

Update

Spring 2017

Ron Zucker, Editor

Local

April 23 Meeting

A Talk and a Film on Single Payer

The recent meltdown by House Republicans in their effort to undermine the Affordable Care Act, the relatively modest health care plan of which U.S. citizens now take advantage, has given way to more talk – and new momentum – toward a true national single payer or “Medicare for All” plan. As the only developed nation without such a plan, the thought is not new to some that we have some ground to make up.

Since 1987, Physicians for a National Health Program has been at the forefront of efforts to reform the health care system in the U.S., with a focus on promoting a single payer system. On Sunday, April 23, PASMOC will host a presentation by PNHP member Dr. Jeff Gee, who will share his thoughts on health care reform alternatives and show a condensed version of a new documentary film, *Now Is The Time*. The evening will begin at 7 PM at the Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo, 300 E. Santa Inez Avenue (at Ellsworth) in San Mateo. Admission is free, contributions welcome. The UUSM is wheelchair accessible.

Dr. Gee’s talk will cover the outlook on healthcare from Republicans (let the “free market” reign: pay more for less), mainstream Democrats (ACA 2.0: adding the Public Option), and Healthy California (a bill in the legislature mandating single payer, SB 562). Dr. Gee will also compare the poorer outcomes and much higher expense in the U.S. health system with other developed countries.

Now Is The Time is a feature length film with a run time of 71 minutes. We will show a 35-minute version, followed by a discussion the national health care issue. Terry Sterrenberg and Laurie Simons are the husband-and-wife team who made the film as a follow-up to their previous 2011 documentary, *The Healthcare Movie*. *Now Is The Time* was recently released with the goal of being in time to influence the results of national and various state-level efforts to bring Single Payer healthcare to the U.S.

From the film’s web site: “While the Affordable Care Act has helped some people, many of us are feeling the pinch of rising costs and narrowing networks. Through interviews, animations and exposé, this new documentary film tells the story of the drama, struggle, and success of the movement towards healthcare equity.”

Dr. Jeff Gee has been with PNHP since 2012. He graduated from UCSF, where he is a Clinical Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine. His career as physician in the bay area goes back to 1982.

Come to an evening in which we continue the push for a national healthcare plan that could very well benefit all Americans.

And stay in touch for information on our following meeting – Sunday, May 21: Dr. Conn Hallinan, journalist and analyst for Foreign Policy in Focus, will give a talk entitled “Dangerous Seas: North Korea, China and the U.S.”

Summary of March 20 Meeting

Peace Leaders Outline Priorities

PASMOC had the good fortune to host a stop on a tour by Kevin Martin, the President of Peace Action, and, from Germany, Reiner Braun, co-President of the International Peace Bureau. These spokespersons for the peace and disarmament community offered stories of how the world arrived at its current state of tension, and next steps that could and should be taken. NATO, military spending, and nuclear weapons were among the subjects that marked the dual presentations; the result was a cohesive message of the need to be aware and active.

Reiner spoke first, and early on took aim at Donald Trump in his then-recent meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Addressing Trump’s call for other NATO countries to spend more money on their military, Reiner said such increases would mean excess military spending and deep cuts to programs for social welfare and the environment. Citing the right of each country to decide its own level of spending, Reiner suggested Trump “has no idea how NATO works”.

But Reiner also called out NATO for its current goals and what they might mean. He first took us back to the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, which he called “a symbol of East-West confrontation”. This was followed by the end of the Soviet Union and the 1990 Charter of Paris that signaled the end of the Cold War, a period of cooperation and hope for a “peace dividend”.

But when the Warsaw Pact ended in 1990, NATO reassessed its role and its reason for continuing. It came up with “new jobs” as he put it: to fight the Islamic State (and Islamic countries), and to march and expand eastward – up against a Russia that had become to some degree disarmed and, Reiner said, an “...economically

(and) socially weak country.” Russia’s people are also mindful of the 27 million deaths suffered in World War II, thus wary of any possible future conflicts.

As a result, the U.S. and NATO now have bases in places like Poland and the Baltic states which were previously under the Soviet sphere, and missile defense systems near Russian borders. Reiner added that, rather than being truly “defensive”, missile defense exists to block a nuclear retaliation in the event of a first strike. NATO doctrine, he said, allows for that.

