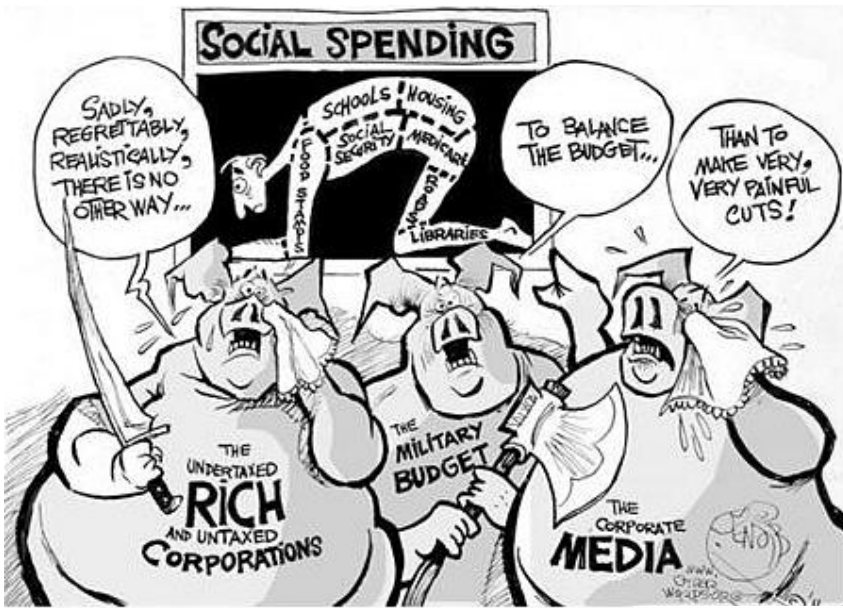


# JUST TRANSITION: FROM MILITARY ADDICTION TO ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

*Charting the course to a new definition of 'national security' and a new economy for all*

by Michael Eisenscher, National Coordinator, U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW)



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According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), US military spending in 2014 fell by 6.5 per cent from 2013 (in real 2011 adjusted dollars) as part of ongoing budget deficit reduction measures. Military spending has now fallen by 20 per cent since its peak in 2010. However, current US military spending is still 45 per cent higher than in 2001, just before the 11 September terrorist attacks on the USA.<sup>1</sup> Spending on the military continues to consume more than half of all discretionary spending, but cuts to military spending are a reality.<sup>2</sup>

Both the president and various factions in Congress (with the notable exception of the Progressive Caucus) have proposed to break the budget caps imposed by sequestration under the Budget Control Act of 2011.<sup>3</sup> Military contractors and their Congressional advocates have mounted a full court press for greater military spending. Any increases will come at the expense of already underfunded domestic programs. Faced by the legal and political constraints of BCA, hawks in Congress have increasingly relied on the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account established to fund the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and not subject to the caps, as a slush fund to pay for weapons and activities that should fall under the base budget.<sup>4</sup>

Popular pressure to restore vital domestic programs that have seen their budgets slashed during the last few years is also growing. With the end of combat operations in Iraq in 2010 and drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, advocates for social services, transportation, infrastructure rehabilitation, parks, alternative energy generation and a host of other domestic needs have demanded that the bloated

**Appropriations 2015 vs. House Allocations 2016**  
Discretionary Budget Authority in Billions of (nominal) Dollars

**US Military gets more than all of the rest of the government combined**

| Subcommittee               | FY 2015 Appropriations |             |                | FY 2016 House 302(b) |             |                | Change from FY 2015 Total |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------------------|
|                            | Base                   | OCO         | Total          | Base                 | OCO         | Total          |                           |
| Agriculture                | 20                     |             | 20             | 21                   |             | 21             | 0                         |
| Commerce-Justice-Science   | 51                     |             | 51             | 51                   |             | 51             | 0                         |
| Defense                    | 490                    | 64          | 554            | 490                  | 88          | 579            | 24                        |
| Energy-Water               | 34                     |             | 34             | 35                   |             | 35             | 1                         |
| Financial Services         | 22                     |             | 22             | 20                   |             | 20             | -2                        |
| Homeland Security          | 40                     |             | 40             | 39                   |             | 39             | 0                         |
| Interior-Environment       | 30                     |             | 30             | 30                   |             | 30             | 0                         |
| Labor-HHS-Education        | 157                    |             | 157            | 153                  |             | 153            | -4                        |
| Legislative Branch         | 4                      |             | 4              | 4                    |             | 4              | 0                         |
| Mil. Con.-Veterans Affairs | 72                     | 0           | 72             | 76                   | 1           | 77             | 5                         |
| State-Foreign Operations   | 40                     | 9           | 49             | 41                   | 7           | 48             | -2                        |
| Transportation-HUD         | 50                     |             | 50             | 55                   |             | 55             | 6                         |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>\$1,010</b>         | <b>\$73</b> | <b>\$1,084</b> | <b>\$1,017</b>       | <b>\$96</b> | <b>\$1,113</b> | <b>\$29</b>               |

**Note**  
OCO = Overseas Contingency Operations

**Sources**  
Office of Management and Budget, "Report for the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015," Table 12, December 29, 2014, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/legislative\\_reports/7\\_day\\_after/hr83\\_7-Day%20After.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/legislative_reports/7_day_after/hr83_7-Day%20After.pdf)  
Department of Homeland Security, "Written testimony of DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson for a House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Homeland Security hearing on the President's FY 2016 budget request for the Department of Homeland Security," March 26, 2015, <http://www.dhs.gov/news/2015/03/26/written-testimony-dhs-secretary-jeh-johnson-house-appropriations-subcommittee>  
House Appropriations Committee, "Suballocations to Subcommittees Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Authority and Outlays," April 2015 (not yet officially released)

**In FY 2016, the military gets even more, while diplomacy, labor, health & human services and education get less**

<sup>1</sup> "US military spending falls, increases in eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia says SIPRI", April 13, 2015, <http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/2015/milex-april-2015>

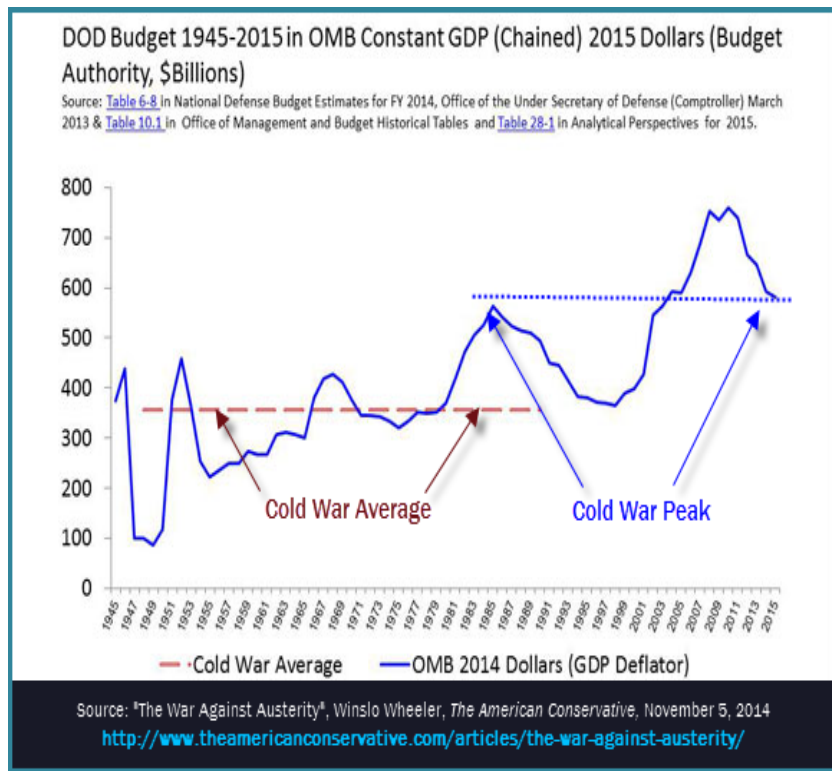
<sup>2</sup> Even if spending remains flat or is adjusted only for inflation, that will represent a reduction from the average 2% real annual increase on which the Pentagon has predicated its procurement and weapons development planning. The consequence will be felt by workers and communities in which military contractors operate. For more, see "[Are the Pentagon budget planners encouraging bad behavior?](#)" by Gordon Adams (*Foreign Policy*, February 14, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> "Competing Visions: President Obama, House Budget Committee, Senate Budget Committee, and Congressional Progressive Caucus Release Budget Proposals for 2016", National Priorities Project, March 19, 2015, <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/analysis/2015/competing-visions-2015/>

<sup>4</sup> "'Crack cocaine for the Pentagon': Meet the secret slush fund that's getting hawks high", David Dayen, *Salon*, March 24, 2015, <http://uslaboragainstawar.org/Article/36921/crack-cocaine-for-the-pentagon-meet-the-secret-slush-fund-that-s-getting-hawks-high>



Pentagon budget be substantially reduced to providing funding to meet urgent domestic needs.



