

OPINION

Military Spending Doesn't Buy Safety

Adding to the debt with unwanted weapons systems

BY ELIZABETH ROSE

Are you wondering where your tax dollars are going? Then take a look at the \$642.5 billion stuffed into the National Defense Authorization Act, which the House of Representatives recently approved.

House Republicans may spout plenty of concern about the nation's budget deficit, but their version of the Pentagon's budget tops the spending levels they had agreed to a few months ago by \$8 billion. It's also \$4 billion above the total that President Barack Obama and the Pentagon requested.

These politicians are trying to



fund Cold War-era weapons that our military doesn't want and that have been dismissed as outdated and unnecessary by the top brass — leaders like Gen. James Cartwright, the retired vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a former commander of the country's nuclear forces.

The U.S. military budget is six times that of China, and tops the next 17 highest-spending countries combined.

Military spending has played a significant role in increasing the national debt. Over the last decade, the Pentagon's budget has nearly doubled.

The wars in Iraq and Af-

ghanistan have also contributed to this soaring increase in defense spending and to record deficits.

The drawdown of troops from Afghanistan and Iraq should mean the Pentagon will spend less. But giant military contractors have dumped a fortune into campaign contributions and lobbying, making sure that any and all anticipated savings are going to expensive weapons systems — all paid for by you through your taxes.

The 10 biggest government contractors are all military contractors. These companies each spend millions of dollars a year on political contributions and then millions more on lobbying campaigns. After the Supreme

Court's Citizens United ruling, which allowed unlimited corporate spending on political campaigns, these contractors are spending even more to win over lawmakers. And judging from the way they voted for that bloated Pentagon budget, the investment is paying off.

A recent study by the University of Maryland found that three-quarters of Americans favored cutting military spending, including two-thirds of Republicans as well as nine in 10 Democrats. This study also confirmed that respondents generally underestimate the magnitude of the military budget, and that when they receive information about its size — they're more likely to support Pentagon spending cuts.

Americans support our troops.

Everyone wants America to be safe. But that doesn't mean we need to buy expensive weapons systems that Pentagon hasn't even asked for. Throwing money at the Pentagon doesn't buy us safety. It just means that our grandchildren will be paying for weapons systems we don't need and can't use because a defense contractor has buttered up a lawmaker at taxpayer expense.

The Senate is unlikely to pass the hike in military spending that the House Republicans voted for, but it shows that if the GOP seizes control of the Senate in November, Uncle Sam will be buying more big weapons systems.

Elizabeth Rose is the communications director of Campaign for America's Future.

Hate in the Political and Media Arena

Confronting poisonous language

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The growth in hate groups and the use of their divisive and negative language in the mainstream political and media arena is cause for national alarm.

Already this year several horrendous hate crimes, possible hate crimes, and crimes committed by people with ties to hate groups have received national attention. In the first week of May a 15-month-old girl was shot and killed along with her mother, grandmother, and her mother's boyfriend allegedly by Arizona white supremacist, border vigilante and longtime neo-Nazi J.T. Ready.

he murders were the apparent result of domestic violence but were tragically little surprise from a man the Southern Poverty Law Center's Mark Potok called "a violent thug who typifies the very worst element in the American nativist movement."



In Tulsa, Okla., hate crime charges were filed in April against two white men who went on a Good Friday shooting spree in a black neighborhood randomly targeting and killing three black victims and injuring two more. In Jackson, Miss., three white men pled guilty to federal hate crime charges in March after admitting to a pattern of harassing and assaulting black people that ended with one of the men killing James C. Anderson in June 2011 by driving over him with a pickup truck.

And in Sanford, Fla., federal investigators considered whether hate crime charges might apply to the February killing of unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin who was followed and killed by self-appointed neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman.

For 40 years the Southern Poverty Law Center's mission has been to fight hate and bigotry and seek justice for the most vulnerable members of society. In its most recent Intelligence Report, the news on hate groups in America was frightening. There were 1,018 hate

groups in the United States in 2011 continuing a trend of significant growth that has lasted more than 10 years.

The Southern Poverty Law Center notes "[t]he radical right grew explosively in 2011, the third such dramatic expansion in as many years. The growth was fueled by superheated fears generated by economic dislocation, a proliferation of demonizing conspiracy theories, the changing racial makeup of America, and the prospect of four more years under a black president who many on the far right view as an enemy to their country."

The report continues: "The truly stunning growth came in the anti-government 'Patriot' movement—conspiracy-minded groups that see the federal government as their primary enemy... Many Americans, infused with populist fury over bank and auto bailouts and a feeling that they had lost their country, joined Patriot groups. The swelling of the Patriot movement since that time has been astounding."

The apparent killer in the Arizona murders is a prime example of how hate can cross

over from the fringe into mainstream politics: J.T. Ready, the white supremacist and alleged shooter, was a vigilante border patroller, former Arizona Republican precinct committeeman and candidate for local office who was applauded, endorsed, and sponsored as an elder in the Mormon church by former state Senate president Russell Pearce, an architect and lead sponsor of Arizona's draconian anti-immigration law. Pearce was himself voted out of office after a recall election forced by a petition drive last November—the first such recall in Arizona history. Now he is Vice Chair of Arizona's Republican Party.

What does it mean for the country our children and grandchildren are inheriting when there is so much poisonous divisiveness in the political and media culture and the number of hate groups is on the rise?

Another of the Southern Poverty Law Center's signature initiatives is the Teaching Tolerance program which provides resources for educators to help create school environments that are welcoming and nurturing—"classrooms where

equality and justice are not just taught, but lived." Teaching Tolerance's goal is to help teachers prepare the next generation to live in our already diverse world and nation. This is a goal we all need to share and pursue with urgency.

Children of color will be the majority in 2019—just seven years from now. Whether we're prepared to celebrate our children of color or meet them with fear and hatred will shape their futures and America's future.

As frightening as the rise in hate groups is, the truth is that there are still millions more Americans who don't condone hatred or bigotry and never will. Their voices need to speak up and be heard—in our families, schools, faith congregations, communities, political and media life.

We need to have candid conversations about race, confront racial profiling, and promote racial healing right now. We must make ugly words designed to demean or disrespect any human being unacceptable in our presence and national life.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.