

Brooklyn for Peace, Westside Campaign Against Hunger Hour Children, Hunger Action Network of New York State Media Release

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Human Service and Peace Groups Announce Support for Councilmember James' Resolution to Cut Military Budget to Fund City Budget and other Local Needs

Peace, faith and human service organizations joined on Tax Day with NY City Council members to urge New York's Congressional delegation to create a peace dividend by cutting the federal military budget. Such cuts would help resolve the city's fiscal crisis without the need for cuts in spending for housing, education, welfare and health programs. Funds are also needed for job creation; the AFL-CIO is seeking \$400 billion nationally for a new jobs program.

The groups said that President Obama, rather than exempting military spending from his recent call to control federal spending, should instead make the ever-expanding military budget the focus of his efforts to cut the federal budget deficit and to revive the economy.

"It is baffling that our country continues to spend so much on foreign defense when our national and local needs are so great," said NYC City Council Member Letitia James. "In this fiscal climate, we need money for jobs; we need money for child care; we need money for our schools and city colleges. We need affordable housing and dependable public transit. We need comprehensive and affordable health care through local resources."

New York City is presently facing a \$4.9 billion budget deficit. To resolve the deficit, the Mayor has proposed draconian cuts to essential city services and jobs. The City Council resolution urges the state's Congressional delegation to see cuts in the record military budget proposed by President Obama to provide funding to state and local governments to deal with the massive budget deficits throughout the country. The resolution also wants military spending transferred to support job creation, affordable housing, anti-hunger programs, environmental protection, education and other essential human needs

A half century ago, President Eisenhower, who successfully led the allied forces in World War II, warned the American people about the social and budget dangers posed by the military industrial complex. The American people had to be careful that they did not allow special interests to absorb an ever-increasing share of national wealth. He proclaimed that "every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired' was 'a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed."

More recently, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." King called for "a campaign for jobs and income, because...the economic question was the most crucial that black people and poor people, generally, were confronting."

"The warnings of Eisenhower and King unfortunately have gone unheeded by Presidents and Congress alike as they have transformed our military budget into huge slush fund for corporate war profiteers and their campaign contributions. We can't get the \$4 billion more in funding we need to feed our children as part of the child nutrition program reauthorization but there is always more money for another tank or attack drone," said Mark Dunlea of the Hunger Action Network of New York State.

"I am convinced that it pains the heart of God that our nation accounts for 45 percent of total defense expenditure worldwide, while millions of U.S. families are struggling to feed themselves. We should be sharing the bread of life with our fellow citizens, increasing funding for anti-hunger and other essential needs, rather than investing in killing machines," said the Rev. Derrick Boykin, pastor of Memorial Community Church.

Anti-hunger groups and Senator Gillibrand are seeking an additional \$4 billion annually in funding as part of the reauthorization of the various federal child nutrition programs (e.g., school and summer meals, WIC). The Senate Agriculture Committee however is proposing only a \$450 million increase. Any such increase, under current federal rules, would have to be paid for by spending cuts in other agriculture programs.

"While national security is important, if we spend all of our money on that we will have nothing left to secure. We have seen a 39% increase in 2009 in the number of people we are feeding. The increase is coming from people in all sizes and shapes, some who have lost jobs, others who have been struggling all along but can't make ends meet now. We had a big increase in demand last year too but we got a big increase in food from the feds through the economic stimulus. There has been no talk about extra federal dollars for food this year and now we have Mayor Bloomberg talking about cutting the EFAP program for emergency food and Governor Paterson talking about cutting HPNAP," said Christy Robb at Hour Children.

Doreen Wohl, Executive Director at the Westside Campaign Against Hunger, added that "using more of our federal tax dollars for education and better health care and housing and feeding people is a much more constructive worldwide use of our resources than war." Among the 27% increase last year in the number of guests coming to the pantry at the Church of St. Andrew and Paul in Manhattan were residents of the Bronx. "There are emergency food programs in the Bronx, but they are frequently without food. The Bronx is hurting more than anywhere else, practically. It's one of the areas that feels the recession more than anywhere else." A recent Gallup survey found that the Bronx's 16th Congressional District covering the south and lower western portions of the borough had the highest rates of hunger in the nation.

"Brooklyn for Peace strongly supports this resolution. We can no longer separate the subject of our excessive military spending from the failure to meet domestic needs. Why is the US pouring money into self-defeating military operations in Helmand province in Afghanistan, while day care centers in NYC close for lack of funds? The White House has proposed a \$708 billion military budget for next year. Our City Council needs to protest this absurd skewing of national priorities," said Carolyn Eisenberg, co-founder of Brooklyn for Peace."

The US spends more on the military than the rest of the world combined.

According to the National Priorities Project (www.nationalpriorities.org), taxpayers in New York City will pay \$23.5 billion for Total Defense Spending in FY2010. This sum dwarfs the city's projected \$4.9 billion city budget deficit and is a major factor in the city's high rate of unemployment, the loss of housing vouchers, and economic recession. For the same amount of money, the following could have been provided:

- 4,339,400 People with Health Care for One Year OR
- 454,152 Public Safety Officers for One year OR
- 358,359 Music and Arts Teachers for One Year OR
- 3,917,220 Scholarships for University Students for One Year OR
- 4,239,773 Students receiving Pell Grants of \$5550 OR
- 133,761 Affordable Housing Units OR
- 8,222,731 Children with Health Care for One Year OR
- 2,680,955 Head Start Places for Children for One Year OR
- 272,544 Elementary School Teachers for One Year.

The groups noted that New York City taxpayers have paid \$35 billion for total Iraq and Afghanistan war spending since 2001.

Economists for decades, such as Seymour Melman at Columbia University, have documented that military spending creates fewer jobs than any other investment. This was confirmed by a recent UMASS-Amherst study, "The Employment Effects of Downsizing the U.S. Military," which found that for every \$1 billion of spending on military production 8,555 jobs are created. But when that same amount of money is spent on home weatherization 12,804 jobs are created or when spent on education 17,687 jobs result.

http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/working_papers/working_papers_151-200/WP152.pdf

“The little reported truth is that military spending is bad for the economy and creates fewer jobs and less tax revenue for state and local government than does other kinds of investment,” said Dunlea.