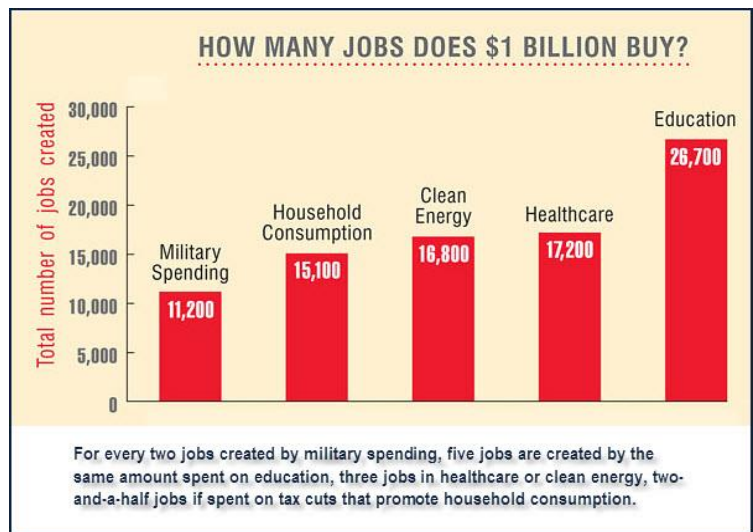
Whether national security spending declines, remains at or near peak Cold War spending or resumes its upward climb, there is no doubt that there will be changes to military weapons, programs, personnel and activities that are funded. Layoffs have already taken place at factories like those of the Oshkosh Corporation, where armored military vehicles are manufactured, as production has been cut with withdrawal of troops from Iraq and the drawdown in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> Production of other weapons may be reduced or terminated due to obsolescence, changing force structure and need, or as a consequence of the failure of lobbying and campaign contributions by their advocates. And pressure will continue to build for reduction in the size of the Pentagon bureaucracy. While the size of the military budget may be subject to speculation, there is little doubt that numbers of military sector workers will be laid off as these changes are made.

## PART I – THE IMPERATIVE FOR CHANGE

**21<sup>st</sup> Century progressives and peace advocates must go beyond opposition to armed conflicts to address the underlying structural causes and social and economic consequences of militarism.**

While continuing to call for new budget priorities and moving money from the Pentagon to our communities – as important as those are and will continue to be – the larger objective must be to *demilitarize U.S. foreign policy*. Accomplishing that requires that we demilitarize the economy in whose service that foreign policy operates. The challenge is how to get from our nation’s addiction to military spending to a new demilitarized sustainable economy that works for everyone rather than just for those already at the top of the economic ladder.

The domination of our economy by what President Eisenhower appropriately called the *military-industrial complex*<sup>6</sup> not only drains resources from other urgent human and social needs, it distorts the economy, diverting the creative energies of millions of professional and skilled workers into production for war, thus depriving our economy of their talents and creative potential. As a PERI Institute study has demonstrated, dollar for dollar, spending on the Pentagon creates fewer jobs than the same funds spent on healthcare, education, clean energy



<sup>5</sup> "Oshkosh Corp. cutting hundreds of positions in its defense division", Rick Barrett, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, October 10, 2014

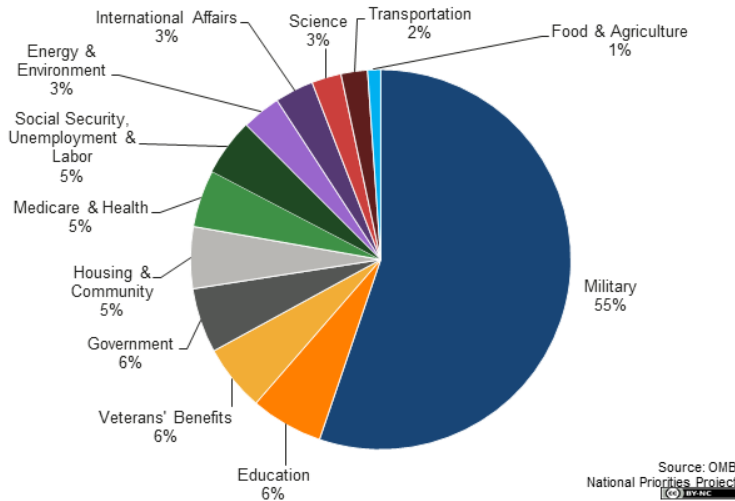
<sup>6</sup> *Farewell Address to the Nation*, January 17, 1961, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eisenhower%27s\\_farewell\\_address](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eisenhower%27s_farewell_address)



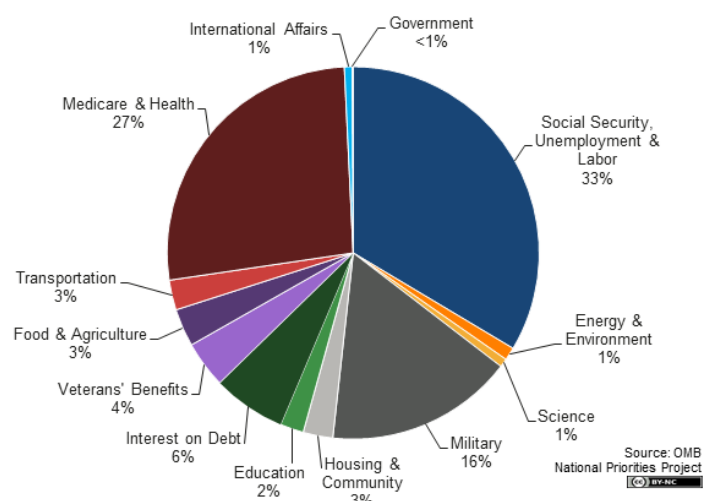
and even tax cuts that fuel consumer spending. And jobs in those other sectors are on average compensated as well as or better than jobs in the military sector.<sup>7</sup>

We would have a more dynamic, efficient and productive economy that would create more good jobs if it were freed from the distorting effects of military spending that consumes more than half of all discretionary spending (16% of the president's overall budget for 2015).<sup>8</sup>

**President's Proposed Discretionary Spending (Fiscal Year 2015)**



**President's Proposed Total Spending (Fiscal Year 2015)**



But what about the millions of people who today rely for their economic livelihood on jobs in the military-industrial complex? What about the communities that rely on revenue generated by those jobs and the business activities of military contractors that employ those workers? Among the most powerful arguments in support of continued high levels of military spending is that those dollars translate into good jobs that make it possible for millions of working people to have a decent standard of living – what is sometimes referred to as “military Keynesianism”.<sup>9</sup>

The reality confronting those workers and communities now is that military spending is being cut – and will likely be cut further – in part as a response to the withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq and winding down of the Afghan War, but also because the structure of U.S. military forces today is predicated on Cold War realities that no longer hold and the force structure required to address 21<sup>st</sup> Century realities must be very different. The present course is simply unsustainable, both economically and environmentally.<sup>10</sup>

The public has begun to draw the line, making it more difficult to politically justify bloated wasteful Pentagon spending while public services are being cut, public sector jobs are being eliminated, the social safety net is being shredded, and millions are sinking into or already trapped in long term unemployment, economic insecurity and poverty. Ninety-five

<sup>7</sup> See the research by Bob Pollin and Heidi Garrett-Peltier at the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI). *The Real News* conducted an interview with Pollin (“[Investing in Schools Creates More Than Twice as Many Jobs as Military Spending](http://truth-out.org)” (Truth-out.org, June 10, 2013) and his research report, “[The U.S. Employment Effects Of Military And Domestic Spending Priorities: 2011 Update](http://truth-out.org)” by Robert Pollin & Heidi Garrett-Peltier (Political Economy Research Institute University of Massachusetts, Amherst, December 2011); also cited in “[Military Spending: A Poor Job Creator](http://truth-out.org)” by William Hartung, (Center for International Policy, December 2012)

<sup>8</sup> “Federal Spending: Where Does the Money Go - Federal Budget 101” by the National Priorities Project (which produces many other excellent resources), <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/budget-basics/federal-budget-101/spending/>.

