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Being a Good Citizen is Hard

To whom it may concern: all Friday evenings are already scheduled in my life.

For decades I have carefully carved out time to take in public television's "Comment on Kentucky," "McLaughlin Group" (tuning out during the short period in each program when all 5 persons are shouting at one another at once); "Washington Week in Review," and "Now with David Brancaccio." The reviews, projections forward and overviews are always helpful to me, complementing all the reading I do, even though I don't agree with all I hear.

As life in the Middle East and now northeastern Africa gets more troubled by the day, I strongly recall a Spring 2003 "Comment on Kentucky" program where a leader from our University of Kentucky was among the journalists on the panel. He led a UK institute dealing with international policy; this institute had just completed a week long conference on Middle East policy. This was just a couple months after our U.S. Middle East invasion. At the conclusion of a report on the conference's work, moderator Al Smith asked him, 'Do you think people in Washington are listening to you all?' Response: 'Oh, no. There is no one in the White House inner circle who is recognized as a Middle East expert.'

My response: 'Sweet mother!! We are in for a lot of trouble here!!' We had ventured into an area with cultures several thousand years old (our USA age is a mere 230 years), and territory where other great powers had ventured and failed (from Alexander the Great to the Soviet Union and its heirs).

Already in this new year, 4 years later, I have heard an analysis that says a plan to increase military presence in Iraq would not be heeding the Iraq study group's recommendations. From where will wisdom come?

These days anger and great sadness grow in me. An-

ger at the mess into which we have let ourselves be led despite the strongest global calls ever to "Not go there" with the war, and sadness at what has flowed from our errors and realizing that "We all are guilty" as a country of some 300 million people. My heart aches at all the death and injury resulting from this adventure to our own personnel, to local people there. It leads to the demise of so many key features of our democracy, to our sense of global community.

Though I am not a professional historian, I know enough history to be very concerned that we have been repeating major mistakes of other great powers. Though we are waiting for the next plan and rationale for U.S. presence in Iraq, indications are to do more of the same: ramp up the military response, which seems to have been a big part of our problem all along.

Then there is the matter that we wouldn't be there at all if major oil deposits weren't in the area—the use of which oil is a very big contributor to our planet's great peril from speeding up, soon-to-be-self-feeding global warming—with next to no national work to conserve our use of it or wean ourselves from its use.

In response with this anger and sadness, I try to keep figuring it all out, seize opportunities to give input to our leaders, deliberate with others, try hard to reduce my "carbon footprint," pray for strength and fidelity as the future unfolds. A fundamental question for me: given it all, what does God hope I/we will do? Play like an ostrich doesn't seem to be among any right answers.

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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.