With 765 U.S. and NATO military bases around the world (Russia has 5) and a collective military budget of \$800 billion next year as opposed to Russia’s projected \$48 billion, Reiner called our ignorance of a possible Russian reaction to all of this a “background of confrontation”. With all of the weaponry in the region, he suggested the danger of another big war is “very nearby”. He similarly noted NATO military ties to countries like Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines, seemingly meant to surround China in the same way as Russia in an equally dangerous way.

Reiner noted the importance of “common security” in terms of addressing what “the other side” is thinking. It is necessary, he said, to understand how their interests are the same as ours, how we can find compromise, and avoid military and other confrontation. Reiner called for a more active peace and justice movement to oppose worldwide excessive military spending – to achieve goals toward sustainable development to better benefit the world’s populations. Along with upcoming actions such as the every-April Global Campaign on Military Spending, Reiner encouraged efforts in “peoples’ diplomacy”, in which citizens of different countries come together to try to solve problems in ways that war cannot – and in ways most major governments have not tried.

Kevin’s talk emphasized affairs and actions in the U.S. With the 50th anniversary approaching of Rev. Martin Luther King’s “Beyond Vietnam” speech, Kevin invoked King’s mention of the “giant triplets” of racism, militarism and economic exploitation.

Kevin expressed dismay with American perception of military issues. “Our society is most in denial about and most ignorant about our level of militarism”, he said, suggesting that people don’t seem to understand that the three are linked: Military and foreign policy are racist, and meant to benefit the top 1 % at our wealth scale. He mentioned a survey in which people put the total number of U.S. nuclear weapons at a median figure of 300, while the correct number is about 7,000. Many also don’t realize we have been at war for all but 16 years of our existence. Privilege may be part of the problem, he said, in that we have not had any wars inside of our own borders as have Europe and Russia.

Addressing nuclear weapons, Kevin took aim at the “modernization” plan, which calls for spending \$1 trillion over the next 30 years. He suggested simply calling it the “new nuclear arms race” – one that makes us less safe when Russia and other nuclear weapons states feel compelled to catch up. He also called out the ability for one person (the leader of a few different countries) to decide to launch a nuclear attack and perhaps end life on earth. New legislation to require Congressional approval to launch such weapons was just one of the bills Kevin mentioned (and is found in our Action Alert section).

Kevin talked about our relations with North Korea, questioning the oft-used notion that the government is “insane” and instead suggesting we have given them no chance for resolution. When we said “all options are on the table”, diplomacy was not one of them, and Kevin mentioned various issues that could be resolved – including ceasing war exercises and missile tests, having direct talks, international recognition, and a true post-Korean War peace treaty. He added that it was wrong to simply ask China to resolve the situation, for which it does not have the power.

Kevin encouraged the notion of “beloved communities” in the form of local actions. Both he and Reiner expressed hope after the Women’s Marches and the airport protests; Kevin noted the April 29 “People’s Climate March” in DC and San Francisco will this time include peace issues. He mentioned the “Don’t Bank on the Bomb” campaign of not investing in corporations or banks that finance nuclear weapons, with appropriate information found on the campaign’s web site. Coming back to the many issues in play right now, he concluded, “in these difficult times, we need to support each others’ struggles – but keep them connected to peace and disarmament.”

www.peace-action.org; www.ipb.org

Summary of March 26 Meeting **Drones – an Indictment and a Call to Action**

Toward the end of her talk about drone warfare, Bay Area CODEPINK organizer Toby Blomé found herself in tears, having just mentioned that it was “a hard topic to talk about”, and then adding, “I’ve never cried before” when presenting the subject. Perhaps it was from the gravity of her call for a moment of silence on behalf of victims of modern drone warfare along with those of the Vietnam-era My Lai massacre. While she spent some time on the types of drones and the Air Force bases from which they are operated, Toby’s emphasis for the talk was on drone warfare’s victims. She also put strong emphasis on ongoing direct actions at those bases, urging audience members to get involved in some part of that effort.