<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_Keynesianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Keynesianism)

<sup>10</sup> “[STRATEGIC AGILITY: Strong National Defense for Today's Global and Fiscal Realities](http://truth-out.org)”, Stimson Center Report, September 2013



percent of 2009-2012 income gains went to the wealthiest 1%.<sup>11</sup> Growing economic polarization and social inequality is a prescription for social upheaval.

## A Needed Conversation

We need to generate a conversation in the labor movement and more broadly among progressive forces about the need to transition from production for the Pentagon to production to meet social needs.

*That conversation should include the implications of cuts in military spending for workers in and communities dependent upon the military-industrial-national security complex. Failing to do so will doom any effort to make the fundamental changes required to wean our country from its dependence on militarism as its central industrial policy<sup>12</sup>.*

Just as calling for moving from a fossil fueled economy to one that is environmentally sustainable obligates us to address the social and economic impact that transformation will have on those who are today employed by and dependent on a carbon-based economy, *calling for a smaller military budget brings with it an obligation to address the impact of a reduction in military spending on the workers, their families and communities today dependent on work in that sector.*

*This is an opportunity to engage in a broad national social dialogue about what kind of economy will provide economic security, a decent standard of living, reduce economic inequality, be environmentally and socially sustainable, and reduce the sources of international conflict that lead to militarism and war - for today and for generations to come.*

The question is whether workers in the military sector (and their unions) will resist those cuts because it threatens their economic welfare, or leverage the opportunity to participate in transforming their jobs, workplaces and the economy to serve the urgent social and economic needs of their communities and the country by moving to alternative sustainable, socially useful forms of economic activity – recognizing that doing so may also reduce the damage to the environment now created by a military that is both the largest consumer of fossil fuels on the planet and the biggest contributor to climate-killing CO2 emissions.

### Demilitarization for Deep Decarbonization:

Reducing Militarism and Military Expenditures to Invest in the UN Green Climate Fund and to Create Low-Carbon Economies and Resilient Communities  
published by International Peace Bureau - Sept 2014

Table 1: U.S. Military Oil Consumption and Estimated CO2 emissions, 2012

| U.S. Military | Number of barrels/year | Number of gallons/year | Percentage of total DoD consumption | Fuel Cost (in US \$) | CO <sub>2</sub> or equivalent (metric tonnes) |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Air Force     | 62 million             | 3 billion              | 53%                                 | \$9 billion          | 26 million                                    |
| Navy          | 33 million             | 1 billion              | 28%                                 | \$5 billion          | 14 million                                    |
| Army          | 21 million             | 900 million            | 19%                                 | \$3 billion          | 9 million                                     |
|               | <b>117 million</b>     | <b>5 billion</b>       | <b>100%</b>                         | <b>\$17 billion</b>  | <b>49 million</b>                             |

Source: Schwartz, M. et al. (2012) *Department of Defense Energy Initiatives: Background and Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service, [Online] Available at: <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42558.pdf>  
Calculations of CO<sub>2</sub> is from the U.S. Energy Information Administration: <http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=307&t=10>

*Will they and their unions be reactive or proactive? Will they help chart the path to sustainable economic transformation or allow their economic fate to be determined by the decisions of others?*

## The Challenge: A Just Transition

We need to engage workers and communities that are today dependent on military production to become involved in shaping and planning this transition. *They alone should not bear its social cost, and they should have a voice with community allies in planning for a transition that protects their economic welfare and the economic health of their*

<sup>11</sup> [“Poll: Voters Prefer Military Spending Cuts To Reduce The Deficit”](#) (Think Progress, February 25, 2013) and [“Some 95% of 2009-2012 Income Gains Went to Wealthiest 1%”](#) (Wall St. Journal, September 10, 2013)

<sup>12</sup> While conservatives reject the idea that the U.S. should have an industrial policy – a government guided strategic effort to encourage the development and growth of the manufacturing sector of the economy – the fact is that our country has one now that dates back at least to the start of the Cold War. See [“America Has an Industrial Policy – It’s Run by the Military”](#), *Real News Network* interview of Bob Pollin by Paul Jay, November 13, 2013.



communities, as it meets society's numerous urgent needs. *We call this a “just transition” to an alternative sustainable economic model.*<sup>13</sup>

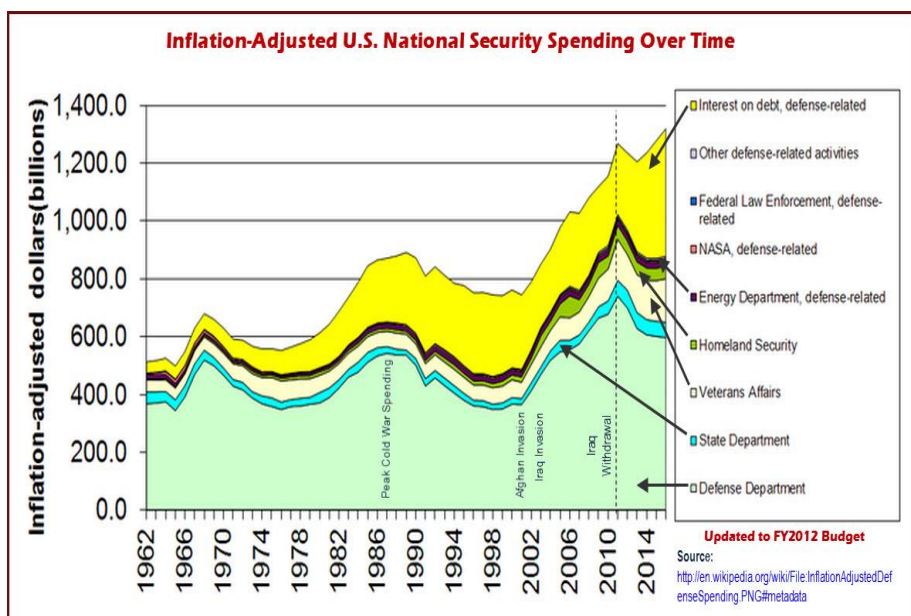
Just transition, however, calls for more than plans that protect the economic and social interests of military sector workers alone. Those plans should take into account the employment and social needs of the larger community so that those at the bottom of the economic ladder are also provided a path to economic security.

