



Gonsalves: Military hawks eat deficit hawks

By Sean Gonsalves
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That mooing you hear? It isn't cattle being herded across the bridges.

It's the bipartisan sound of politicians singing the praises of America's No. 1 sacred cow — or rather, the entirely predictable response of Republican and Democratic lawmakers digging in to resist another round of base closings called for by the Defense Department following a congressional mandate to trim \$500 billion in defense spending over the next decade.

As chairman of the state's Military Asset and Security Strategy Task Force, Lt. Gov. Tim Murray came to the Cape on Monday to tour our beloved Massachusetts Military Reservation. The mission: "to build grass-roots support to protect the missions, jobs and economic investments associated with the (six) bases" in the state.

One of the smartest things the military ever did was build bases in every nook and cranny it could find so that whenever someone brought up the idea of closing a base, entire communities would be up in arms about the potential economic fallout. As one recent headline put it: "Pentagon faces tough sell on base closures."

I know, shocking, isn't it?

Forget all that stuff about "out-of-control" government spending, austerity, "tough choices" and how "we need to run government more like a business." When it comes to military spending, anyone who even suggests we cut the budget will be painted by all the hawks out there as terrorist-appeasing Neville Chamberlains.

Of course, there are some libertarians who try to be ideologically consistent, which is why you'll find a few folks at places such as the Cato Institute talking about giving the military a buzz cut. But the way it works in reality is they'll write papers and opinion pieces calling for military cuts, but end up collaborating with military hawks in ensuring

that the "tough choices" are imposed on the government services for the neediest constituents.

Hence, the perennial lament of all that alleged fraud and abuse in "entitlement" programs. God knows there's none of that in military spending, which just so happens to account for the single largest tax expenditure on the books.

According to the National Priorities Project, which uses Uncle Sam's own figures to calculate how the proverbial single "tax dollar" is spent, 27.4 cents of every tax dollar goes to the military; 21 cents goes to health care, and a mere 4 cents goes to housing and food programs. And we haven't even touched on how the huge demand for gasoline by the U.S. military helps drive up the price at the pump.

Meanwhile, as champions of "free enterprise" and the private sector constantly harp on the "creeping socialism" of the "welfare state," we're not supposed to notice that one of the biggest top-down socialist command economies in the world is operating right under our noses. The Pentagon budget is bigger than the GDP of most countries on the planet.

Also, in this "government isn't the solution — it's the problem" atmosphere, we're supposed to overlook the indispensable role government plays in propping up the economy. Every time I hear someone say government doesn't create wealth, two words come to mind: Silicon Valley. It came into existence on the taxpayer-subsidized back of military research and development. The Internet is just the most obvious example. (And I'm not talking about Al Gore. Google DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.)

Beating up on the government plays well on the campaign trail, even though there isn't a politician in the country right now who isn't clamoring to save the bases in their backyard. They usually trot out these studies that show how many jobs are tied to a particular base and the economic multiplier effect that has. Funny how you never hear these kind of multiplier effect arguments when it comes to other government employees.

Teachers? Cut their pay, lay 'em off. They're not producing results. Yet, we spend over a trillion dollars fighting two wars, lose 6,000 servicemen and servicewomen, kill tens of thousands of civilians, with, shall we say, ambiguous results, and yet it's somehow unpatriotic to rein in military spending?

Now, because I spent a lot of time at my best friend's house in elementary school in the 1980s — spending the night at his home on the Oakland Naval Base, which we were allowed to use as our playground — I have a real fondness for military bases. I'd prefer overseas outposts be shuttered before domestic ones.

It seems unlikely MMR will be shut down anytime soon. When he came to meet with this paper's editorial board, Lt. Gov. Murray noted that the Base Realignment and Closure Commission looks for ways to consolidate operations and cut energy costs. With MMR

(and other Massachusetts bases) already hosting multiple missions and doing things like putting up cost-saving wind turbines, we're ahead of the game.

Also, considering that the first air responders for the Northeast/Atlantic region are stationed in the Bay State, it wouldn't make much sense to shut bases so vital to the national defense.

If, and when, some military bases are closed, there's no reason to think it will happen here. Military hawks always trump deficit hawks.

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