

The Rise of the Military and the Fall of Healthy Communities

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, represents in the final analysis, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists the hope of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war it is humanity hanging from the a cross of iron.”

-Dwight D. Eisenhower

In my column last month, I said:

The weapons of mass destruction may not be found in Iraq, but they can be found here at home.

I was referring to George Bush’s interest in spending money on the war in Iraq and Homeland Security instead of funding services provided by local government such as education, health care and aid to those most in need. The weapons of mass destruction are no longer resting quietly here at home; they are exploding in our communities.

On June 20th the Alameda County Board of Supervisors passed a budget that eliminated a \$112.6 million revenue shortfall for the next fiscal year. The final budget included a combination of service cuts and the elimination of 350 full time positions. Many of the eliminated positions are vacant, which means the County will not be able to hire essential staff, which will have an impact on our ability to deliver crucial services. Furthermore, approximately 50 people will loose their jobs.

The budget reductions for the 03/04 fiscal year will curtail the County’s ability to run job-training programs, provide prevention services for at risk youth, and provide medical services for those in need. The Alameda County Medical Center’s decision to close the Central and Fairmont medical clinics, which primarily serve the uninsured, is only one of the horrendous cost cutting strategies we are forced to employ as a result of the loss of funds from Washington D.C. and Sacramento.

The Federal government can’t see their way clear to send cities and counties any portion of the \$10 billion tax cut in the proposed federal budget; states will receive the entire allocation. An earlier version of the bill would have sent \$4 billion directly to cities and counties; money that could have been spent on education, health care, job training and other essential services. On the other end of the spectrum, the proposed military budget is hovering around \$376.3 billion, which does not include the cost of “Homeland Security.” The current bill for the war in Iraq is over \$75 billion and the current talk in the House of Representatives is about how to add \$1 billion to the \$30.4 billion proposed allocation for Homeland Security.

As the federal budget picture becomes clearer, we see the sweat of our laborers will continue to be ill spent and an increasing number of children will be left behind everyday. If the President's budget is adopted, the money spent on the war in Iraq, the military budget, and the Homeland Security budget will impact local programs in the following ways:

- Two hundred thousand fewer children will receive child care.
- Six billion dollars cut from the Title I education program from for disadvantaged students.
- A \$400 million cut to Twenty-First Century Community Learning Centers - eliminating after-school programs for 570,000 children.
- The elimination of the HOPE VI program, which pays for the rehabilitation or replacement of public housing.
- A \$35 million cut to supportive housing and other housing assistance for the elderly and disabled.

For those of you who don't agree with my claim that the weapons of mass destruction are exploding in our communities I suggest you read the Rise and Fall of Great Empires by the award winning Yale Professor, Paul Kennedy. One theme which runs throughout the book is that if a nation allocates too many resources to its military, their productive capacity will shrink compared to other countries; those countries have historically fallen from their position of world power.