*In other words, just transition seeks to raise the standard of living for everyone rather than protecting the standard of living only of those military or energy sector workers whose jobs are impacted by changing national budget priorities. Any transition plan must, therefore, have a racial and economic justice component to address the social and economic inequities experienced by those who have been historically deprived of the opportunity to obtain those jobs.*

### The Labor Movement’s Course Correction

During the 2013 AFL-CIO Quadrennial Convention, the labor movement made an important course correction. The convention committed to a process that had already begun in important sectors of the labor movement. Evidence of this shift can be found in the role that the labor movement has played in the struggles for immigrant rights, organization of domestic, fast food and Walmart workers, port truck drivers and other “independent contractors” who don’t fall under the protection of the National Labor Relations Act. It is present too in the campaigns to raise the minimum wage and for a living wage and struggles for universal affordable healthcare. The AFL-CIO declared its intention to speak to and advocate on behalf of the interests not only of union members but of all working people. To demonstrate this is more than a rhetorical flourish, for the first time the convention seated representatives of organizations that are not traditional unions on the Executive Council of the federation.<sup>14</sup>

Consistent with this turn to the entire working class, any movement for economic conversion must develop strategies for change that speak to the economic and social needs of millions of workers who are unemployed, under-employed, working in marginal contingent jobs, without union representation, denied the economic security, social stability and lifestyle benefits achieved by workers in the better organized military and energy sectors – whose own standard of living and security is increasingly threatened by layoffs, collective bargaining retreats, and the impact of austerity policies adopted by Congress and states and imposed by multinational corporations.<sup>15</sup>



<sup>13</sup> [“Just Transition for Workers During Environmental Change”](#) (Canadian Labour Congress, April 2000)

<sup>14</sup> [“10 Important Initiatives Coming Out of the AFL-CIO National Convention”](#) by Kenneth Quinnell (*AFL-CIO Now*, September 23, 2013); [“At AFL-CIO Convention, Leaders Ask: What Direction for Labor?”](#) by Mark Vorpahl (*Truth-out.org*, September 11, 2013); For a more critical perspective, see [“House of Labor Needs Repairs, Not Just New Roommates”](#) by Steve Early (*Labor Notes*, September 26, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> People learn social solidarity through engagement and by identifying and reflecting on shared values. The objective is to identify ways to build bridges between those in different social and economic strata – whose interests may at times overlap and at other times collide – to build coalitions between them that transcend narrow interests in pursuit of their common interests. When convinced their common interests take precedence, people will put aside their special or individual interests for the common good.



## An Economy for All

This requires a conversation in the labor movement and in our communities about how we get from a militarized carbon-dependent economy to a sustainable new economy in which the skills of military and energy sector workers are refocused on producing other products and services that meet the needs of society rather than the profit objectives of the military-industrial-national security-energy complex, and job opportunities and training for them are also made available to those who have historically been disadvantaged and locked into an intractable state of insecurity, poverty and deprivation.

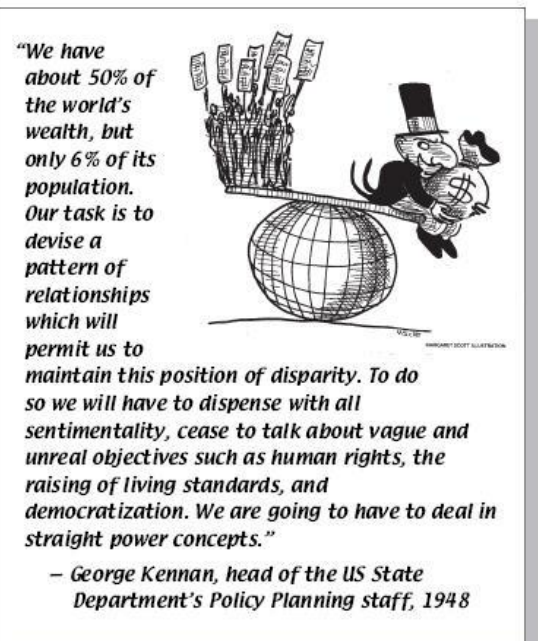
A struggle for a new environmentally sustainable, socially responsible, equitable and just economy – a solidaristic economy that works for all – will require that our country gives up its ambition to be the global hegemon in favor of becoming a reliable global partner, adopting a foreign policy that relies foremost on diplomacy and negotiation rather than military supremacy, and puts a premium on social justice rather than on economic and political subordination to the interests of an economic elite. This must be a foreign policy in service to the interests of the American people.

### A New Definition of “National Security”

We need a new definition of "national security" that is not based on the size of our military, the number of our foreign military bases, the power of our weapons or the advanced state of our military technology.

Real national security should protect our people, not the profits of multinational corporations and the military-industrial-national security-energy complex.

- Real national security exists when people have jobs with incomes sufficient to provide a decent standard of living, affordable housing and healthcare, education without a lifetime of student debt, and safe, affordable child and elder care.
- Real national security provides efficient affordable mass transit, modern safe public infrastructure, a proper social safety net, sustainable carbon-free energy, protection of our environment, and wholesome food.
- Real national security can only be achieved if all countries dramatically reduce their consumption of fossil fuels and lower the threat posed by runaway global warming.
- Real national security requires our country to operate in the world as a member of a global community of nations so as to earn respect rather than to instill fear.
- Real national security can be achieved only if the conditions of poverty, unemployment, alienation and desperation which provide the fertile field in which terrorism grows are alleviated throughout the world.



If this becomes the accepted definition of real national security, then it necessarily follows that the giant military-industrial-national security-energy complex must be dismantled or transformed to serve the legitimate aims and requirements of national security rather than the financial and political interests of corporate and Pentagon brass.

### Making the Changes Required to Obtain Real National Security

*For both union-represented military and energy sector workers and those without representation at the bottom of the economic ladder, the only way to protect and advance their respective interests is by uniting to fight for their common interests. Neither will succeed without the other.*

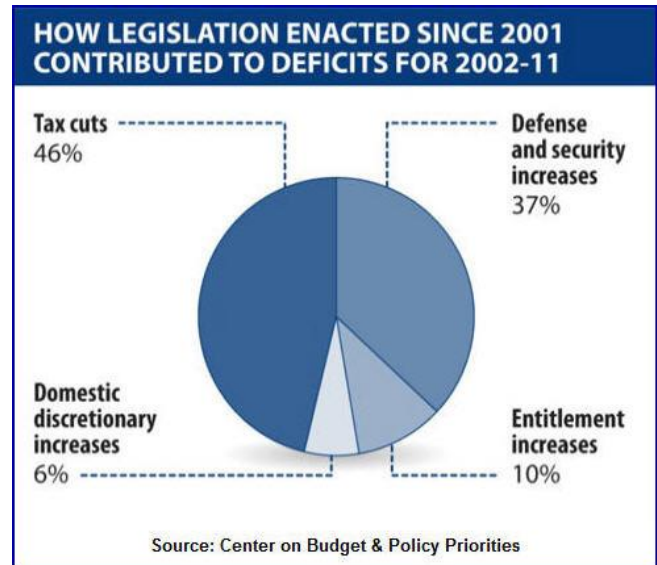


But military and energy sector workers, though numbering in the millions, represent a distinct minority of all workers. Many, by virtue of decades of struggle, also now occupy middle rungs on the economic ladder. These include public sector, skilled and professional workers, who owe their standard of living to their unions and generations of workers whose struggles made that standard of living possible. Today they find themselves the target of austerity measures and relentless political and ideological attacks. Many are one or two paychecks away from missed mortgage or rent payments, overdrawn bank accounts, and an increasingly crushing personal debt burden that lead to foreclosure and bankruptcy. The climb up the economic ladder is difficult but the fall from those higher rungs can be fast and traumatic.

Although all are not directly threatened by Pentagon budget cuts, other workers too have a direct stake in a struggle to achieve a more equitable solidaristic economy. The tax revenue that support public services and the social safety net that keeps people from becoming hungry, homeless and destitute will be reduced when military sector workers lose their jobs. Personal consumption that contributes to the economic vitality of their communities supports the jobs and incomes of many thousands more than the number of military sector jobs that are directly affected. Their civic participation in voluntary community activities will also suffer in the wake of lost jobs and incomes. With their loss of jobs also comes an increasingly tenuous connection to their unions and a sharp reduction in union revenue.

Conversely, a struggle that raises the living standards of those at the bottom, secures the incomes of those in the middle, repairs the social safety net, restores public services, rebuilds public infrastructure, rehabilitates housing and builds a carbon-free energy system will create hundreds of thousands of new jobs, revitalize local economies and increase government revenue.

The struggle for a just transition to a new “solidarity economy” is one that will benefit and can unify many different sectors of society. But it is a struggle that cannot be won without all of them involved in its pursuit.



