

Mayors Tell Congress: Bring War Dollars Home

By [Lisa Savage](#)

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BALTIMORE, June 20 – Mayors from around the world met in Baltimore this week to set public policy for the billions of people living in big cities, depending on municipal services to stay safe. While Congress considered allocating another \$118 billion to conduct wars next year – and President Obama absurdly maintained that the costly bombing of Libya is not an act of war, and thus not subject to Congressional oversight – mayors listened to the people.

Following a lively debate about adding stronger language supporting troops and their families, and adding President Obama as a recipient, mayors voted in their June 20 plenary session to call on the federal government to stop funding wars, and bring the money home.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors' Resolution Number 59 was only a twinkle in the eye two years ago when a coalition of citizens alarmed at endless wars and catastrophic budget shortfalls coined the slogan "Bring Our War Dollars Home" at activist Sally Breen's kitchen table in Winthrop, Maine. That state's campaign took off on Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 2010, and soon spread nationally with adoption by the women-led peace group CODEPINK. Locations across Maine soon adopted war dollars home resolutions, including Deer Isle, Portland, and School Administrative District #74, followed by Northampton and Amherst, Massachusetts and, most recently, by Hartford, Connecticut.

Meanwhile, Congress continued to pass war funding supplemental bills, but without the support of Maine's two representatives in the House. Rep. Mike Michaud (D-2nd) and Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-1st) defied Democrat party leadership to repeatedly vote no on the measures. Pingree began speaking out in Congress and in the press about the need to listen to her constituents' demands to end the wars as Maine's economy unraveled, and local budgets for education, health care, housing and job training were slashed.

In March CODEPINK brought on board national campaign manager C.J. Minster, who wrote the text of the mayors' resolution at another kitchen table, that of co-founder Medea Benjamin. The idea to bring a resolution to the annual conference of mayors had been proposed to co-founder Jodie Evans by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the incoming president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

The conference first convened in 1932, as big city mayors came together in Detroit to consider what could be done to pull their troubled cities out of the depths of the Great Depression. The New Deal incorporated many of their ideas, and mayors have met annually ever since.

"The United States Conference of Mayors calls on the U.S. Congress to bring these war dollars home to meet vital human needs, promote job creation, rebuild our infrastructure, aid municipal and state governments, and develop a new economy based upon renewable,

sustainable energy," the resolution reads, citing the \$126 billion a year cost of U.S. wars and the deaths of more than 6,000 troops.

Mayor Joanne Twomey of Biddeford, Maine spoke out about the current recession last April when her city council was forced to drastically reduce spending on K-12 education. At a rally at the State House in Augusta, Maine Public Radio reported: "As mayor of the city of Biddeford - we are cutting \$1.6 million in our education budget, and last week I had had it - I'm starting to say it from the podium," said Twomey. "It's my responsibility as mayor of the city of Biddeford to start saying if our priorities were straight, if we could bring these war dollars home, I wouldn't have to be doing this, and neither would the Biddeford school board."

Kitty Piercy, Mayor of Eugene, Oregon, took the lead by introducing Resolution 59 stating: "Mayors call on our country to begin the journey of turning war dollars back into peace dollars, of bringing our loved ones home and of focusing our national resources on building security and prosperity here at home. Our children and families long for and call for a real investment in the future of America. It is past due."

Piercy was joined in supporting the measure by mayors from Worcester, Hartford, Baltimore, and a score of other cities. States represented on the endorsement list included Virginia, Florida, Ohio, New York, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Wisconsin. The resolution flew through the Metro Economies Committee on the opening day of the mayors' conference, and the news was picked up by media outlets all over the world. On Sunday, June 19, Mayor Villaraigosa spoke in favor of the resolution on television current affairs program Meet The Press - and the rest is history.

As for who will enforce the non-binding resolution, that is up to the people. Grassroots pressure to end funding for wars eventually produced an end to U.S. military presence in Vietnam, presaged by the last time the mayors considered a war dollars home resolution in 1971. Mayors may very well be closer to the will of the people than are senators or presidents. The framers of our Constitution seemed to recognize this when they put the power of the purse in the hands of the branch of government supposed to be closest to the people, the House of Representatives.

Immense profits by weapons manufacturers - and the jobs that depend upon war funding - are compelling reasons for wars with vague goals and shifting targets to continue indefinitely. Corporations spend millions lobbying Congress while contriving to pay no income taxes. Many citizens are questioning who the federal government really represents.

President Obama said while campaigning that he was not against all wars, just stupid wars. Bankrupting the country to maintain 800+ military bases abroad, and drop bombs costing \$1 million apiece - the equivalent of 25 teachers' annual salaries - could be the definition of stupid in the 21st Century. Fellow Democrat Rep. John Garamendi of California warned this week, "If the president doesn't move...he will face a revolution in Congress...It's coming to that."

If the President has forgotten that Afghanistan is called "the graveyard of empires," the people have not. Their mayors now join the chorus calling on the federal government to end endless wars, and bring the war dollars home.

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