

Testimony before Massachusetts Legislature's
Joint Committee on Veterans' and Federal Affairs

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Thank you, committee members, for allowing me to join you today to comment on the Budget for All Resolution that is currently before you. I hold a PhD in economics from Harvard and am a Professor of South Asian History and Economic History at Boston College. In 2012 co-authored with Heidi Garret-Peltier, who has testified earlier today, a study entitled "Military Spending and Jobs in Massachusetts," which shows that shifting federal dollars that come into the state from military to other areas (education, environment, healthcare, etc.) creates more jobs for Massachusetts. The Budget for All Resolution rests, in part, on this compelling logic: that job creation is better fostered by spending our federal moneys on non-military needs. I submit a copy of that report for the consideration of the committee.

I am here today to address another issue, however, and that is the future of manufacturing jobs in Massachusetts. It is undeniable that military spending supports manufacturing jobs in our state, ranging from the GE plant in Lynn to Raytheon and other factories scattered around the state. The future of these military dollars is in jeopardy, even leaving aside the impact of the Budget for All campaign. The sequestration that was enacted last year has seen a reduction in military spending. The dramatic run up in the Pentagon budget of the Bush years, which has continued under President Obama, appears to have peaked and the future is likely to see lower levels of federal support for the Massachusetts economy in the shape of Pentagon spending.

Others will testify today on the other options that exist for workers in military manufacturing jobs. These same plants and these same workers have the ability to turn their machines and their skills to making wind turbines, refrigerators, and countless other goods for a peace economy. Nevertheless, the process of transition is unlikely to be a smooth one and there will no doubt be bumps on the road and dislocation. The state of Massachusetts, however, can make the transition an easier one if it plans and uses the resources of the government.

Such forward thinking was exercised in our neighboring state, Connecticut. Earlier this year the Connecticut state legislature passed a bill entitled "An Act Concerning the Commission on Connecticut's Future." The bill calls for the creation of a commission consisting of leaders from industry, labor, and education to create a plan for the renewal of manufacturing in the state, with some attention paid to the conversion of military facilities to peaceful and green purposes. An extraordinary coalition of labor, peace and manufacturing groups supported this bill with the awareness that business as usual cannot continue. I submit a copy of this act for the consideration of the committee.

The Budget for All is an important first step, but its natural complement is a commission, or some other body that may be better suited to the political system in Massachusetts, to explore how our manufacturing base may be rebuilt, but this time along more peaceful as well as more environmentally sustainable lines. Our state and its residents deserve no less. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity today.