

Health Care for the Homeless Mobilizer

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council

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The 100-Day Plan to End Homelessness (Third in a Series)

Accomplishments during the first 100 days often are the public measure of newly-elected Presidents and Congresses. As the 110th Congress continues its work, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council proposes a series of measures that – if enacted by the Congress – would dramatically diminish the crisis of mass homelessness in our country. These items are presented not so much in order of their importance, but with regard to timeliness and relevance to the Congressional agenda. Items one and two concerned enactment of a livable wage and a strengthened health care safety net.

Item Three: Stop the Surge in Homelessness

The National Council long has recognized the strong relationship between contemporary homelessness and military spending. With a Defense Department budget already consuming more than half of the discretionary budget (spending not mandated, such as Social Security and Medicare) and with the mounting cost of military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, resources remain insufficient to address the important domestic priorities of comprehensive health care, affordable housing, and livable incomes – long overdue initiatives necessary to end homelessness. The National Council calls upon *Mobilizer* readers to communicate with their elected officials about the importance of reducing military spending and re-investing in domestic initiatives to avoid a new surge in homelessness in the United States.

A Bigger Piece of the Budgetary Pie

EVERY GUN THAT is made," said Dwight Eisenhower, "every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in a final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists and the hopes of its children."

Already at historically high levels, Congressional spending for military purposes has accelerated dramatically since the events of September 11, 2001. From a level of \$310 billion in FY2001, the Defense Department budget increased by nearly 30 percent to \$441.6 billion in FY2006. "This figure does not include \$21.8 billion for Energy Department spending on nuclear weapons activities. Nor does it include spending on the

wars we are actually fighting. When these costs are added in, military spending for the coming year will exceed \$600 billion--a figure that would exceed both the heights of the Reagan military buildup and the Vietnam War, in inflation-adjusted terms.”¹ The Office of Management and Budget estimates that if this trend continues, and clear signs from Washington suggest that it will, military spending will top \$2.3 trillion by FY2011. This spending is disproportionate in relation to all other countries; the U.S. accounts for nearly two-fifths of world-wide military spending, outpacing China – the second largest military spender – seven to one (Center for Defense Information).

Without strong Congressional action, U.S. spending for military purposes seems destined to increase even further. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recommends an increase in the size of the Marine Corps and Army by 92,000 troops over the next five years. Credible defense experts disagree; for example, Dr. Cindy Williams, former member of the Senior Executive Service in the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon has asserted that “much of the 50% increase in military spending since 9/11 reflects “business as usual” rather than addressing today’s threats.”²

Though President Bush’s proposal to send 21,500 additional troops to Iraq has encountered bipartisan opposition on Capitol Hill, the Administration seems poised to proceed with the plan nonetheless and saddle taxpayers with the additional financial burden. Public opinion, however, continues to grow against further military intervention in the Middle East: a recent Washington Post poll shows that the majority of Americans do not support the decision to send more troops, and only one in three believe the plan will increase the chances of victory in Iraq. Tens of thousands of Americans took to the streets of Washington, D.C. on 1/27/07 to support an immediate end to this war.

The Cost of War

"For 45 years of the Cold War we were in an arms race with the Soviet Union. Now it appears we're in an arms race with ourselves." -Adm. Eugene Carroll Jr., Dep. Dir. Center for Defense Information

The true costs of the current wars and of increased military spending overall will continue to be borne by the most vulnerable Americans in at least two ways. First, as the Defense Department continues to consume an increasingly larger piece of the budgetary pie, the slices for all other discretionary spending categories become smaller. The country already has witnessed the consequences of this phenomenon through reductions of budgets for housing, health care, and assistance to states and localities. Stagnating and dwindling public assistance available to vulnerable Americans will only result in increased homelessness nationwide. And true reform through a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, a national system of universal health insurance, and a national livable wage will remain a distant hope.

¹ **A Unified Security Budget for the United States, 2007**, Miriam Pemberton and Lawrence Corb (*Assistant Secretary of Defense, 1981-1985*), 5/3/06.

² Dr. Cindy Williams, [Are We Safer](#), Security Policy Working Group, September 2006.

Yet, the cost of war is also felt in a second way by the very individuals who answer the call to military service overseas. As service providers for homeless individuals long have realized, the country experiences a surge in homelessness when our soldiers return home to lost jobs, a scarcity of social support networks, and reduced funding for human services.³ Some studies have indicated that as many as one-third of the adult homeless population has served their country in the Armed Services, and on any given day as many as 200,000 veterans are homeless (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2006). The National Council is among a growing list of concerned organizations and individuals who realize through direct experience that the underlying personal and societal costs of an increasing military budget and continued military interventions remain too great.

ACTION:

Homelessness will only end when we address its fundamental causes with the same tenacity and economic investment with which we support military endeavors. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council calls upon Mobilizer readers to advocate for reductions in Defense Department spending and reinvestments in health care, housing, and livable incomes.

- **Read the National HCH Council's 2006 Policy Statement on Military Spending** at <http://www.nhchc.org/Advocacy/PolicyPapers/MilitarySpending2006.pdf>
- **Play the American Pie Game:** Visit the website of ice cream makers Ben & Jerry (www.benjerry.com/americanpie/) to create your own discretionary spending pie. Then compare it to the current U.S. discretionary budget.
- **Review the costs of war to your state and hometown** by visiting the website of the National Priorities Project: <http://nationalpriorities.org/>.
- **Contact the people who spend your taxes.** Congress has not yet approved a budget for FY2008. Contact members Congress regarding the importance of reprioritizing the spending of your tax dollars by reducing the defense budget and increasing spending for affordable housing and health care. Find out who represents you at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. Call your Members of Congress through the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-2131.
- **For more information** contact the National Council's Health Policy Organizer, Adrienne Breidenstine, at 443-703-1337

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Please pass this on to your colleagues, clients, and Board of Directors.

³ See, for example, Rose Aguilar, *Gimme Shelter*, AlterNet, 2/8/05.