Toby discussed the particulars of drone warfare – which she noted continues to grow in its use – distinguishing between drones (“unmanned aerial vehicles” is the official term) used for killing and those for surveillance. The former, of which she showed slides, are mostly named “Predators” and “Reapers”, both comparable in size to 737 airliners. She also had a slide of a deadly “Hellfire” missile that is typically fired from them. These are controlled from Creech Air Force Base near Las Vegas, NV. The latter used for surveillance, called “Global Hawks” and potentially as small as an insect, are operated from Beale AFB near Marysville, CA. While surveillance might seem a more benign aim, Toby pointed out that surveillance findings often lead to orders for a killing.

From Toby’s perspective, evidence suggests that drones are a racist tool designed to target “the most vulnerable” and “the most disadvantaged” – those who can’t defend themselves. She expressed frustration at a double standard in which the U.S. thinks it has the right to both strike and watch people in war zones, when “we would not stand for it here.” Toby also pointed out the destabilizing nature of drone warfare on countries and their people, with children growing up where losing loved ones is a common occurrence. This, she said, is justified by the U.S. military in the name of fighting terrorism. “The U.S. is the biggest terrorist”, she countered.

And Toby gave examples to back up that assertion: Stories of a wedding and a funeral being bombed; 49 civilians killed in a mosque bombing just a week prior to her talk (the Air Force denied its involvement, but Toby cited reports of a weaponized drone in the vicinity at the time); a 16-year-old Iraqi who went to a *jirga*, or gathering, to talk about drones and after he returned home was hit and killed by a Hellfire missile.

These were just a few of the stories she gave, adding there were “other stories we won’t hear about.” She also criticized the assertion from the military that they are “surgical” strikes; not only do reports of civilian deaths contradict that, but the CIA, also a participant in drone warfare, has stated its willingness to kill a number of people in order to get just one intended victim.

Toby addressed the legal issue of drone warfare. It violates U.S. law, she said, against both premeditated murder and assassinations. It also goes against the notion of due process, when the U.S. President and military “act as judge, jury and executioner” of accused victims. And it violates international law to kill civilians who pose no immediate threat to human life.

She also talked about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), another toll taken on victims of drone strikes. A 2012 study called “Living Under Drones” chronicled people in Pakistan who survived strikes but are severely shaken by their drone warfare experiences. And on the

U.S. side, Toby said, PTSD is not limited to soldiers in combat, but extends to drone operators who regularly kill people by remote control. Three of these operators are main characters in “National Bird”, a new documentary film about drone warfare that she recommended.

Direct protest actions have been going on at Creech AFB since 2009, she said – a result of a “disillusioned” feeling about Congress’ unwillingness to address the killing. “Shut Down Creech” as the Nevada gathering is called, which draws activists from all over the country to block the base’s gates, takes place every year around this time, with the next action scheduled for April 23-29. Toby encouraged audience members to think about going, or at least supporting the effort. The Beale AFB actions, going on since 2010, are the last Monday and Tuesday of each month. She invited people to also come for one or two days and join growing numbers from towns in the surrounding area. Getting arrested is of course optional; the main point, said Toby, is that “we have to do what we can to stop it...it’s important to witness.”

www.codepink.org;

www.shutdowncreech.blogspot.com

Peace Vigils in San Mateo

Join members and friends of PASMCM every Saturday from 3-4 PM as we call for peace and justice around the world! We gather at El Camino Real and 3rd Avenue, in front of the Bank of America Building.

And on Thursdays from 4-6 PM, you’ll find Declaration of Peace-San Mateo in its weekly “Stand for Peace, at El Camino and 5th Avenue.

JOIN PEACE ACTION OF SAN MATEO COUNTY

____ New Member ____ Renewing Member

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____ \$30 Individual Membership

____ \$40 Family Membership

____ \$52 (“A Dollar a Week for Peace”)

____ \$15 Student/Limited Income

____ Other \$ _____

\$ ____ Bonnie Burnham Memorial Fund (Supports Video Project in Schools)

\$ ____ Leo Sack Memorial Fund (Addtl. Donation)

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Please make checks payable to:

PEACE ACTION OF SAN MATEO COUNTY

P.O. BOX 425, San Mateo, CA 94401-0425

Because of our advocacy and political action programs, membership is not tax deductible.