## PART II – STEPS ALONG THE PATH TO CHANGE

### Just Transition to a New Economy

The aspiration of weaning our economy from its dependence on military production is not new and USLAW is not the only organization thinking along these lines. In [Peace Action](#) they are having the same conversation. Miriam Pemberton<sup>16</sup> at the [Institute for Policy Studies](#) has devoted considerable energy to the issue, picking up the baton passed on by [Seymour Melman](#) and [William Winpisinger](#), who advocated for conversion in the 1970s and '80s. [Women's Action for New Directions \(WAND\)](#), [Progressive Democrats of America](#), [American Friends Service Committee](#), [Win Without War](#), and a growing number of organizations operating in the orbit of the [New Priorities Network](#), [Coalition for Human Needs](#), the [Pentagon Budget Campaign](#) and their allies also share this goal.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, when an end to the Cold War held out the promise of a “peace dividend”, Professor Seymour Melman<sup>17</sup> became the driving intellectual force behind and the most widely recognized advocate of the concept of economic conversion.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, [Webinar: Transitioning to a New Economy](#).

<sup>17</sup> Seymour Melman was a professor emeritus of industrial engineering at Columbia University, co-chair of the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), and founder and chair of the National Commission for Economic Conversion and Disarmament. A collection of articles, books, videos and other materials by and about him can be found at



He wrote, “By conversion we mean political, economic and technical measures for ensuring the orderly transformation of labor, machinery and other economic resources now being used for military purposes to alternative civilian uses.”<sup>18</sup>

He documented how the country’s heavy reliance on military production distorted the economy, sapping it of its economic dynamism and efficiency, resulting in a pronounced decline in U.S. economic competitiveness, loss of technological innovation, failure to invest in public infrastructure, dismantling and export of the country’s manufacturing base, and a huge infusion of public and private debt.

William Winpisinger<sup>19</sup> was International President of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers from 1977 until his retirement in 1989. His union represents many of the production workers employed in the military-industrial sector. He was not afraid to plow new ground. When he addressed the [International Conversion Conference](#) in 1984, he concluded by saying,

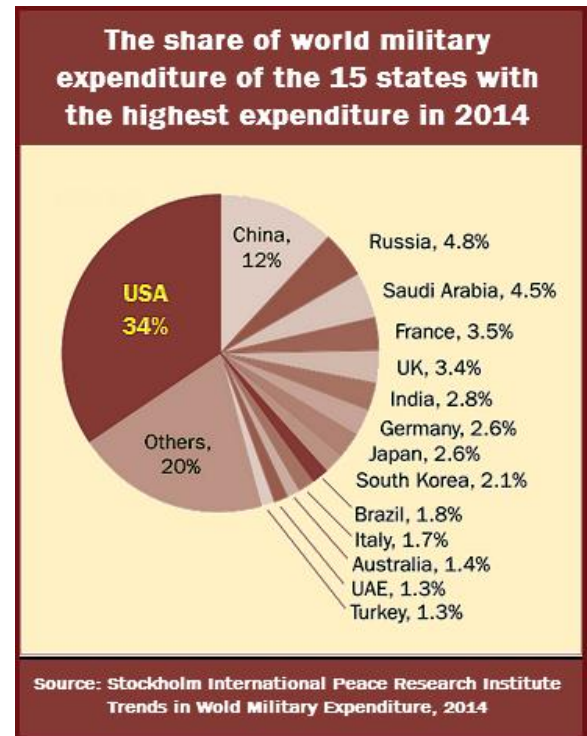
*“(Economic conversion) permits us to pursue peace and prosperity in both qualitative and quantitative human terms. When and wherever we achieve it, it will bring us that much closer to ending our bondage to the warfare state. We are the hostages and we shall free ourselves.”* (emphasis in original)<sup>20</sup>

Bill Allwell, then Vice President of United Food and Commercial Workers, followed Winpisinger, emphatically stating,

*“The problem is jobs. And my friends, if we ignore the real issue, we risk the continued frustration of this movement to the end the arms race.”*

In 1992, with Lane Kirkland as president of the AFL-CIO and the Cold War defining the international outlook of the federation, the AFL-CIO Executive Council nonetheless adopted a statement on economic conversion that is just as relevant today as it was then.<sup>21</sup> The council called for conversion planning that provides for:

1. A national commission in which labor, industry and government together plan and coordinate conversion-related activities.
2. Community committees in defense-dependent areas, where labor, management and local leaders can work together to develop conversion plans.
3. In-plant Alternative Use Committees to engage labor and management in joint exploration of civilian market possibilities.



<http://globalmakeover.com/SeymourMelman>. See, for example, *The Permanent War Economy* (Simon & Schuster, 1974) or an article that summarizes its major themes, “[In the Grip of a Permanent War Economy](#)”.

<sup>18</sup> “[Planning for Economic Conversion](#)” by Seymour Melman and Lloyd J. Dumas in *A Peace Reader: Essential Readings on War, Justice, Non-violence, and World ...*, Pp. 51-60, edited by Joseph Fahey, Richard Armstrong (Paulist Press, 1992). See also “Economic Conversation: Conversion & the Labor Movement” by Lance Compa, *Labor Research Review*, Vol. 1, No. 7, 1985, <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=lrr>

<sup>19</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_W.\\_Winpisinger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_W._Winpisinger)

<sup>20</sup> “[Economic Conversion Now](#)” (video), Ernest Urvater, Producer (JTJ Films, 1985). This documentary includes extensive excerpts from a the first International Conference on Economic Conversion, Suzanne Gordon, Director, held at Boston College in 1984.

<sup>21</sup> February 18, 1992, Bal Harbour, Florida, posted at <http://uslaboragainstawar.org/downloads/AFL-CIO%201992%20Resolution%20on%20Economic%20Conversion%20.pdf>



4. Sufficient advance notice of defense procurement cancellations and cutbacks to allow time to develop alternative use plans.
5. Appropriate funds to facilitate the planning process.

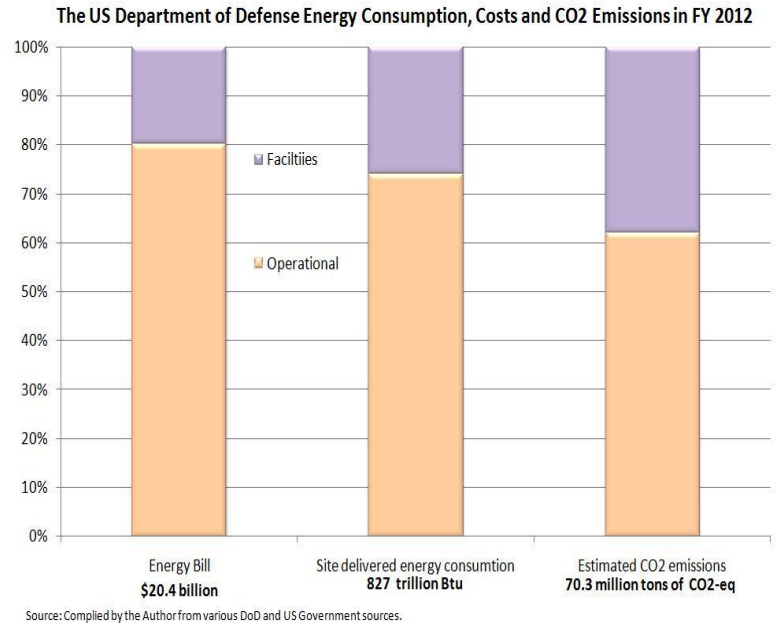
It laid out proposals for business development and assistance to workers. It called for federal funds to affected communities to offset the loss of their tax base, and federal impact aid when necessary to hard hit communities. The statement closed with this:

*“The AFL-CIO calls upon Congress to enact legislation that provides adequate planning at the national and local level for economic conversion, effective support for business and labor to develop alternative uses of the defense-oriented facilities, and appropriate assistance for workers adversely affected by cuts in military spending. We urge Congress to allocate a significant share of federal budget savings from defense cutbacks for use in economic conversion planning and assistance.”<sup>22</sup>*

That conference took place when most of the labor movement still operated in the shadow of the Cold War. Today we no longer live in a world with two super-powers competing for global hegemony. Our world is more complex. Our economy, if anything, is more deeply embedded in and dependent upon military production, global arms sales and serial wars.

