



Speak Out Now

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The Federal Budget – Costs of the Empire

Tax day is coming up soon, which along with every time we look at our paychecks, is a reminder of how much we pay each year – and for what?.

Despite how much we pay in taxes, everything around us seems to be falling apart, not just roads but bridges and other infrastructure and social services.

The collapse of the Francis Scott Key bridge in Baltimore, when a massive container ship collided with it, exposed the priorities of the system. Nothing had been done to upgrade basic safety features, like “bumpers” around the piers or supports. Safety on the ship and for workers on the bridge was of no concern. As a result of the negligence of the ship owners and politicians, our tax dollars will pay most of the cost for a new bridge. Estimates by engineers show that bridges in the U.S. need \$125 billion in repairs.

Look at our schools. In urban areas, most teachers aren't paid enough to live where they teach. In working-class communities, class sizes are so large that even the most experienced teachers have a difficult time to do more than “manage” students. Burnout is common, with teachers leaving, with no experienced and qualified teachers to replace them.

The price-gouging of big landlords has driven rents up everywhere. As a result, more people are pushed into the streets. Tent cities are popping up. When they increase in size and overwhelm the area, the politicians have the encampments destroyed and push people out, with no place to go.

Healthcare is unaffordable and out of reach for many of us. Medical debt is the leading cause of bankruptcy. The various Covid-era programs that expanded health coverage are expiring, and an estimated 15 million people will be kicked off of the CHIPS or Medicaid coverage.

We pay a lot of taxes, and where is that money going? Certainly not to provide what we need. Joe Biden and Congress just passed a \$5,568 billion budget for the

upcoming fiscal year and they make it very clear what their priorities are.

While so-called “defense” received \$895 billion, in reality, the number is closer to \$2,529 billion, when including the money used to pay off debts from past military expenditures, which go to the banks. The U.S. military budget is the largest of any country – more than the next nine countries combined. War is big business. With the war in Ukraine, other military operations, and the weapons sent to Israel to carry out the genocidal war in Gaza, weapons manufacturers are reporting record profits.

These wars come at a cost, not only measured in dollars. The war on Gaza has killed more than 33,000 people. The wars on Iraq and Afghanistan in the past decades, killed more than 600,000 Iraqis, 100,000 Afghans and 24,000 U.S. military forces. These two wars cost an estimated \$6 trillion.

The U.S. has 750 known military bases in 80 countries. And there is little or no oversight on the cost of maintaining this military empire. The Pentagon has not passed a single audit that it was supposed to perform in the past six years. Meanwhile the politicians claim there isn't enough money to fund basic services that would provide people with affordable housing, access to decent medical care and good schools. But there are unlimited resources for maintaining U.S. military dominance over the world and keeping the billions rolling into what President Dwight Eisenhower called “the military industrial complex.”

The politicians call these wars and the billions of dollars spent on the military “defense”. But what is being defended are the access to resources and markets around the world for the big corporations, and the profits that the weapons manufacturers pull in year after year. For them, war is good business.

For workers everywhere, war brings misery and tragedy. And we certainly have better things to do with the wealth we create than hand it over to the Masters of War.