Summary of January 15 Meeting

Agent Orange – A Vietnam Legacy

Veterans for Peace board member Paul Cox is a Vietnam vet with typically searing memories of his time during that war. But Paul had no doubt – and had stories and photographic images to prove – that the collective memory of Vietnam and its people goes far deeper than his own. At the PASMCM meeting on Sunday, January 15, he shared some of those stories and images, and added in some possible remedies to the damage done by the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam.

Paul began by talking of his willingness to enlist as a teenager, where the war “wasn’t controversial in the depths of Oklahoma” as it was in bigger cities. He landed a relatively easy clerical job but eventually wound up in the far more dangerous infantry. Paul showed slides of the demilitarized zone, as well as the devastated jungles and bomb craters “the size of this room” that the U.S. military left in the wake of war. Citing the use of “endless amounts of armaments”, he made the connection between the weapons industry and the war effort, in which we “were expected to just keep using (arms), so they could bring us more.” Even now, he later added, dangerous ordnance from the war is being found around the country.

Paul also gave his take on the Vietnamese people, observations which would soon enough contribute to a change of his outlook on the war. They were often poor farmers, he said, subsisting off the land for generations, living in huts and drawing water from wells. It was on that land that the U.S. dropped hundreds of thousands of bombs, as well as the skin-burning gasoline product white phosphorus. A part of this population would join the fight against the U.S. by hiding in and operating from Vietnam’s jungles. “They knew the land”, Paul said. “They would fight and leave.” He accentuated the point with slides of disabled U.S. veterans and mention of lifetime trauma and addiction to painkillers. These were some of the soldiers who had survived.

Thus, he said, came the advent of Agent Orange – one of 15 different chemical herbicides identified by the color of the stripe on the barrels in which they arrived. Agent Orange comprised 60% of the herbicides that were used, thus it became identified with a warfare in which jungles were sprayed and defoliated in order to more easily find the enemy and prevent ambushes. Paul’s slides of ruined jungles which he said “can’t come back” illustrated the chemicals’ brutal effect on the land.

And his slides of Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange further informed its effects on people. There were disabled adults and children unable to move, born without arms, without legs, autistic, etc. Some of these images were of people who lived at the time, others who were

born sometime later but came by their conditions genetically. The fact of disabilities in a family, he added, has kept some from working their land due to the obligation of caring for family members – a fact that has exacerbated the poverty in which many of them live.

Paul cited in Agent Orange the presence of dioxin, which he called, next to plutonium, “the most toxic chemical known to man”. He noted that the people lived with the substance – farming, bathing, basically subsisting on contaminated land. Because of misinformation they received about the dangers of Agent Orange, American soldiers suffered a similar fate, and so have some of their children.

On the positive side, Paul cited efforts in Congress to fund cleanup projects around the country, thanks in large part to Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy, whose efforts led to the restoration of Danang Airport. Other such projects are being studied, but slow in getting started.

More recently, he said, East Bay Representative Barbara Lee re-introduced the Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act (H.R. 334), which Paul helped to write. The bill’s funding provisions include: medical assistance and disability benefits for stricken children of U.S. male vets; health and social services for affected Vietnamese as well as Vietnamese-American immigrants and their children; further cleanup of contaminated land and restoration of eco-systems; and research on the health effects of Agent Orange both here and in Vietnam.

Paul urged the audience to get local representatives to sign on to the bill; at press time neither Rep. Speier nor Eshoo had co-sponsored. Thus there is another item on our to-do list...and theirs.

www.veteransforpeace.org

Membership Report

Join Peace Action of San Mateo County in welcoming our newest members: Inge Etzbach, Kathryn Hillgrove, Alan Matlage

And we say “welcome back” to the following renewing members: Tom Banks, Mike Caggiano, David and Nancy Crabbe, Cosette and Malcolm Dudley, Linda Durkee, Timonie Hood, Richard Howse, Caryl Hughan and family, Vi Huynh, Adrienne Lonzarich, Louis Maraviglia, Joanne McMahan, Pat Nicholson, Gloria Purcell, John St. Peter, Linda Whitley, Mary Wilhelm, Bob and May-Blossom Wilkinson

Summary of February 12 Meeting

Israel and Palestine – What Next?