### Allies and Partners

But labor also has potential partners in today’s environmental movement as it seeks to end reliance on fossil fuels and polluting technologies to make a just transition to sustainable alternatives. *The challenges of demilitarization and breaking our addiction to fossil fuels are remarkably similar and indeed are inextricably intertwined.* On a superficial level alone, the Pentagon is the largest consumer of fossil fuels on the planet, and its single largest polluter.<sup>23</sup>



<sup>22</sup> [Statement of the AFL-CIO General Executive Council on Economic Conversion](#), February 18, 1992

<sup>23</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense is the world’s single largest consumer of energy, using more energy in the course of its daily operations than any other private or public organization, as well as more than 100 nations. [Fueling the “Balance”: A Defense Energy Strategy Primer](#) (Brookings Institution, 2009). See also [Lean, Mean and Clean: Energy Innovation and the Department of Defense](#) (Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, 2011).

The Department of Defense has been the country’s single largest consumer of fuel, using about 4.6 billion gallons of fuel each year (12.6 million gallons/day). Military vehicles consume petroleum-based fuels at an extremely high rate: an M-1 Abrams tank can get just over a half mile on a gallon of fuel and uses about 300 gallons during eight hours of operation.] Bradley Fighting Vehicles consume about 1 gallon per mile driven. (<http://costsofwar.org/article/environmental-costs>) The biggest gas-hogs in the Pentagon’s arsenal are the Navy’s non-nuclear aircraft carriers that burn 134 barrels per hour and battleships which consume 68 barrels per hour. At it top speed of 25 knots, the USS Independence consumes 150,000 gallons of fuel a day. At peak thrust, F-15 fighters burn 25 gallons per minute. An F-16 jet on a training mission ignites more fuel in a single hour than the average car owner consumes in two years. [How Fuel Efficient Is the Pentagon: Military’s Oil Addiction](#) (Environmentalists Against War, 2003)

While official accounts put US military usage at 320,000 barrels of oil a day, that does not include fuel consumed by contractors, in leased or private facilities, or in the production of weapons. The US military is a major contributor of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that most scientists believe is to blame for climate change. Steve Kretzmann, director of Oil Change International, reports, “The Iraq war was responsible for at least 141 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMTCO2e) from March 2003 through



Our economy's fossil fuel addiction is a driving force behind our militarized foreign policy. Keeping a large standing army, a global naval fleet, air combat and missile superiority, a massive nuclear arsenal, and more than 1000 overseas military bases is driven by the preoccupation with maintaining control (and keeping others from gaining control) of the sources of oil and gas and the pipelines and sea lanes required to deliver it.<sup>24</sup>

In the name of national security, the U.S. military contributes disproportionately to the acceleration of climate change which, if unabated, will not only threaten the security of the U.S. but also the viability of most of the species on the planet.

On the basis of a simple environmental calculus alone, the course our country is on is simply not sustainable. Thus the environmental movement is a natural ally for any effort to curb military spending and find alternative economic activities that are environmentally sustainable and socially responsible, and conversely, the antiwar movement needs to become involved in supporting environmental demands for energy sustainability.

Other potential allies that in the past have not spoken out about military spending have begun to do so out of recognition that essential public services, protection of the most vulnerable populations, indeed protection of the planet itself, can not be properly funded so long as 55 cents of every discretionary federal tax dollar is siphoned off by the military.<sup>25</sup>

### Futures Commission

The concept of economic conversion has already found a sympathetic audience in Connecticut, a state whose economy is heavily reliant on military contracts, and in the International Association of Machinists, which represents large numbers of military sector members.

On May Day, 2013, Connecticut State Senator Toni Nathaniel Harp announced the adoption of [Public Act 13-19/SB619](#), a measure that creates a "Futures Commission" of the sort called for by the AFL-CIO in 1992. She said,

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December 2007. . . . That war emits 60 percent more than that of all countries. . . . <http://www.projectcensored.org/2-us-department-of-defense-is-the-worst-polluter-on-the-planet/>

Energy consumed per active duty military and civilian personal is 35 percent higher than the U.S. energy consumption per capita, which is amongst the highest in the world. While consuming that amount of energy, DoD emitted 73 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, corresponding to over 4 percent of the total emissions in USA. While the average American is paying \$3 per gallon of gasoline, the price can soar to \$42 a gallon for military grade jet fuel delivered through aerial refueling. ([Daily Energy Report](#), January 3, 2011) The [Wall St. Journal reports](#) that fuel drops into Afghanistan can cost as much as \$400/gallon. (by Nathan Hodge, December 6, 2011)

Source of chart: "[HOW MUCH ENERGY DOES THE U.S. MILITARY CONSUME? – AN UPDATE](#)", by Sohbet Karbus, *Daily Energy Report*, August 5, 2013

<sup>24</sup> *Empires of Oil: Corporate Oil in Barbarian Worlds* by Duncan Clarke (Profile Books Ltd., UK, 2007); *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power* by Daniel Yergin (Free Press, December 2008); "American energy independence: the great shake-up" by Thanassis Cambanis (Boston Globe, May 26, 2013); "[The End of the World as You Know It and the Rise of the New Energy World Order](#)" by Michael T. Klare (TomDispatch.com, April 15, 2008); [Fuel on the Fire: Oil and Politics in Occupied Iraq](#) by Greg Muttitt (New Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> For example, the [Coalition for Human Needs](#), a coalition of more than 100 major social service and social justice organizations, has for the first time taken a strong stand for cutting the military budget and using those resources to fully fund social programs that have been dramatically cut as a consequence of sequestration and the austerity regime adopted by Congress. ([Coalition for Human Needs Letter to Congress on the Budget](#)) Deborah Weinstein, CHN's Executive Director said, "Replacing the automatic "sequestration" cuts is needed, but more savings should have been sought from the Pentagon, made responsibly and gradually over the next decade." ([Media release: 4/10/13](#))



“(It) will set up a framework that allows us to convert many of our military related jobs and infrastructure into non-military industries. If we want to take advantage of the green economy that the Obama administration is pushing,” she said, “we need to have the infrastructure and trained workers in our state to do so.”<sup>26</sup>

The commission includes members from economic development agencies, state and local governments, the labor movement, educational, science and engineering institutions, business and industry, and peace, social justice, and environmental organizations. Among those appointed to it are Henry Lowendorf from the Greater New Haven Peace Council, a prime mover of the legislation, Todd Berch, Legislative and Political Coordinator of the CT AFL-CIO, who serves in an ex officio capacity, John Harrity, President of the CT State Council of Machinists, and Richard McCombs from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. The commission issued [its report](#) in December, 2014.

Efforts to move similar legislation are underway in other states.

In 2012, seven local IAM lodges submitted a [resolution](#) to the IAM convention on economic conversion, calling for the creation of a working committee, with a member from each territory, to examine and consider various proposals for a national Economic Conversion Program, including plans previously put forward by the union. It called on the union to incorporate the recommendations of the committee into the political program and work of the union.

### A Democratizing Force

In 1984, Suzanne Gordon, Director of the International Economic Conversion Conference, observed:

*“The moment you say convert you have to say convert to what and that immediately begins a democratic conversation about what we should be producing in this society...whose interests that production should serve. Should it serve people in need, the majority of people in society? Or should it serve to advance the profit-margins of multinational corporations. It’s a strategy about empowering people because it gives workers in a factory and community residents and people in need a say, not only in what is produced but how it is produced, what’s the technology, where it’s produced and so-forth. So conversion really is a very critical concept about democracy. Its central core is democracy.”<sup>27</sup>*

Imagine if workers, unions, community organizations, local government and local business leaders collaborated in a community needs assessment as part of the process of developing a plan for economic conversion. What creative energy might that unleash? What ideas might emerge for the development of new products and services, new businesses, rehabilitation of our cities, programs to train the unemployed and retrain workers whose jobs will be transformed to serve social need rather than the insatiable profit-drive of military contractors. This is not wishful thinking or dreaming the impossible dream.<sup>28</sup>

