



# Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

Volume 26, Number 4

Fall 2017

## Impact of Military Budget on Social Services: Choices to be Made

Jean Stokan - Justice Coordinator for Nonviolence and Immigration, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

### EXPERIENCE

Our political leaders have some key decisions to make this fall as Congress needs to pass a federal budget for fiscal year 2018 by December. The stakes are high, particularly for the people we accompany in our ministries.

The Trump administration submitted a budget proposal to Congress, which slashes non-defense discretionary spending, including safety net programs for the most vulnerable members of society. This includes:

- Cuts in homeless assistance grants by 133 million dollars (5.6%) which would result in 25,000 homeless people living on the street;
- Elimination of 250,000 Housing Choice Vouchers which help end homelessness by covering the gap between rent and what families can afford to pay;
- Major slashes to nutrition programs including a 10% cut to SNAP, as well as cuts to WIC and

the Community Assistance Program, which subsidizes food banks and other nutrition charities.

At the same time, the Administration proposes massive increases in military spending, \$6.8 trillion over 10 years. For FY18, this totals 668 billion, an unprecedented increase of 54 billion from 2017 levels, 1 billion of which is new spending for nuclear weapons systems. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have advanced versions of the military spending package of close to \$700 billion. That is more than the president had asked. (FCNL)

Choices will have to be made before the budget is finalized. The next weeks will be a crucial time to raise our voices.

The federal budget  
is a moral document  
reflecting the priorities  
of our nation.

### SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The federal budget is a moral document reflecting the priorities of our nation. Given the proposed dramatic cuts to safety net programs, while building up a national security state through hyper-militarization, what does this reflect about government's role in attending to the common good?

- Daily, women religious accompany those made poor and stripped of

*Resolutions to Action* is an occasional publication of the Global Concerns Committee of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Members of the committee are: Danielle Bonetti, CSJ; Gemma Doll, OP; Susan Francois, CSJP; Alice Gerdeman, CDP; Donna Marie Gribshaw, SCL; Eileen Haynes, SCL; and Ann Scholz, SSND, staff. Please address correspondence to:

LCWR  
8808 Cameron Street  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
301-588-4955  
fax: 301-587-4575  
ascholz@lcwr.org

their dignity.

- One in six children in the United States live in families that struggle with hunger ([Bread for the World](#)).
- Forty-three million live in poverty, including 24% of African Americans, and 21% of the Hispanic population; 2.5 million of these are working full time, yet are still in poverty ([USCCB](#)).

The income and wealth gap is deepening at an accelerated rate, the result of federal policies enacted over the last decades, and generations of systemic institutionalized racism.

Of every dollar paid in 2016 income taxes .23 goes to the military, though only .05 supports troops; .03 goes to education; .02 to housing and community services ([National Priorities Project](#)). Clearly, our nation's priorities, as reflected in the federal budget, are seriously misplaced; and the drivers of such policies need to be challenged.

Private military contractors, with large bands of lobbyists, are the main beneficiaries of excessive federal military spending. In FY 2015 the top 100 defense contractors received 175 billion dollars from the Pentagon; Lockheed Martin alone received 36 billion in contracts, an amount larger than the budgets of 22 of the 50 states ([William Hartung](#)). Military contracting is woven into the economies of congressional districts across the country, to make legislators push for military spending to create jobs back home.

A [Brown University study](#) found that military spending creates fewer jobs than if the same amount was invested in other sectors. Equivalent spending in education creates twice as many jobs, and 50% more jobs in the clean energy and health sectors.

Also, there is tremendous waste in military spending. Last December, a

*Washington Post* [investigation](#) found that the Pentagon hid an internal report outlining 125 billion dollars in waste.

We are a country awash in weapons, with a military budget equal to the combined military budgets of the next seven largest nations yet this does not mean we are safer. The 9-11 terrorist attacks were carried out with box cutters, and it was the US war on Iraq which gave birth to ISIS.

The definition of what it means to be "strong" as a country has been hijacked to mean "military strength," justifying the scandalous amount of our nation's treasury spent on weapons systems. While national security and defense are vital to a nation, the motives around a bloated Pentagon budget need to be unmasked.

## REFLECTION

*"A good Catholic meddles in politics." -- Pope Francis, 9/17/13*

Catholic Social Teaching is clear on the profound dignity with which each person should be treated. A fair and moral budget for our nation must be centered on the common good.

Pope Francis addressed the US Congress in September 2015 and urged policymakers, "Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a "culture of care" and "an integrated approach to combating poverty."

In his [2017 World Day of Peace Message](#), the Holy Father elevated nonviolence as "a style of politics for peace." As if to address our nation's budget priorities, he wrote, "Violence is not the cure for our broken world. Countering violence with violence leads at best to forced migrations and enormous suffer-

ing, because vast amounts of resources are diverted to military ends and away from the needs of young people and families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people in our world."

Let us bring this message to our policy makers over the next few weeks and do all we can to organize support for a [faithful budget](#): shifting from military to civilian spending priorities.

## ACTION

1. NETWORK is inviting Catholic sisters to write letters to House Speaker Ryan opposing an immoral federal budget; share stories about the communities you serve. See [resources](#).
2. Call, tweet or email a similar message to your Representative and Senators. Call the Capitol Switchboard: (202) 224-3121.
3. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper on how local community services are impacted by a militarized budget. See [resources](#). Include the names of your members of Congress, as their offices track media references.
4. If your member of Congress is holding a town meeting, attend and raise these concerns, which serves to inform others in attendance.
5. Educate others and help shape a new narrative for our country, away from militarism and fear to values built on true human security and investing in human needs. Stir the moral imagination of what it would look like to live in right relationship with all. See Pax Christi resources posted for the [Catholic Nonviolence Initiative](#).