Dr. Stephen Zunes, professor of Politics and International Studies at the University of San Francisco, made clear his hope for peaceful co-existence for both Israel and Palestine. While pointing out the importance of a Pales-

tinian homeland, he also said that regardless of opinions about Israel's right to exist, "Israel exists", adding that Zionism takes a number of forms "across a broad ideological spectrum." But a message Dr. Zunes also delivered was one of dismay that the "two-state solution" was in some jeopardy. He lay that state of affairs at the feet of the new U.S. presidential administration, but saved a fair amount of blame for members of Congress from both major political parties.

Dr. Zunes began by calling out Donald Trump for his selection of David Friedman for U.S. ambassador to Israel. Zunes called Friedman a far-right Zionist who supports Israeli annexation of occupied Palestinian territories while opposing the idea of both a Palestinian state and Israeli citizenship for Palestinians. Friedman also accused then-President Obama of "blatant anti-Semitism" for his lack of support for increasing settlements, and called J. Street, a moderate pro-Israel group, "advocates of Israel's destruction" for a similar stance.

Dr. Zunes then took aim at Congress in its twin House and Senate resolutions condemning the Obama administration's abstention (a departure from a more typical U.S. veto of such measures) on a UN resolution criticizing Israeli settlements. Although the UN measure was in keeping with international law regarding colonizing occupied lands, and one of over 50 such resolutions that the U.S. had supported since 1967, Dr. Zunes said Obama's refusal to block it was "lambasted" by Republican and Democratic leaders alike in both the House and Senate. He pointed out that almost none of the Bay Area representatives supported the House version of the resolution, but in the Senate, while Dianne Feinstein has not co-sponsored, our new Senator Kamala Harris has. Zunes encouraged audience members to contact Sen. Harris and tell her how they felt about her position.

Another stance from Congress regards the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement that groups have used to oppose Israel's policies. While the emphasis has been on products made in settlements, Dr. Zunes noted legislative bodies have passed measures eliminating distinctions between products made in the West Bank from those made in Israel, implying an economic attack on Israel.

He suggested that Congress also seemed to take the position that the settlements did not violate the 1993 Oslo Accords, when in fact the accords prohibited both the Israelis and Palestinians from doing anything to change the status of the West Bank – which the settlements surely have done.

Dr. Zunes talked about the consequences of not reaching a two-state solution, with a less desirable alternative being a single state and a system of "one person, one vote". Israel could only avoid that by having an apartheid sys-

tem... which he called a "de facto" situation in the region already. He noted polls showing a majority of Democratic Party voters, as well as of American Jews, opposing the Israeli settlements. J Street and the similar organization Americans for Peace Now have also argued against unfettered settlement expansion. Both groups opposed the Congressional resolutions which they thought "would go against the long-term interests of Israel."

Dr. Zunes thus called for a change in politics by connecting some dots. He asserted that Israel would not change its position on settlements while the U.S. was giving its unconditional support; that Congress won't end its support of Israel's settlement policies as long as Democrats keep going along; and Democrats would not change their positions until there is pushback from grassroots activists. He also suggested that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is less a factor in continuing these policies than many think; such support, he suggested, has more to do with "the weakness of the opposition" than the strength of AIPAC.

He seems to think that that support is in fact eroding. Comparing the Israel/Palestine issue with those of Vietnam, South Africa, and El Salvador, he noted that some Democratic party politicians were in favor of previous bad policies, but their minds were eventually changed by progressives who did not stand for the repression then and ought not now.

"To me this is not about Israel vs. Palestine", he said. "This is about human rights (and) international law." Regarding the hope for diplomacy, he suggested both sides of the conflict need to feel their secure rights are not compromised by others; then the debate can go toward a resolution and a "more typical foreign policy supporting peace, human rights, international law and self-determination."

www.stephenzunes.org

International

Success of Negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty

The first session of the negotiations "on new legally binding instruments to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading toward their total elimination" ended Friday, March 31 at the UN headquarters in New York on a successful note. A draft treaty is due to be presented the second half of May.

Over 130 countries participated in this first round of discussions with international organizations, experts and civil society representatives in a spirit of openness and sincere commitment to the goals. "This is an historical process," said Reiner Braun, co-President of the International Peace Bureau. "It is the first time in UN negotia-

tions especially on nuclear weapons, that the super-powers (stood) outside of the room. We...felt an impressive spirit of courage, empowerment and emergency to prohibit the worst weapons ever conceived.”