### Military Contracts by State Per Capita

| State          | Contracts FY13 | Population 2012 | Per Capita |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| DC             | 2400000000     | 632,323         | 3795.52855 |
| Virginia       | 21800000000    | 8,185,867       | 2663.12658 |
| Connecticut    | 8700000000     | 3,590,347       | 2423.16411 |
| Maryland       | 7700000000     | 5,884,563       | 1308.50838 |
| Arizona        | 7800000000     | 6,553,255       | 1190.2482  |
| Mississippi    | 3500000000     | 2,984,926       | 1172.55838 |
| Alabama        | 5600000000     | 4,822,023       | 1161.3383  |
| Massachusetts  | 7600000000     | 6,646,144       | 1143.52021 |
| Maine          | 1500000000     | 1,329,192       | 1128.50514 |
| Missouri       | 6700000000     | 6,021,988       | 1,113      |
| Kentucky       | 4600000000     | 4,380,415       | 1050.12881 |
| Alaska         | 754100000      | 731,449         | 1030.9673  |
| Colorado       | 4300000000     | 5,187,582       | 828.90256  |
| Texas          | 20900000000    | 26,059,203      | 802.019924 |
| New Hampshire  | 1000000000     | 1,320,718       | 757.163906 |
| Pennsylvania   | 7800000000     | 12,763,536      | 611.115916 |
| California     | 22800000000    | 38,041,430      | 599.346555 |
| Washington     | 4000000000     | 6,897,012       | 579.961293 |
| Hawaii         | 785300000      | 1,392,313       | 564.025474 |
| Nevada         | 1500000000     | 2,758,931       | 543.688842 |
| Rhode Island   | 449300000      | 1,050,292       | 427.785797 |
| New Jersey     | 3400000000     | 8,864,590       | 383.548478 |
| Georgia        | 3700000000     | 9,919,945       | 372.985939 |
| New Mexico     | 732900000      | 2,085,538       | 351.420113 |
| Florida        | 6600000000     | 19,317,568      | 341.657915 |
| Utah           | 936500000      | 2,855,287       | 327.988045 |
| Kansas         | 885200000      | 2,885,905       | 306.732204 |
| Wisconsin      | 1700000000     | 5,726,398       | 296.870738 |
| South Carolina | 1400000000     | 4,723,723       | 296.376396 |
| South Dakota   | 246000000      | 833,354         | 295.192679 |
| Ohio           | 3200000000     | 11,544,225      | 277.194874 |
| Minnesota      | 1400000000     | 5,379,139       | 260.2647   |
| Oklahoma       | 971900000      | 3,814,820       | 254.769557 |
| Louisiana      | 1100000000     | 4,601,893       | 239.032068 |
| Vermont        | 146700000      | 626,011         | 234.34093  |
| New York       | 4500000000     | 19,570,261      | 229.940725 |
| Nebraska       | 418900000      | 1,855,525       | 225.758209 |
| Indiana        | 1400000000     | 6,537,334       | 214.154577 |
| Iowa           | 619000000      | 3,074,186       | 201.354115 |
| Michigan       | 1900000000     | 9,883,360       | 192.242314 |
| North Dakota   | 115200000      | 699,628         | 164.658933 |
| Illinois       | 2100000000     | 12,875,255      | 163.103566 |
| North Carolina | 1500000000     | 9,752,073       | 153.813451 |
| Delaware       | 116300000      | 917,092         | 126.813886 |
| Tennessee      | 815900000      | 6,456,243       | 126.373806 |
| Montana        | 109200000      | 1,005,141       | 108.641474 |
| Wyoming        | 61700000       | 576,412         | 107.041491 |
| Idaho          | 160200000      | 1,595,728       | 100.393049 |
| Oregon         | 341900000      | 3,899,353       | 87.6812128 |
| Arkansas       | 232200000      | 2,949,131       | 78.7350579 |
| West Virginia  | 104100000      | 1,855,413       | 56.1061068 |

Sources:  
<http://www.usaspending.gov>  
<http://www.governing.com>

<sup>26</sup> [Media Release, May 1, 2013](#)

<sup>27</sup> [“Economic Conversion Now”](#) cited previously in Note 8.

<sup>28</sup> [“A real green deal”](#) relates the story of efforts by workers at Lucas Aerospace in the UK to promote alternatives to military production, which was on the decline, through economic conversion. Interviews with some of the shop stewards who led that



The military budget is subject to cuts under the budget deal reached by Congress.<sup>29</sup> This will continue to be contested terrain with all the uncertainties that implies for the future of military spending. Even if the hawks in Congress succeed in raising the Pentagon budget, cuts will nonetheless take place in programs, weapons and personnel. There is growing recognition that the course our country has been on is unsustainable and is increasingly destructive not only to the public welfare and the environment, but also to the vitality of the capitalist system. This creates new opportunities for moving this discussion into the center of public discourse. It also suggests that unions that represent military and energy sector members and the communities affected need to have a “Plan B” and cannot assume their jobs will continue to be secure.

### **It Takes a Village to Raise a Child, and a Movement to Change an Economy**

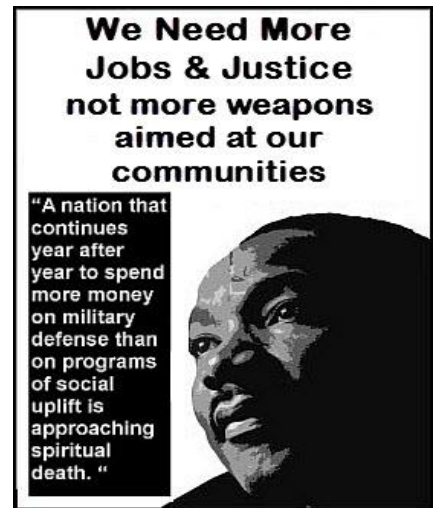
*Economic transformation required to meet society’s social needs is not something that can be accomplished without a movement demanding it.* That movement, if it is to be successful, must include workers and unions in the military and energy sectors along with other segments of the labor movement in coalition with people and organizations in the peace movement, environmental movement, faith communities, and racial, economic and other social justice struggles. It must be diverse and inclusive.

Operating on their own, these constituencies are unlikely to develop sufficient political power to achieve their own objectives. However, by identifying common interests and working together they can build a movement for change that has the potential to do so.

The first challenge is to open the conversation about the need for and possibility of economic transformation and just transition throughout progressive movements, and identify those who see the need for it and are willing to invest their time and energy in the struggle to accomplish it. This kind of base- and coalition-building will necessarily be an ongoing process over the course of many years. Economic transformation of the sort contemplated here is not something that can be achieved in a few years. It is likely to require a decades-long struggle.

This is just the beginning of a conversation. This effort takes the struggle for new priorities to a new level – to a struggle for a demilitarized economy and foreign policy – a struggle for a new, sustainable, more just, equitable and democratic economy and society. In the process, we will help to redefine the meaning of “national security” – as determined not only by the security of our borders, the size of our military or the power of its arsenal, but also by whether people have real economic and social security - food security, health security, housing security, employment security, security in their old age, and environmental security – and a decent standard of living for all, not just the privileged few.

*Our definition of national security must be aligned with and defined by our values, not by our fears.*



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effort are featured in the video “[Economic Conversion Now](#)” (Note 8). See also, “[Economic Conversation: Conversion & the Labor Movement](#)” by Lance Compa (Labor Research Review, Volume 1, No. 7, 1985, Cornell University Industrial Relations Research School)

<sup>29</sup> Of course, there are powerful interests that will not accept those cuts. Military contractors, Pentagon brass, Department of Defense officials, and federal, state and local politicians have launched a full court press to restore the cuts and win further increases in military spending. Trade papers that cover the military-industrial complex make clear that even the modest reductions that have already or are slated to take place have set off alarm bells. Here is a sampling of articles: “[Deals Drop as Pentagon Contractors Bear Cruellest Month](#)”; “[Going for Broke: The Budgetary Consequences of Current US Defense Strategy](#)”; “[Are the Pentagon budget planners encouraging bad behavior?](#)”; “[Acquisition Reform More Important as Program Cuts Expected to Continue Into FY ’15](#)”; “[Contractors adjust to belt-tightening at the Pentagon](#)”; “[Security Insiders: High Time for Congress to Cave on Closing Military Bases](#)”; “[Congress Must Make ‘Unimaginable’ Defense Budget Choices: HASC’s Adam Smith](#)”; “[A Cut From 11 to 10 Carriers Would Impact Industrial Base](#)”;



This journey, like all others, begins with first steps. Our success or failure will have consequences, not only in the immediate term and near future. It will help to define what our society and world look like for generations to come. It will determine what kind of world we bequeath to our children, grandchildren and generations beyond.

