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Subject: changes in the heartland

Posted by [Eldragon](#) on Sun, 19 Mar 2006 18:43:49 GMT

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Change of heartland On the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, many Indianians are no longer strongly behind the war By Charlie Savage, Globe Staff | March 19, 2006 SOUTH BEND, Ind. -- The third anniversary of the Iraq invasion unleashed a surge of pessimism at a local farmers' market here, where stalwart Republicans, standing amid aisles of produce and miracle cures, said President Bush has messed up a war that looks more like Vietnam every day. | Breaking News Alerts "It's chaos," said Roger Madaras, who voted twice for Bush. "How many more people are going to be killed? We were going in to free the people of Iraq, but as far as I'm concerned, a lot of them are worse off today than they were under the dictatorship." Madaras, the owner of a plumbing company, said he believed Bush when the president declared major combat to be over in May 2003, and is "disgusted" that Bush's rhetoric was hollow. And he is far from alone. Support for Bush and his handling of Iraq is sharply eroding across the American heartland, where the overcast skies and the muddy fields of late winter matched a sense of gloom about Bush and the war. This month, the Indianapolis Star released poll findings that Bush's approval rating among Indiana voters stood at 37 percent -- a drop of 18 points over the past year. The numbers echoed national polls, but were particularly shocking in a state that has not voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1964, and where Democratic presidential contenders often do not bother to campaign. "A 37 percent approval rating in Indiana for a Republican president is unheard of," said Brian Howey, who runs a newsletter for Indiana state political insiders. "Those are Bill Clinton or John Kerry numbers in Indiana. So there is something seriously awry going on right now." In scattered rural diners and small-town restaurants adorned with 9/11-vintage American flag posters, support for the troops remains high. But many in Indiana also say the war has not turned out the way they thought it would three years ago, and they question whether Bush has what it takes to lead the troops into a happy ending. Standing behind the counter where she sells bird houses and seed at the farmers' market, Beverly Beisel said she is increasingly fearful that Iraq will inevitably fall apart as soon as US soldiers leave -- making a mockery of the deaths sustained until then. "It's not going well, that's for sure," Beisel said. "I don't like that fact that we started it. I thought Bush was actually going after the terrorists, wherever they were. We thought they had weapons that they were hiding." Beisel said she doesn't blame Bush because "he can only deal with the intelligence he was given" and still supports him because she opposes abortion. But she added that plenty of her friends think "we should get out of there and they're probably sorry they voted for him." Continued...