

Speech delivered in conjunction with WOMEN AGAINST WAR Albany, NY, May 6th. GDAMS event

We are here today in conjunction with a long-standing international citizens' initiative called the GLOBAL DAYS OF ACTION ON MILITARY SPENDING. Since TAX DAY in April, people around the globe have been gathering and speaking in an effort to draw attention to the imperative to DEMILITARIZE national budgets, to move the money that fuels and ultimately guarantees wars from the heart of these budgets and the coffers of the few who profit, and to invest in the needs of people and planet thus laying the only true foundation for security and possible futurity.

We, WOMEN AGAINST WAR, and our friends who join us today, are not standing here alone: behind us, all around though unseen, stand those who have paid the deepest costs of our most recent "wars", the wars of choice we have engaged in since 2001. Here, in memory, are the estimated 480,000 who have died due to direct war violence: soldiers and civilians; men, women, children; they are accompanied by the estimated many times over, thousands upon hundreds of thousands of faceless individuals who have perished before their time because of such indirect war effects as malnutrition, infrastructure, destruction and environmental degradation.

Here, are the US veterans who have been injured and made ill by reason of their deployment: the maimed, the PTSD victims, those who have been driven to suicide.

Here, in imagination, are the 21 million Afghan, Iraqi, Pakistanis and Syrians living lives of desperation in deplorable, unstable conditions, made refugee by war, uncertain of their futures. It is a large crowd that stands with us today to talk about the costs of war. We stand also because - though painfully difficult to hear - and accept: even our own government's objective analysts indicate that in spite of this horrific human cost paid over the past 17 years, in spite of good news, fantasyland press releases and reports spun by war apologists, very little if anything has been accomplished.

So Much suffering and loss, disruption and destruction has led nowhere: no stable democracies established, in fact, political chicanery and instability prevail while billions upon billions of dollars spent in reconstruction are lost to fraud, waste and abuse of power. What about women's rights -no... human rights...no; economic viability for the majority of citizens attained - no, health care and education improved-no infrastructure restored and enhanced. no but the opium trade in Afghanistan is reported to have had its best year ever last year and the Taliban is waiting in the wings... the list goes on and clearly, those who stand behind us unseen must weep with us. So why are we, ever saddened by so much human loss, standing here, across from the New York State Capitol during lobby days, wearing the color of money and holding placards laden with dollar signs?

In town halls and county seats, amidst the wrangling of Congress and the debates in every statehouse, a hungry, unacknowledged elephant sits square center.

While discussion rages on how to bridge the fiscal gaps in funding to support the needs of social uplift or the shoring up of crumbling local and national infrastructure or to confront the looming ravages of climate disruption, the voracious beast silently looms.

While recent wars break our hearts in their dead ended awful loss of sacred lives and health of mind and body as well as social stability for millions of people and lead to chronicles of waste, corruption and pointless endeavor, we are held in thrall to the ever present, ever open, ever hungry maw.

This silent beast is not a creature of Party but one born of a long standing, bipartisan consensus. Her trunk, if you will, is, as once described by Dr. King, “a demonic, destructive suction tube” and we were well warned against her manipulative, corrupting power when our last general President told us to “Beware”.

Of course, I am talking about the ever expanding, ever more obscene federal war budget, relabeled years back as “defense” with a marketer’s wile. Year after year, the US “defense” budget ingests and consumes a bigger and bigger piece of the pie and though the ever more exponentially growing, hyper lobbied calculus results in an ever more bloated bottom line, one that leaves us gasping, it is year after year approved even as it becomes its own driving force, ensuring that there will be war, ever more war.

Because of accounting practices designed to camouflage true costs and inhibit transparency as well as the slush fund paid for by borrowing rather than taxes which is the post 911 Overseas Contingency Operation (OCO) fund, exact analysis may differ as to the bottom line but it is clear that at least close to half of all discretionary funds in the annual federal budget goes to current and past military “needs”. The War Resisters League calculates the inclusive FY2019 bottom line at 1501 billion. Estimates about the most recent wars alone indicate that up to this point they may have cost us as a nation: 56 trillion dollars, that is 32 million dollars an hour, that is \$24,000 per every tax payer, that is trillions upon trillions added to the deficit with interest payments calculated, kicked down the road for our children and their children to pay.

Armed with cash and promises for candidates and constituencies, dangling the dazzling glories of bigger or smarter, “we’re number one” assuring, more and more lethal weaponry (while 122 nations on the planet are working to ban nuclear weapons, our budget for 2019 looks for \$24 billion more to modernize ours) A “tail wagging the elephant “army of lobbyists, so often veterans of the military and the arms industry... march on Congress (as they do in the halls of power everywhere). Their job: to convince our leadership and us as citizens that the money is “for the troops “, that it is needed “to make us safe”, that it is a “job creator” and so each year the consensus is reached: the beast must be fed.

But I still haven’t really answered the question: why here today at the NYSTATE Legislature. It is our goal to convince our representatives, to join us in the effort to demand of Washington that the madness that is this consensus be confronted. It is our belief that if NYS legislators who are always struggling to balance a budget which is never adequate to meet the social, infrastructure and environmental needs of those they represent, are made aware of just how much money we bleed as a state to the service of deadended wars, they will join the cry to “MOVE THE MONEY”!

During the last decade and a half, even as the NYSTATE FISCAL POLICY INSTITUTE determines that the State budget lags always in its capacity to meet the social, educational, infrastructure needs of its citizens, the National Priorities Institute

estimates that NY State taxpayers share of the federal budget gone to pay for the recent wars was 432 Billion dollars while the estimate for just one year, FY2018 is pegged at 62.4 billion.... more than one third of the current state budget in its entirety!

Using the National Priorities Project TRADEOFFS calculator we hope to light a fire under our representatives as we point out what this money transported out of state might represent in terms of the State's capacity to support healthcare, education, employment and energy sector needs. More than 50 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King decided that he could no longer choose the politic over the moral and he raised his voice to proclaim:

“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

Though maligned for recognizing the Maddened beast in the center of the room he called for us to: “reorder our priorities so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war” finally understanding that “our greatest defense...is to take offensive action... to remove ... conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice... as an absolute necessity for the soul of the nation “as well as “the survival of man.”

As we vigil and leaflet inside the Capitol today, trying to remind our legislators of the cost of war to NY State, this is our ask:

Please help us to “reorder our priorities”

And join us in saying to Washington:

MOVE THE MONEY

DEMILITARIZE

INVEST IN PEOPLE AND IN PEACE!