The work went well, as described by International Committee of the Red Cross representative Lou Maresca, who emphasized that at the end of the week “all ICRC expectations were met and exceeded” with the aim of “clear and robust” prohibitions after the second round – which will take place from June 15 to July 7.

Before that round, all countries including nuclear weapons states will meet in Vienna May 2-12 for the first Preparatory Committee of the Non Proliferation Treaty. The Treaty is facing major challenges, especially from the proponents of nuclear weapons. The lack of implementation of commitments and the planned modernization of arsenals stand in contradiction to nuclear weapons states’ obligations under Article VI, “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament”. Also worrisome are declarations from the Trump administration that this commitment to nuclear disarmament could be dismissed in the next U.S. Nuclear Posture Review.

The vast majority of governments and peoples are frustrated by the lack of progress in nuclear disarmament in regards to the threats that these weapons pose to the very survival of humankind and our environment. There was broad agreement that the Ban Treaty should clearly focus on the humanitarian costs of nuclear weapons and the unacceptability of weapons designed to indiscriminately kill civilians.

Once again civil society is playing a key role that many delegations have welcome. “If we want to achieve in July a simple, efficient and goal oriented treaty, and advance our final goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons, the development of a broad grassroots mobilization will be essential” said Braun.

IPB also recalls the outrageous cost of nuclear weapons production in the nine possessor countries, estimated to exceed \$110 billion per year. The cost of the consequences of any use of one of the 16,000 existing nuclear weapons can’t be valued when targeting a major city. The Global Days Against Military Spending (GDAMS), a major IPB campaign, will see many actions around the world beginning April 18, with a special focus this year on nuclear weapons programs.

International Peace Bureau

GDAMS info: www.demilitarize.org

Co-existence
or no existence.

Piet Hein, poet and scientist

Action Alert

Whose Finger on the Button?

The current U.S. policy that threatens the first use of nuclear weapons has always been controversial; in these times it’s a dangerous relic of the Cold War. Even military leaders who have been in charge of our nuclear forces, such as General James E. Cartwright, argue that there is no need for such a policy that cannot be addressed by economic, diplomatic and conventional tools. And of course, should the United States ever launch a nuclear first strike, the risks of catastrophic escalation would be great. If one nuclear attack led to others, a nuclear winter could ensue, risking billions of casualties and any number of global crises.

Maintaining this first-use policy, especially when the decision of whether to carry it out is left in the hands of one person – in our case, the President – encourages other nations to pursue advanced nuclear weapons in order to deter a potential U.S. first strike...which in turn increases the chance of an unintended nuclear war. The current resident of the White House, and the manner in which he has so far done his job, brings new significance to the notion that no president should be able to unilaterally launch a nuclear first strike.

In January California Rep. Ted Lieu and Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey introduced corresponding bills in the House and Senate, entitled the Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act of 2017. This legislation – H.R. 669 in the House and S. 200 in the Senate – would prohibit a President from launching a nuclear first strike without a declaration of war by Congress. In a government that thrives under a system of checks and balances, the bills would seem to be the ultimate “check” in favor of our survival. While nuclear weapons should never be used under any circumstances, the bills are a move in the right direction to prevent what amounts to what has been called a “thermonuclear monarchy”.

Action: Contact Reps. Jackie Speier or Anna Eshoo, or whomever represents you, and tell them to co-sponsor H.R. 669, the Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act of 2017. Likewise contact Sen. Kamala Harris and tell her to add her name to the corresponding S. 200. Suggest this is a long-overdue bill, but especially timely during the present administration. Sen. Dianne Feinstein has signed on in the Senate, so feel free to thank her.

Trump’s War

In early March, Donald Trump sent hundreds more Marines into combat in Syria. The war in Syria is a devastating crisis that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives, created millions of refugees and dragged on for 6 long years. Experts agree that there is simply no military solution to the conflict, yet Trump is rushing toward a major

war, using the same old broken thinking that every problem in the Middle East can be solved with American weapons. In addition, the Defense Department recently announced it would no longer disclose how many troops are being sent into places like Syria.