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## **APPENDIX – NEXT STEPS**

### **Immediate Considerations**

Here are some issues to consider in preparing to take the new solidarity economy road:

- What is the state of the conversation on economic conversion in your community, constituency or organization?
- Who is engaged in the conversation? Why?
- Who is not yet engaged who should be at the table?
- Who are actual or potential allies in moving this conversation?
- What is the level of dependency of your community, constituency and organization on the military-industrial-national security-energy complex?
- How many workers are involved? What kind of work do they perform?
- Are they represented by a union? Who are its leaders?
- Is their workplace located in or very close to the community where most reside or do they commute from many different communities distant from the workplace?
- What are prospects for moving resolutions calling for just transition to a new sustainable economy in your organization, other organizations, and in local/regional governments?
- What are prospects for state legislation creating a “futures commission” like that in CT that will develop a plan for moving from dependence on military contracts for jobs and tax revenue.
- Are there academics, scholars, economists, regional planners or others with special skills willing to support and assist?
- What are the agencies and institutions that have responsibility for economic development in your community/area? What level and form of public input do they encourage/permit?
- What job training/retraining resources are available? What resources are needed? What role can local community colleges and public school adult education programs play in training/retraining for new kinds of work that could be made available as a result of a transition plan?
- What would be needed to encourage affected workers, unions and local business people to be supportive and participate?
- How might a plan for economic development be established that both addresses the economic security concerns of military and energy sector workers and the economic opportunity needs of the broader community of working people, the unemployed and the poor?
- Who are potential allies in the business community?
- Are there existing worker-owned and cooperative businesses in the area? What role might that business form play in an economic development-just transition plan?
- What are next steps?



## Suggested Actions

Use responses to the discussion questions above as a guide to develop a plan of action and division of labor. Here are some suggested steps that could be taken:

1. Contact potential organizational allies about their interest, including labor, environmental, racial and economic justice groups and community organizations that are also wrestling with sustainability and employment issues.
2. Identify and reach out to unions whose members are likely to be directly or indirectly impacted to explore their interest and identify their concerns, and where possible, take this conversation to their members.
3. Meet with leaders of area labor councils to secure their support, then with that support approach the State Labor Federation to enlist the leadership's involvement.
4. Network with organizations in other communities pursuing similar objectives.
5. Organize a showing of "[Economic Conversion Now](#)". Discuss what remains relevant today from this 1985 documentary and how changed conditions require new strategies. Show the webinar "[Transitioning to a New Economy](#)" developed by Miriam Pemberton of the Institute of Policy Studies and Judith Leblanc of Peace Action, in collaboration with [Women's Action for New Directions \(WAND\)](#) and the [Women's Legislative Lobby \(WiLL\)](#).
6. Perform a *military sector workplace census*: Set up a task force to begin identifying all the places of employment where work is performed under military contract, i.d. the number and types of jobs they provide, whether there is a union, the type of venue (factory, office, service center or whatever), whether a prime or sub-contractor, etc.
7. Research what forms and the amount of direct and indirect taxpayer subsidies these businesses have received and what conditions and obligations, if any, were attached to those subsidies. If possible, determine how much in tax revenue the work performed under military contract contributes to the local government revenues.
8. Design a community needs assessment/survey: Identify infrastructure in need of rehabilitation or replacement, social and municipal services that are underfunded/understaffed, housing in need of rehabilitation, and other needs identified by community members, public agencies, elected officials, NGOs, faith leaders, social and economic justice organizations and others. Invite organizations concerned with these issues to participate.
9. Meet with staff of your Congressional delegation to find out what help they can provide, and their willingness to support and collaborate to move this work forward.
10. Identify all of the current job training programs, what they offer and who they serve; determine how they are funded.
11. Identify all economic development programs, agencies and organizations, and the names and contact information of their executives and key staff. Find out what their development plans, priorities and projects currently are.
12. Learn about the economic development plans and priorities of state and local government, whether they receive any federal grants related to military sector development or its alternatives, whether there are any studies that have already been done. Learn who the key players are.
13. Explore with supportive elected officials the prospects for applying for a Department of Defense [Office of Economic Adjustment](#) planning grant to underwrite research, professional and technical support, and other costs of developing a transition plan.
14. Consider the advisability of pursuing a "[Futures Commission](#)" like that [in CT](#) and one being developed [in MD](#); meet with state legislators and city/county political leaders to get buy-in and identify potential sponsors for legislation.



15. If not already affiliated with the [New Priorities Network](#), [Jobs-Not-Wars Campaign](#), and [U.S. Labor Against the War \(USLAW\)](#), learn more about them and consider affiliation. Each has websites with substantial resources relevant to any conversion initiative.
16. Develop contact with sympathetic students and student organizations, and faculty and staff at nearby colleges and universities and determine whether they can assist with research. Explore whether internships might be created and whether there might be funding for them through those institutions, other funders, or under the terms of an OEA planning grant.

## Organizations & Networks Involved in New Economy/Just Transition Work

### Allies

[American Friends Service Committee](#)

Contact: [Mary Zerkel](#)

[Center for International Policy](#)

Contact: [Bill Hartung](#)

[Institute for Policy Studies \(IPS\)](#)

Contact: [Miriam Pemberton](#)

[National Priorities Project](#)

Contact: [Doug Hall](#)

[Peace Action](#)

Contact: [Kevin Martin](#)

[U.S. Labor Against the War \(USLAW\)](#)

Contact: [Michael Eisenscher](#)

[WAND/WiLL](#)

Contact: [Susan Shaer](#)

[Coalition on Human Needs](#)

Contact: [Debbie Weinstein](#)

[USAction](#)

Contact: [Jeff Blum](#)

[Win Without War](#)

Contact: [Stephen Miles](#)

[Pentagon Budget Campaign](#)

Contact: [comms@budgetpriorities.org](mailto:comms@budgetpriorities.org)

[MoveOn.org](#)

Contact: [Jo Comerford](#)

[Credo Action](#)

Contact:

[RootsAction.org](#)

Contact: [David Swanson](#)

### A Comprehensive Strategy for Defense Transition Assistance:

<http://www.ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/A-Comprehensive-Strategy-for-Defense-Transition-Assistance.pdf>

**Federal Grants Available:** [http://uslaboragainstawar.org/public/admin/Federal Grants Available.pdf](http://uslaboragainstawar.org/public/admin/Federal%20Grants%20Available.pdf)





## A Values Exercise

Annually over the course of six years, I taught a course in political economy in the Labor Studies Program at Laney College in Oakland. This community college serves thousands of students who are working adults who return to school to upgrade their skills, earn certification in a vocational specialty, obtain a degree that will enable them to enroll in a B.A. degree program at a university or four-year college, or simply to enrich their intellectual and cultural lives for the sheer joy of learning.

The course I taught fulfilled general education requirements, so the students were usually a mixture of union members pursuing a Labor Studies Certificate and students with no union background seeking credits toward their two-year community college degree. Students ranged in age from early twenties to as old as late seventies and were racially, ethnically, gender and culturally diverse.

In the first class of each term I conducted this exercise. I asked students to say what they considered was required for a “good economy” – what they believed a good economy would provide. As you might expect, students said secure jobs at wages sufficient to support a family, good schools, healthcare without regard to income, employment or immigration status, retirement security, affordable housing, a clean environment . . . and more. As they called out each characteristic of a good economy, I wrote them on the board.

When they could think of nothing more (and the board was usually full), I asked why no one said a good economy requires a bigger military, more police and more prisons. (In six years, not a single student ever mentioned any of these.)

We then would discuss why there is such a disconnect between the economy we have and what they consider to be necessary for a good economy.

Try this exercise with fellow union members, coworkers, classmates, neighbors, family, friends, members of community, civic and social justice organizations.

It’s a good way to generate a conversation about what values people consider important and share, and what constitutes a just, equitable and sustainable economy – the new solidarity economy they want and the dysfunction and exploitative economy they have.

When all is said and done, it is their values that provide the foundation on which they try to build their lives and determine what they will fight for.

Michael Eisenscher

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