign: “Honk to End the War.” Her weekly demonstration is the latest turn in a fractious journey that has taken the evangelical Christian mother from protesting abortion clinics to protesting the war in Iraq.

“I feel like at least we are doing something,” Mrs. Brownlow said, waving to passersby along with her husband, Dave, and two youngest children.

Suzanne Brownlow and daughters Desi (left) and Sierra (center), look at photos of their son and brother Jared, 20, who serves in Iraq. Mrs. Brownlow is an evangelical who had supported President Bush but now strongly opposes the war. (RNS photo by Benjamin Brink/*The Oregonian*)

No polling data conclusively demonstrate that opinion has shifted among the broad national base of conservative evangelicals. But some prominent national evangelical leaders say that debate about—and, in some cases, outright opposition to—the war is breaking out among Christian conservatives whose support was key to President Bush's election victories.

For those evangelicals, they say, frustration with Republicans' failure to overturn abortion rights has fueled their skepticism. Others decry the war's human toll and financial cost, and they're concerned about any use of torture.

"This war has challenged their confidence in the party," said Tony Campolo, an evangelical Baptist minister, author and professor of sociology who lectures across the country on social issues. "Add to that that they feel the Republicans have betrayed them on the abortion issue, and you are beginning to see signs of a rebellion."

[The National Association of Evangelicals](#), which represents 45,000 evangelical churches, recently endorsed an anti-torture statement saying the United States has crossed "boundaries of what is legally and morally permissible" in its treatment of detainees and war prisoners in the fight against terror.

The Brownlows voted for Bush in 2000 because of his conservative views. But a month before the 2003 invasion, the Damascus, Ore., couple began campaigning against his Iraq policies. Dave Brownlow ran for Congress three times, twice on an anti-war ticket for the Constitution Party. Since November, the couple has lobbied lawmakers to bring the troops home.

Recently, they founded [Believers Against the War](#) to influence other evangelical Christians.

On a recent Saturday, a motorcyclist, sleek in black leather, spotted the Brownlows' banners, raised his gloved fist and flipped an obscene gesture.

The Brownlows smiled, because many others were honking their support. Then a woman driver slowed and screamed, "Get over it."

Suzanne Brownlow's serenity finally broke.

"How can I get over it?" she said. "My son is in Iraq."

To be sure, many mainline Christian churches and several dozen prominent evangelicals opposed the war from the beginning. Others were ambivalent.

But since 2003, polls have shown that a higher rate of conservative Christians than other Americans favored military action. The National Association of Evangelicals, the same group that condemned torture tactics, even linked evangelical "prayer warriors" to the successful killing of Saddam Hussein's sons.

Before the war in Iraq, the Brownlows shared the concerns of the religious right.

Suzanne and Dave Brownlow met at a church singles group in Houston 26 years ago. As born-again Christians, they vowed to be a politically active married couple. He picketed Planned Parenthood clinics; she organized for Concerned Women for America.

They had Jared, now 20; Desi, 19; Jace, 15; and Sierra, 12, and moved to Oregon in 1990. They home-schooled their children, were foster parents for three medically fragile youths for Heal the Children and housed eight foreign-exchange students. They campaigned on behalf of Republican candidates. In 2001, Suzanne Brownlow won the Concerned Women for America's National "Diligence" award.

But by 2002, troubled by the lack of progress on the anti-abortion front and the legality of the president's war powers, they joined the Constitution Party. Soon after the invasion, Dave Brownlow began writing articles

opposing the war.

Meanwhile, Jared Brownlow—long fascinated by military histories, movies and photos of his grandfather, a World War II tail gunner—joined the Army.

The Brownlows say their eldest son has not objected to their anti-war efforts. He's serving in the Army near Baghdad.

Suzanne Brownlow has found herself increasingly overcome with worry. She has trouble eating and dreams of helicopters landing in her yard. Her husband starts every day clicking onto casualty websites. The couple keep two clocks in their living room, one set for Oregon and one for Iraq.

Although many churchgoers are active against the war, the Brownlows still feel self-conscious sharing their views with their Christian friends. People have told them freedom isn't free or that they must support the troops.

"As if to say that by allowing our sons and daughters to languish in a vast Iraqi shooting gallery," Dave Brownlow said, "we are somehow supporting them."

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