POWER OF THE PURSE
Women Legislators for a Principled Budget

WOMEN LEGISLATORS' LOBBY

WAND
WOMEN'S ACTION FOR NEW DIRECTIONS

WiLL
WOMEN LEGISLATORS' LOBBY
To all U.S. Senators and Representatives:

As women legislators, we represent millions of people in diverse communities across the country. We have worked frequently with our partners in Congress to create policies and programs that reflect our shared responsibility to strengthen America. As you work on upcoming appropriations decisions—we ask that you consider the profound impact it will have on our ability to serve our constituents and especially the impact this proposal would have on women.

As elected officials, we are using our collective voice to urge you to not accept drastic cuts to domestic programs without first considering cuts to our bloated Pentagon budget. All budgets are a statement of values, and this budget shows us the President values big corporations, defense contractors who profit from war, and making life easier for his rich friends. We, however, value investments in education, HHS, and HUD—programs that Trump seeks to cut to continue in wasteful forever wars. The strength of our nation is not measured by the countless military missions we fight overseas but in the fights elected officials wage to invest in our constituents.

The glaring emphasis on making cuts to nondefense discretionary spending does not align with pressing state priorities. Cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services impact all regions—from urban centers to rural areas. Chronic illnesses cost the United States approximately $5,300 per person per year, attributing to 90 percent of the country’s health expenditures. Rather than cutting health funds, the President’s budget should be putting more money into safety-net hospitals, telemedicine efforts, and initiatives aimed at preventative care. Over 700 women die every year from pregnancy-related complications, two-thirds of which are preventable. If the President’s aim is to secure our nation, securing access to healthcare is an important step in that direction.

Since 2015, the share of federal spending on K-12 education has dropped by 12 percent. In particular, funding for school construction has stalled, while nearly half of school buildings nationwide are over 50 years old. Crumbling school structures, busted ventilation systems, and old pipes affect how children learn. Providing more funding for school construction projects is a step towards closing the education gap.

The cost of state response to natural disaster and mitigation has increased for the third straight decade, putting a squeeze on state funds when we are looking to maintain rainy day funds and public pensions. Pre-disaster efforts provide not only savings to states but also to the federal government. We are calling on Congress to provide that funding by redirecting money that would otherwise go to building new nuclear weapons (we hope to never use), retiring old planes (that are perfectly fine), and staying in endless wars (we were supposed to be done fighting).

The administration argues that the proposed budget will further strengthen and protect the nation. However, the Overseas Contingency Operations fund remains one of Washington’s obvious slush funds where resources are squirreled away under the guise of emergency funding for combat. While the Department of Defense seeks to hoard funds, that the audit shows the Pentagon cannot even account for, money for SNAP, CHIP, and other sorely needed domestic programs are on the chopping block. Families, especially those with a single breadwinner will bear the brunt of those cuts.

Across the country, women sit down at the kitchen table every day to make tough choices as they craft their family’s budget and put their hard-earned money where it makes the most sense. This budget proposal does not honor the sacrifices these families make. Instead it draws us deeper and deeper into perpetual war under the guise of national security. The goal of national security cannot be fully met without ensuring that the 372 million people living in the U.S. are secure in their home and health.

Sincerely,
Power of the Purse: Women Legislators for a Principled Budget

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Dear Colleague:

Please join me in signing this letter to Members of Congress regarding the FY21 federal budget. As a State Director for WiLL, the Women Legislators’ Lobby, I want to urge Congress and the President to adopt a federal budget that reflects the values of the American people.

Over 50% of our discretionary budget – the budget Congress debates and votes on every year – goes to the Pentagon. When we spend huge amounts on the Pentagon, the rest of the budget feels the squeeze. Economists at Brown University’s Costs of War Project found that by spending $260 billion on war-related expenses over the past 19 years, we have lost the ability to create millions of jobs in the U.S.

The President’s FY21 budget request includes major cuts across the board to already critically underfunded departments such as Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, the Environmental Protection Agency, Education and others. Funding for these programs could be found by redirecting a portion of Pentagon spending (Department of Defense plus the nuclear weapons portion of the Department of Energy) in this budget.

We are spending far more than what is needed to keep our nation safe and secure. We also need to keep America economically strong and competitive. As this letter states, “The goal of national security cannot be fully met without ensuring that the 372 million people living in the U.S. are secure in their home and health.”

In light of these facts, it is disturbing that the FY21 budget request continues to beef up the Pentagon budget while it cuts almost every other department in the discretionary budget.

As state legislators, we should take action and respond quickly to the President’s FY21 budget resolution before Congress takes action. Join me by signing on to the attached letters to Members of Congress by Friday, March 13!

Warm regards,

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“Power of the Purse: Women Legislators for a Principled Budget” conveys strong support for a federal budget that invests in our states and communities. It urges Congress to reject President Trump's Fiscal Year 2021 budget which proposes increasing funding to the Pentagon, nuclear weapons, and to overseas military operations at the cost of departments and programs that promote economic stability and growth. WiLL rejects the proposed budget for the following reasons:

- It’s unsustainable. Since 1998 the Department of Defense, nuclear weapons, and war spending have received well over half of the discretionary spending that Congress appropriates each year. The United States already spends more on the military than the next seven countries spends on the military combined-- most of whom are allies and contribute to our collective defense.

- Dollars sent to the Pentagon are starving domestic investment. The dollars that fund crucial investments in programs like Head Start, food safety, veterans’ benefits, environmental protection, repairing roads and bridges and much more are being cut to stay within mandatory budget caps. Roughly one third of these dollars flow into the states to fund jobs for teachers, police officers, and firefighters.

- It provides increased spending to the Pentagon that isn’t based on common sense or need. Last year the Pentagon completed--but failed--its first-ever audit. Last year the Pentagon had so much money left over that in an end-of-year use-it-or-lose-it-spree it spent $4.6 million on crab and lobster and $9,000 on a single chair.

- It’s self-defeating. We cannot afford another war on the nation’s credit card. With the federal debt hitting a record high of $23 trillion, government spending should reflect efforts to save costs--not prepare for more unnecessary wars. Right now the federal government should be looking to establish stability by investing in the State Department and USAID, not more wasteful F-35s and more tactical nuclear Weapons.

- It will stymie economic growth and shift costs to the states. By diverting domestic programs to pay for a $750 billion defense budget that is larger than President Reagan’s at the height of the Cold War—we would be sacrificing opportunities for sustainable economic growth. Public dollars invested in clean energy, health care, and education create significantly more jobs--in some cases as many as double the jobs--in our local economies when compared to investing an equivalent amount in the military Sector.