

The World is Over-armed, and Peace is Under-funded

By Sierra Berry

"Dad, how do soldiers killing each other solve the world's problems?" Bill Watterson's question, asked by his inquisitive character Calvin, is one that many people have pondered. How is it possible to create peace and prosperity from something so destructive? The government's answer, with a whole lot of money. Money that should be used to educate, create opportunity for the undeserved and protect the environment. Compared to other countries the U.S. military's budget is staggering. According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the United States spends more money on military than the next ten highest defense budgets combined.

In 1960 Robert Frost wrote, "Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." An educated population looks for other solutions to problems instead of caving to our more base reaction to fight. By looking at history, learning to think logically and even developing the ability to think creatively we are arming our young people with the tools needed to solve problems peacefully. However, instead of investing in education we continue to cut funding to institutions of higher learning while spending record amounts on our military.

Well chosen welfare programs also help our society's ability to thrive. Programs that help empower people and give them the tools to lift themselves out of poverty are crucial. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "Beyond Vietnam Speech" in which he spoke these famous words, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom." When we keep an entire segment of our population in poverty while spending vast sums on the military, something is wrong. It is like saying the wall around the city is more important than the people inside. Of course a wall can be useful to protect oneself from predators; however, when it gets more attention than resolving the issues at hand there is a problem.

The military is preparing for future wars instead of preparing for the health of future generations. We regard land as a commodity. Wars are fought to take the resources we believe we are entitled to. Corporations have also declared war by mining, drilling and polluting the environment that we need for a sustainable future. This is happening all over the world. We are poisoning the countries we are trying to protect from other countries that are doing the same thing.

"How come we play war not peace?"

"Too few role models."

Calvin's father is right. There are a few role models, if we look, but they are not valued in our society. If we protest the influx of military spending and strive to become role models of peace, we will have a chance at a sustainable future, where the population is educated, prosperous and taking care of its resources. Most importantly, the next generation of children will have the opportunity to play peace, not war.