

'Pentagon's trillion dollar spending spree exceeds general funds of all U.S. states'

Americans can begin to hope that the current recession, coupled with the politics of debt reduction in Washington, may yet result in cuts in that runaway Pentagon budget, The Nation magazine says in its April 11th issue.

"War-weary Americans have turned decisively against the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and, according to polls, voters support cuts in military spending," Contributing Editor Robert Dreyfuss writes.

"After 13 consecutive years of growth, between 1998 and 2011, spending on the military has reached an all-time high," and for 2012 the Pentagon's Robert Gates "is asking Congress to authorize yet another increase, seeking \$553 billion, plus an additional \$118 billion for Iraq and Afghanistan, for a total of \$671 billion," Dreyfuss writes. Throw in all war spending, homeland defense (\$44 billion), Veterans Affairs (\$122 billion), interest on military debt (\$48 billion) and the war machine is costing the public in excess of \$1 trillion a year.

"It's so much money," Dreyfuss writes, President Obama's own National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform(NCFRR) pointed out the \$80 billion the U.S. spends on military R&D alone "surpassed China's entire military budget by more than \$10 billion." Overall, Dreyfuss writes, the U.S. spends as much on military "as the rest of the world combined".

What's more, the Pentagon's trillion dollar spending spree exceeds the general funds of all 50 U.S. states combined, which, says the National Association of State Budget Officers, will come to about \$636 billion in 2011. Translation: Pentagon spending for war is greater than all public outlays for all purposes by all states. And while hard-pressed states wallow in debt and lay off teachers and police, "defense" contractors enjoy record or near-record profits.

Editor Dreyfuss noted that "a series of high-powered reports" last year called for "big cuts in military spending, with each projecting reductions of 15-20 percent of the Pentagon budget." These were:

Sustainable Defense Task Force of Reps. Barney Frank and Ron Paul, seeking to chop \$960 billion between 2011 and 2020.

The libertarian Cato Institute published "Budgetary Savings From Military Restraint" that outlined \$1.2 trillion in cuts over 10 years, including a one-third cut in troop strength.

The Bipartisan Policy Center issued "Restoring America's Future" that proposed a five-year freeze in Pentagon spending at current levels plus a cap on future growth that would save \$1.1 trillion over a decade.

"Most startling," Dreyfuss writes, was President Obama's own NCFRR came up with nearly \$1 trillion in cuts.

"Broadly speaking, public opinion no longer favors military spending," Dreyfuss writes.

"Support for the war in Afghanistan, which absorbs \$10 billion a month, has dropped off a cliff, with two-thirds of Americans saying the war is no longer worth fighting".

"Other polling," he continues, "shows that when asked to choose between cuts in Pentagon

spending and undermining the social safety net, the public chooses cutting the Pentagon".

A March poll, Dreyfuss notes, revealed that 51 percent favor reductions in military spending versus just 28 percent who would cut Medicare and Medicaid and 18 percent who'd cut Social Security.

If the public truly seeks to slash the Pentagon budget, the fight will be long and hard and it will have to start right away. Dreyfuss quotes Lawrence Korb, a military analyst at the liberal Center for American Progress, who says few if any cuts will come before the 2015 budget cycle. "If you start now, you can take out \$100 billion a year by 2015. That's realistic," Korb is quoted as saying.

Personally, I prefer my own Ross Plan to all of the cuts suggested above. The Ross Plan would require the Peace Corps and the Pentagon to switch budgets and personnel numbers. Restricted to \$400 million a year and 8,600 troops the Pentagon couldn't possibly raise all the hell it does. And with a \$1 trillion budget and three million workers, the Peace Corps, (which candidate Obama promised to double from 7,800 to 16,000 by 2011 but, of course, never has might just work wonders.)

About the Writer: Sherwood Ross is a public relations consultant for good causes who also runs the Anti-War News Service.

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