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**With an interest in many issues, residents plan to tune in to president's remarks**

By Noel Robinson

With President Bush scheduled to give his annual State of the Union address tonight, the topics on the minds of Morris County residents include the war in Iraq, emergency response and energy policy.

Susan Eresman of Rockaway and her son, Tony, continue to worry about the war in Iraq, where Tony completed two tours of duty as a Marine.

"I wish we could finish the war," Susan Eresman said. "We have to finish it, because, if not, for all the men and women who've died there, it would have gone for nothing."

Her son agreed.

"I hope the president will say that the Iraqi forces will start taking over," Tony Eresman said. "I also hope we will start withdrawing a few thousand troops. We can't get out of Iraq until the war is done."

**Social services**

John Franklin, chief executive officer of the United Way of Morris County, will be awaiting President Bush's comments on three key social service issues:

- First, he hopes the president will call for better emergency preparedness as a result of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. In Morris County, the 2-1-1 First Call for Help provides a referral and information system for all questions about social services.

The system is now operational in 13 states and provided assistance for those affected by Katrina. The United Way and its supporters are hoping that the 2-1-1 call system will become nationwide if a bill now before Congress is passed.

- Second, Franklin wants the president to address the crisis in affordable housing.

"In spite of a robust economy, 20 percent of the people in Morris County -- that's a total of 100,000 people -- live on less than \$40,000 per year. I'm hoping the president will pay serious attention to affordable housing," he said.

- Third, Franklin says the United Way is troubled by the rising cost of medical care. He worries about the poor and working poor who have no medical coverage, and the impact this has on employers and agencies in the county.

**Energy programs**

According to advance press releases about the address, the president is likely to concentrate on the nation's energy program.

Fred Abbate, president and chief executive officer of the New Jersey Utilities Association, said he hopes the president puts forth an energy strategy.

"We're hoping for a strong conservation and efficiency message," Abbate said. "At the same time, we also need a strategy for energy independence.

"The Federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 already includes a series of programs, incentives and adjustments, but much of this has yet to be worked out," Abbate said.

He believes Americans need the president to get behind this policy and to provide real momentum.

Foreign policy

Madelyn Hoffman, executive director of NJ Peace Action, believes the state of the country is "about the worst it's been in 30 years, since Watergate."

The Bush administration's stand on civil liberties, budget deficits, national debt and the gap between rich and poor all earn her disapproval.

The NJ Peace Action continues to be disturbed by the ongoing violence in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the amount of money expended there.

"The current U.S. policies have polarized the world, just as they have polarized the country," Hoffman said.

The N.J. Peace Action is hosting a State of the Union Watch Program tonight to respond to the State of the Union address. Speakers will include an expert on civil liberties, a member of Veterans for Peace, and Martha Gardner, president of the New Jersey Council of Churches. The program will be held from 7:30 to 10 p.m. at the Unitarian Church of Montclair.