

Household Budget

“...we may gather out of history a policy no less wise than eternal; by the comparison and application of other men’s fore-passed miseries with our own like errors and ill-deservings.”

-Sir Walter Raleigh

Imagine that your country is your house and home, where all your dearest memories are stored, and all your dearest relatives abide. As a citizen, that’s exactly what your country is. Now imagine what you’d do to assure your home’s material and moral well-being. How would you handle the financial arrangements, and what would the character of your spending be?

Our current inflation has left many of us financially squeezed and justifiably guarded about when and how we spend whatever cash we have available. The same apprehensions apply to government, many of whose officials warn about increasing debt and deficit and feel the need to cut back on programs of social provision and uplift. If you were running the show, what would you do?

In 2020, Lockheed-Martin by itself got more in federal funds to build weapons than our public health agencies received to counter the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, the proposed \$30 billion increase in the 2023 military base budget over 2022 is by itself three times the Center for Disease Control’s discretionary budget, and over three times the entire budget for the Environmental Protection Agency. And the \$370 billion the Biden administration proposes spending to address climate change over the next ten years is less than half of what was given for this year alone to our military establishment, which is the single largest emitter of greenhouse gases on the planet. That means we’re going backwards as far as the effect on climate change is concerned.

When the current nuclear weapons modernization program began in 2014, its projected cost was \$1 trillion. It’s now \$1.7 trillion, is expected to continue into the 2040s, and fuels what may become a permanent nuclear arms race. Lockheed-Martin’s fiscal year 2023 take from this program, \$34 billion, is five times the federal FY 2023 appropriation for diplomacy worldwide. What does this mean at home? The citizens of Maine now spend \$269 per capita each year on the project, with the collective annual cost to the state at \$360 million. In 2019, the state legislature noted how these expenditures were “diverting crucial resources needed to ensure the well-being of Maine people.” And that’s not all: just this summer, Congress reflexively approved the firmer establishment of the Space Force, along with a projected 70 year program of new generation missile development, production, and deployment.

Nearly half the federal discretionary budget goes to the defense department and accounts for over three-eighths of the world’s military spending, more than the next nine countries’ expenditures

combined. Each taxpayer in the US will contribute \$2100 to next year's Pentagon budget. Nor does the Pentagon budget include appropriations for the CIA's military activity, the additional expenditures at the department of energy, 40 percent of whose budget goes to develop and maintain nuclear weapons, money for the Coast Guard, which is now part of the department of homeland security, appropriations to the department of veterans affairs to care for our veterans, or the \$152 billion service on the military portion of our national debt, which raise the ante another 50 percent.

Nor has the Pentagon, where cost overruns are routine, ever passed its federally required annual audit. Every other federal department has, while they struggle to find enough resources to meet human needs at home. In spite of our great national wealth, one fifth of our fellow citizens are ill-fed, ill-housed, ill-paid for their work, and in ill-health. Many of that one-fifth are children, enough to make one wonder about our nation's sense of parental responsibility. Nevertheless, this summer, the Senate Armed Services Committee approved \$45 billion more than the record \$813 billion in military spending which the Biden administration requested. It didn't even hesitate.

Apropos those spending increases, a summer 2022 poll from the Reagan Institute found that its respondents favored spending increases on healthcare, infrastructure, and education over those for the Pentagon.

One wouldn't know that, based on Congress' habitual choices. And so it goes, year after year. Would you organize your own household budget the same way? If you were running the show, what would you do?

References: for a fuller discussion of where our government pleases to put its treasure, and perhaps its heart also, see William D. Hartung, "Fueling the Warfare State," TomDispatch, July 7, 2022. Further details are regularly available from the Center for Defense Information, the National Priorities Project, and Brown University's Costs of War Project.