

It's Time to Put People Over the Pentagon

Rein in Pentagon Spending to Address Real Security Threats

The U.S. spends [more on its military than the next nine countries combined](#),¹ yet the Biden administration's request for fiscal year 2024 is a staggering \$886 billion. Congress should reject these increases to the Pentagon's already bloated budget and instead seek cuts to top-line spending. It is time that legislators reevaluate what threats their constituents truly face.

These last few years, we've seen security threats in the form of a historic pandemic, an expanding climate crisis, vast racial inequality, and a growing economic crisis. Yet instead of funding solutions to those problems, we continue to allocate over half the U.S. discretionary budget to the military. Meanwhile, these massive military budgets eat up funding for critical programs here at home, which takes an overwhelming toll on communities of color and marginalized groups. Now more than ever, we need spending to prioritize the needs of people, not the endless appetite of the defense industry.

Americans Want Money in Human Needs, Not the Pentagon

The American public is tired of seeing ever-growing Pentagon budgets coming at the expense of other essential programs. Recently, after coming near the financial edge, **a deal to raise the debt ceiling is coming with yet more discretionary budget cuts across all sectors except the Pentagon**. The Pentagon's share of discretionary spending was already outrageous, but having it get a pass as other departments receive huge cuts is not in alignment with what most Americans want.

- A [Data for Progress survey](#)² done in May 2022 showed that **63% of voters oppose a Congressional increase in military spending** above Biden's budget request. Additionally, 55% of voters report they are "somewhat concerned" or "very concerned" about the current proposal.
- The same survey showed that 83% of Democratic voters say Pentagon spending should not exceed current levels, versus 8% who say it should be higher. When informed about how much the military is poised to receive, **as compared to other agencies**, 51% of Republican voters say the military budget should not be raised further, versus 37% who think too little is spent.
- In January 2022, a [YouGov poll](#)³ found that 56% of U.S. adults support cutting Pentagon spending, and **reinvesting those funds** in domestic priorities like pandemic recovery, health care, and jobs.
- The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute [found similar stances](#)⁴ in a November 2021 survey. When Americans were asked what the highest priority for increased funding should be, **the military ranked last as a priority** at 11%, behind healthcare (23%), border security (17%), education (15%), and infrastructure (14%).

Misuse and Gouging: Pentagon Spending Has Been Wasteful for Years

The Defense Department has a [long](#),⁵ [well-known](#)⁶ [history](#)⁷ of [wasteful spending](#)⁸ — including the 2016 revelation that the Pentagon **buried evidence of \$125 billion of administrative waste**⁹ — and has failed every single one of its five audits since they became required. Republican House Oversight Committee members James Comer (R-KY) and Pete Sessions (R-TX) felt the waste was getting so egregious that they [recently opened a probe](#)¹⁰ into why "In November 2022, DOD [was] unable to account for sixty-one percent of its \$3.5 trillion in assets."

Additionally, the Pentagon has a record of [funding over budget weapons projects](#)¹¹ that don't deliver on their promises, the F-35 "combat" jet being the most recognized and coming in at a nearly [\\$1.5 trillion lifetime cost](#).¹² Last month, a [60 Minutes investigation](#)¹³ shed light on the widespread price gouging carried out by private

defense contractors who receive money from the Pentagon.

The most tragic part is that the massive amounts of taxpayer dollars going into the Pentagon do not return to the working class or feed the economy. In fact, **over half the taxpayer dollars funding the defense budget go to the same private contractors**¹⁴ who are doing the gouging, “many of whom are redundant, performing tasks that overlap or that can be done more cheaply by civilian government personnel.” Of the billions going to corporations like Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing, etc., much of the money goes to executives instead of the workers on the ground. In 2021 — a year in which a global pandemic was still raging — the CEOs of the top five weapons makers **received over \$104 million**¹⁵ in salary.

Furthermore, a **study carried out by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst**¹⁶ asserts that “spending on the military is a relatively poor source of job creation.” They found spending on clean energy, infrastructure, or education would create one and a half to two times as many jobs per dollar spent as Pentagon jobs do. Specifically, “\$1 billion in spending on the military will generate about 11,200 jobs. By contrast, the employment effects of spending in alternative areas will be...16,800 for the green economy, 17,200 for health care, and 26,700 for education. That is, investments in the green economy, health care and education will produce...more jobs than if the same amount of money were spent by the Pentagon.”

Steps Members of Congress Can Take

- **In the House, cosponsor H.R.1134, the *People Over Pentagon Act of 2023*, introduced by Reps. Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Mark Pocan (D-WI) to cut \$100 billion from the 2024 Pentagon budget excluding personnel and the Defense Health program. In the Senate, introduce and support a similar effort. **Vote yes if provisions of the bill are offered as NDAA amendments** that would cut the topline budget.**
- **Vote no on appropriations bills or continuing resolutions that would increase Pentagon spending.**
- **Vote no on any NDAA or Defense Appropriations bill that does not cut the Pentagon’s topline budget.**
- **Cosponsor S.1025 or H.R.1801, the *SAFEGUARD Act*, introduced by Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY) to prevent the United States from contributing to or facilitating future human rights abuses by bolstering Congressional review of arms sales. **Vote yes if provisions of the bill are offered as NDAA amendments** that would enhance Congressional review of arms exports.**
- **Cosponsor S.2049 or H.R.4409, introduced by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA) to prevent price gouging at the Department of Defense.**

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7 Paltrow, Scot J., *Special Report: The Pentagon’s doctored ledgers conceal epic waste*, Reuters, November 18, 2013

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9 Whitlock, Craig and Bob Woodward, *Pentagon buries evidence of \$125 billion in bureaucratic waste*, The Washington Post, December 5, 2016

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11 Gladhill, Julia, *Ending the Pentagon’s sunken cost, buried treasure excuses*, Responsible Statecraft, April 24, 2023

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15 Hartung, William, *Pentagon Profiteers: Executive Compensation In The Arms Industry*, Forbes, December 12, 2022

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