

RESOLUTIONS To Action

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Impact of Military Budget on Social Services

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Experience

We know that two common types of documents reveal our real values: our calendars and our budgets. Where we spend our time and our money indicate – more clearly than our words, perhaps – what is most important to us. As citizens in our democracy, we look to the federal budget to embody national priorities.

We find that the proposed federal budget that President Bush sent to Congress in February responds to the horrible events of September 11 by greatly increasing monies allotted to military spending and homeland security, while at the same time reducing or freezing funds available to meet people's basic social needs. Specifically, the proposed budget

- continues the reduction in money available for federal spending by making permanent the 10-year \$1.35 trillion tax cut enacted last spring, as well as including

an additional tax cut.

- is based on a forecast of a ten-year surplus of \$1 trillion, which one year ago was estimated to be \$5.6 trillion.
- adds \$15.5 billion to the Department of Energy for nuclear weapons activity.
- adds \$48 billion to the Department of Defense budget, bringing the total to \$369 billion, including approximately \$9.4 billion for the fight against terrorism and \$7.8 billion for missile defense.
- increases non-defense programs only 2 percent, which is less than the rate of inflation.
- freezes spending on TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) at its 1997 level, although inflation has eroded the block grant's value by more than 11 percent.
- does not increase spending

for affordable housing.

- dips into the Social Security Trust Fund.

Overall, military spending makes up more than half the entire discretionary budget; the remainder is divided among programs such as environment, health and human services, Labor Department programs, housing, veteran's programs, education, science and research, foreign assistance, transportation and international affairs.

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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: Mary Brigid Clingman, OP; Marie Cooper, SJ; Shalini D'Souza, SCN; Toni Harris, OP; Maria Elena Martinez, OSF; Mary McGlone, CSJ; Aline Marie Steuer, CSC; Judy Cannon, RSM, staff. Please address correspondence to:



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Social Analysis

As we identify the underlying values and priorities embedded in the President's budget, we are aware that

- Last year's \$1.35 trillion ten-year tax cut disproportionately benefited corporations and wealthy individuals.
- In the short run, the recession and increased spending on the war is most responsible for the decrease in the surplus. However, the tax cut is the largest single factor in the deterioration of the surplus over the long haul. (NETWORK *Legislative Update*, February 11, 2002)
- The dramatic decrease in the surplus seriously jeopardizes the future of Social Security and Medicare, as well as other programs that serve people who are vulnerable.
- "The budget proposal calls for ending chronic homelessness in ten years but that is not backed up with dollars.... Over the past two decades, there has been a steady erosion of the housing stock that is affordable to the lowest income people." (NETWORK *Legislative Update*, March 4, 2002)
- Media forms a national conscience supportive of military spending. There is not proportional attention given to alternative means of promoting peace and addressing the causes of terrorism.
- The increased military budget benefits technology companies. This does not address the need for increased meaningful employment opportunities.
- Does the increase in military spending make us a more secure nation and world?

Security is meeting the basic human needs of all people; decent and safe shelter, access to quality health care, education, work that is dignified and pays a livable wage.

The relationship between military spending and poverty was highlighted by nuclear physicist Mary Ann Doyle, CSJ, as she commented on the missile defense program formerly known as Star Wars: "At the August meeting of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious...I shared my conviction that no system, however technologically advanced, can guarantee that every missile will be detected and stopped.... In the meantime, people around the world continue to die from starvation, poor health care and AIDS; children go uneducated; families are homeless; people lack even the basics for life while we and our enemies spend a disproportionate amount of money on military weapons of all types." (Mary Ann Doyle, CSJ, NETWORK *Connection*, November/December 2001, p. 12.)

Reflection

A military solution to terrorism proposes to do away with violence through violent means. However, we are convinced that violence does not end violence; it only compounds it. In his persuasive message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 2002, John Paul II stated, "To pray for peace is to pray for justice, for a right ordering of relations within and among nations and peoples."

We want our federal budget to promote respect for human dignity and address social causes of suffering, violence, and terrorism.

"We are convinced that the first, and second, and last words from leaders in the Catholic community must promote and explore and lead the way along every possible peaceful avenue to conflict resolution and the achievement of justice for all." (A Catholic Community Responds to the War," December 17, 2001)

We believe that "economic equity ... calls for an economy and society that value as their central dynamic the meeting of basic human needs in a sustainable way over the accumulation of profits." (*Economic Equity Statement*, NETWORK, February 2002)

Action

As informed and active citizens, we can spend our *time* in effective efforts to influence how our nation spends its *money*. We can

1. Continue to educate ourselves and our congregations on the massive increase in the military budget, the consequences of increased military spending on social programs, and the continued tax breaks for corporations and wealthy individuals.
2. Contact the President and Members of Congress to advocate for a budget responsive to human needs, particularly the needs of people who are most vulnerable.