

TAKE ACTION AGAINST MILITARISM & WAR IN WASHINGTON

“What was true in 1968 and what remains an ancient truth today is the understanding that any nation – we are not an exception – any nation that lives by the sword will ultimately die by the sword.”

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, May 6, 2018

War is Stealing from our Communities

War is in our streets and in our neighborhoods. We see the impacts of militarization in how police interact with protestors, such as the protests around the Dakota Access pipeline and the reactions to protests in places like Ferguson. Thanks to projects like the Pentagon’s 1033 program, war has turned our police forces into SWAT teams. Instead of protecting the communities they are intended to serve, our police forces have been armed with military-grade vehicles and weapons, resulting in the escalation of unnecessary force against citizens. After the Ferguson protests, President Obama restricted police access to some of the most egregious offenders on the 1033 list, such as grenade launchers and anti-landmine vehicles. However, in August 2017 President Trump and Attorney General Sessions rolled back those controls, once again signing off on the militarization of our police forces.¹

The war economy has filtered into our schools as well. Our children are being assimilated into the military as early as Junior High into High School. Programs like JROTC come into our schools to teach our children to use military-style weapons, when they should be in class learning to become well-rounded citizens. JROTC is also used as a recruiting tool, funneling our children into the military. This practice is defended as a way to lift people out of poverty, when in fact they target children from low-income communities for military recruitment while funneling precious resources to these programs instead of toward critical school infrastructure. In 2016, the army had a budget in excess of \$300 million dedicated entirely to recruiting, focusing its high school recruiting at the poor.

Take the example of two similarly sized high schools in two Hartford suburbs: Avon and Bloomfield. Army recruiters visited Avon High, where only 5 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, four times during the 2011-12 school year. Yet at Bloomfield High, where nearly half the students qualify for such assistance, recruiters made more than 10 times as many visits.²

¹ Trump Reverses Restrictions on Military Hardware for Police, Adam Goldman, NY Times, August 28, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/28/us/politics/trump-police-military-surplus-equipment.html>

² Do Military Recruiters Belong in School, Seth Kershner & Scott Harding, Education Week, October 27, 2015, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/10/28/do-military-recruiters-belong-in-schools.html>

The current 'voluntary' army relies upon those who are poor to look to the military for a way out of poverty. We may not have a legal draft, as Rev. Barber noted; instead we have ***"...a poverty draft. A no other job draft. A no money for college draft, and sometimes a no other way to get my family healthcare draft."***

War & Environmental Racism

The military and its contractors are also responsible for excessive environmental pollution. The Pentagon is directly responsible for 141 Superfund sites, which are contaminated sites that are so dangerous to human health or the environment that they qualify for special federal clean-up grants. That's about 10% of all of Superfund sites in the world, easily more than any other polluter. Another 760 or so additional Superfund sites are abandoned military facilities or sites that otherwise support military needs. If the U.S. military were its own country, it would rank 7th in the world for fossil fuel consumption. The military and its contractors are not subject to basic environmental controls and protections. The EPA estimates that around 40 million acres of land have been contaminated by the military and its contractors.³ For example, the military open-burns excess munitions without air pollution controls. Munitions contain toxic chemicals such as lead and mercury. We know that those pollutants go up and immediately come down, so they are poisoning the communities where these disposal sites are located and the personnel who are disposing of them. Despite promises from the Pentagon and warnings from the EPA, soldiers in places like Iraq & Afghanistan have been unnecessarily exposed to toxic chemicals by disposing of spent munitions and other waste in open-air burn pits.

Another specific example of the military and its contractors putting our communities at unnecessary risk is the manufacturing of RDX. RDX was developed during WWII and continues to be used today. RDX has been classified as a possible human carcinogen and is connected with causing epileptic seizures in humans. Even though RDX is produced at a single factory in Tennessee, the chemical is used in many military weapons, and RDX contamination has been found at 65 military installations in the U.S. The Pentagon settled a drinking water contamination case against the manufacturing plant for a community that was 143 miles downstream from the plant. Despite the Pentagon's assertions, the EPA has previously classified RDX as a persistent, concentrated toxin that moves quickly through water sources.⁴

³ Open Burns, Ill Winds, Abraham Lustgarten, Pro-Publica, July 20, 2017, <https://www.propublica.org/article/military-pollution-open-burns-radford-virginia>

⁴ The Bomb That Went Off Twice, Abraham Lustgarten, Pro-Publica, December 18, 2017, <https://features.propublica.org/bombs-in-our-backyard/military-pollution-rdx-bombs-holston-cornhusker/>

“Today moral dissent, moral vision, moral resistance, is needed once again, to break the whole of militarism and war profiteering, and to take our nation and our world to higher ground.” –Rev. Dr. William J. Barber

How To Take Action in Washington

1. **Oppose the 1033 Program** – The Pentagon 1033 program funnels excess military equipment directly into the hands of local police forces. We are spending in excess and then channeling that excess to our local communities where the equipment is not needed. The 1033 program has transformed our police from peace forces into SWAT teams. Instead of diffusing situations, police come armed with tear gas and machine guns. By arming our police in excess, the militarization of our country has created a rift between private citizens and police. Instead of working in cooperation, they are standing ready for battle. **Tell your legislators to stop the flow of military grade weapons and vehicles to local police forces and other non-military recipients.**
2. **Tell Congressional members to stop taking money from weapons manufacturers** – In 2017, weapons manufacturers (companies like Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing, General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman) spent more than \$125 million on campaign contributions. The NRA regularly spends between \$1–\$1.5 million during campaign cycles. The result is military-style assault weapons in the hands of our kids, military-equipped police forces in our streets, and massive spending on domestic and international militarism that lines the pockets of the weapons manufacturers who are buying off our politicians. We need to reduce the influence that the military-industrial complex has over our politics and policies. **Tell your legislators to commit to not taking money from weapons manufacturers or the NRA.**
3. **Oppose increased military spending** – We spend more on the military than the next 8 countries combined. In 2017, 23.8 cents of every tax dollar went to the military. Conversely, only 4 cents went to education, $\frac{1}{8}$ of one cent went to transportation, and 2.2 cents went to housing and community development. While our communities and states struggle to provide basic resources for the people in those communities, private companies that manufacture weapons are raking in over \$300 billion a year from unnecessary and excessive federal spending. **Tell your legislator to redirect military spending away from weapons and to education, healthcare, clean water, infrastructure, and renewable energy.**
4. **Take action against JROTC and student recruiting in schools** – Military recruiting intentionally targets the rural and urban poor, especially young people of color. We must

oppose the varying methods of military recruitment which reiterate the core tenets of U.S. militarism: unquestioned obedience to authority, the notion we must fear “enemies,” and the primacy of military might in American foreign policy. We must divest our youth from the war machine, and ensure our most vulnerable youth populations have access to jobs and fields outside the military after school. **Tell your legislator to redirect the Pentagon’s student recruiting budget toward education and job training programs.**

*“And what we know is that the commitment to militarism and continuing wars has completely distorted our economy. So **our country**, the wealthiest country in history, is the only developed country...that does not provide healthcare to all of its people. In our country, the wealthiest country in the world, **women are more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than in any other developed country.** More than ten times than in Belarus or Poland. Here in Washington DC, in the capital of the wealthiest country in history, the death rate is the highest in the country, and it varies by race with **black women more than 3 times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than white women.** Why? Not because we are a poor country. Not because we can’t afford healthcare. Or first class education. Or good union jobs, and a decent infrastructure for our country, but **because our economy is first a war economy before it is an uplifting-our-people economy.**”*

—Rev. Dr. William J. Barber