East Bay Representative Barbara Lee answered with a bipartisan bill to prohibit the expansion of U.S. combat troops into Syria. Lee released a statement – excerpted here – upon her introduction of H.R. 1473, The Prohibit Expansion of U.S. Combat Troops into Syria Act.

“For more than fifteen years, the U.S. has been engaged in an ever-expanding war in the Middle East. President Trump’s deployment of combat troops in Syria is the latest front in this endless war...

“The bill I am introducing today prohibits the Department of Defense from funding any attempt by the Administration to expand our presence in Syria by putting U.S. combat boots on the ground. It is our constitutional duty as Members of Congress to place a check on the Executive Branch in matters of war and peace. We owe it to our brave service members to live up to our constitutional duty.”

Action: Contact Rep. Speier or Eshoo, and tell them to cosponsor H.R. 1473. Add that the new troop deployment in Syria is a new, riskier mission that will lead to a new rash of American casualties and traumatized veterans in a war that shows no sign of a constructive end.

Proposed Military Budget – A Handout to War Profiteers

Half of the federal budget now goes to weapons of war and the military-industrial complex; now Donald Trump wants to increase military spending by \$54 billion, a full 10 percent. There are many reasons to oppose the overall Trump budget, but the Democratic Congressional leadership has barely addressed the part of it that radically expands military spending. If people like House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer rightly intend to resist Trump’s cuts without mentioning the military increases for which the cuts make room, they are telling only half the story.

Many progressives feel there is not so much a spending problem as there is a wasteful military spending problem. Safety net programs like Social Security have their own sources of funding and can be shored up for decades with small fixes – without benefit cuts. The rest of the federal budget “discretionary” spending is split between military spending and domestic priorities.

Such a military budget increase would help weapons contractors who profit from preparing for war, but it does nothing for everyday Americans. Indeed, some military families need food stamps to survive. Children face crowded, crumbling schools, and our infrastructure (to which Trump promised to devote \$1 trillion) is falling

apart. The State Department also faces cuts, which means diplomacy will suffer and war could become more likely. Meanwhile, under the influence of war profiteer lobbyists, Congress repeatedly funds weapon systems that even the military says it does not want.

This isn’t just opposed by Peace Action members. A recent poll found that 58 percent of Americans oppose the Trump plan to increase the military. Congressional Democrats afraid of their own shadows must realize that even though they might draw a little less in campaign funds from weapons contractors, redirecting such spending to higher priorities is a political winner.

Action: Contact Rep. Speier or Eshoo, as well as both Sens. Feinstein and Harris, urging them to oppose a huge military budget increase. Tell them our national priorities and real security are on the line, and Congress should get out from under the thumb of war profiteers and demand a cut to wasteful military spending.

Directory

Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121

Senator Dianne Feinstein

One Post St., Ste 2450 San Francisco, CA 94104
(202) 224-3841 fax: (202) 228-3954
(415) 393-0707 fax (415)393-0710

Senator Kamala Harris

50 United Nations Plaza, Ste 5584 San Francisco, CA 94102
(202) 224-3553 fax: (202) 228-3865
(916) 448-2787

Representative Jackie Speier

155 Bovet Rd., Ste 780 San Mateo, CA 94402
(202) 225-3531 fax: (202) 226-4183
(650) 342-0300 (650) 375-8270

Representative Anna Eshoo

698 Emerson Street Palo Alto, CA 94301
(202) 225-8104 fax: (202) 225-8890
(650) 323-2984 (650) 323-3498

Donald Trump

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20500
(202)456-1111: fax: (202)456-2461
www.whitehouse.gov/contact/

**Find out who your Representative is: www.house.gov
If you are not in California, identify your senators here: www.senate.gov**

Find your State legislator:

<http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/>

The **Update** is published quarterly by Peace Action of San Mateo County. We welcome all submissions and letters, and reserve the right to exclude or edit for content and other considerations. The views expressed within are not necessarily those of the members of Peace Action of San Mateo County or Peace Action.



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Peace vigil every Saturday

We will be at 3rd Ave. and El Camino Real in San Mateo at 3 PM for our weekly antiwar vigil, while our military presence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria continues.

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Peace Action of San Mateo County
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Sunday, April 23, 7 PM
Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo
300 E. Santa Inez Avenue, San Mateo
(wheelchair Accessible)
Admission free, contributions welcome