



Shaker Heights resident says cutting Pentagon, military spending would solve budget woes: Sun News Your Turn

Published: Friday, August 12, 2011, 2:55 PM



By Sun News Readers

By Nina McLellan

Guest columnist



The just-passed debt ceiling deal lets the Pentagon off the hook. Despite claims to the contrary, the maximum real cut to Pentagon spending even remotely possible under the bill is estimated at less than 1 percent and war spending is carved out and exempt from any cuts.

Recent studies show our deficit is caused primarily by the economic downturn, Bush-era tax expenditures and spending on war. Good sense should tell us to aim our remedy directly at the causes of the deficit problem: First, make taxes fair, ending welfare for rich people and corporations. Second, make serious reductions in military/war spending that don't compromise real defense.

If we do this, we won't have to shred the social safety net and will have plenty to invest in our people and communities which will help reverse the economic downturn. This is the path to real security for our country and what poll after poll show is what most Americans want.

How much is in the military/war budget and what can be cut? Fifty-nine cents of every discretionary tax dollar in 2012 (the part of the budget Congress votes on each year) will go to the military. While Democrats and Republicans are both ready to axe the social safety net, the House just voted to give the Pentagon an additional \$17 billion over last year's \$536 billion base budget, which has doubled over the last 10 years.

Military/war spending is More than \$1 trillion a year if you include the cost of Afghanistan and Iraq (\$119 billion), nuclear weapons, intelligence programs, veterans' care, homeland security and interest on military debt. The Pentagon alone accounts for almost half of global military spending by all countries, more than the next 14 countries combined.

Without cutting veterans' benefits, effective counter-terrorism programs, or meeting our debt obligations, substantial reduction in total military spending would leave our military with more than enough to defend our nation. The Sustainable Defense Task Force commissioned by Reps. Barney Frank and Ron Paul determined a 25 percent reduction in the military budget would not impair our nation's defense capabilities.

Peace Action and the National Priorities Network recommend these cuts over next 10 years:

Reduce or eliminate expensive, redundant weapons systems — \$302 billion We spend billions to purchase and maintain weapons designed for "conventional" enemies, of which we have none. We could save billions annually by retiring these and not purchasing new ones.

Close half our military bases overseas — \$550 billion The U.S. maintains almost 1,000 military bases in 46 countries, many a legacy of past wars ended long ago. What possible justification exists for still maintaining 268 U.S. bases in Germany and 124 in Japan, or a global network of 234 golf courses?

End the war in Afghanistan and finish withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq — \$1,180 billion Nearly two-thirds of Americans say the Afghan war is not worth fighting. These wars do not protect us; they only recruit more terrorists and prolong the violence.

Reduce funding for nuclear weapons — \$185 billion We should move toward nuclear weapons abolition, reducing stockpiles and not funding planned infrastructure upgrades and new delivery vehicles.

Reduce size of standing armed services and use of mercenaries — \$287 billion plus The Pentagon employs 2.5 million full-time civilian and military personnel. No existing enemies require this huge standing army. As recommended by the Cato Institute, we could make substantial reductions.

Reduce an outsize security establishment — \$112 billion Reduction in the vast 16-agency U.S. intelligence community that employs 200,000 people could eliminate redundancy, inefficiency and threats to American civil liberties.

Waste, fraud and abuse — Unknown The never-audited Pentagon should end waste, fraud and abuse. The Institute for Policy Studies estimates a potential annual savings of \$15 billion just from contracting improvements.

Over 10 years, we could eliminate at least \$2.6 trillion in federal spending without taking a dollar from Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and programs that serve low income people.

The Congress and President should listen to the wisdom of the American people and respect the will of the majority who clearly say, "Put the Pentagon on a diet and stop starving social programs." Is Congress listening?

McLellan, a Shaker Heights resident, is co-President of Cleveland Peace Action.

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