

# Office of the Mayor

Matthew T. Ryan

## Mayor Ryan on the Cost of War Project

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City Hall, Binghamton, NY

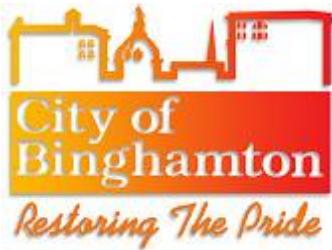
First of all, thank you to the Broome County Cost of War Project for raising the funds for this display unit. And thank you to the National Priorities Project, which for over 25 years has gathered the information that allows all citizens to better understand how our government spends our precious tax dollars.

I urge all our citizens to visit the National Priorities Project website and look at what they call the trade offs for each locality around our country. For instance, they have calculated what services we could provide for our citizens in Binghamton if we had access to the almost \$140 million the taxpayers of Binghamton have paid toward the cost of our two current wars.

On January 17, 1961, in Republican President Eisenhower's Farewell Address to the nation, this former five-star General, who was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe during World War II, warned against the build-up of the defense industry in the United States. His grave concern was that the economic drive for building weapons and all sorts of armaments would eventually, as blogger and Professor Chad Gesser describes, "become integrated into our culture. He was gravely concerned that this buildup would affect the attitudes and values of our culture and our institutions. He was worried that our society would then, whether intentionally or unintentionally, seek to justify that establishment to the world." President Eisenhower's concerns are now our reality as we witness the military industrial complex he spoke of.

We live in a country where 62% of our discretionary spending is for the military. This Cost of War calculator, maintained by the National Priorities Project, is based on U.S. Congress appropriations and is does not even include future medical or psychological care for soldiers and veterans wounded in the war. I don't know what the projected future medical costs are for the two wars we are waging now, but it has been calculated that for the first Gulf War in 1991, which lasted only a few days, the residual medical costs are \$8 billion a year. Just imagine these costs for the now nine-year old war in Afghanistan and the seven-year old war in Iraq. Incidentally, the Afghanistan war is the longest war the United States has ever engaged in.

I am not here today trying to be a war strategist. I am not here to second guess the current administration who has inherited these two wars and I believe is trying to conduct these wars in a way that they will finally end. God knows they have a very difficult task at hand, because once wars are waged, they completely change the geopolitical landscape, and the consequences of these changes



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are complex and affect many civilian lives. I do not envy the tough and complex choices that our great Congressman Maurice Hinchey will have to make as these wars continue.

I am here today to say that dedicating 62% of our discretionary spending to the military is unsustainable. I am here today to hopefully lend a small voice to an ever-increasing chorus of mayors—that includes Richard Daley of Chicago and Thomas Menino of Boston—who are making the connection between our lack of ability, as the chief executives of our cities, to honor our responsibility to keep our infrastructure safe and well-maintained. We are all making the connection that it is now impossible to provide the essential services that our citizens expect and deserve if we continue to spend so many of our tax dollars on one part of government, our military. And by the way, 51% of all the world's military spending is done by the United States.

This display, which will be operational next week, is meant to be informative and spark a debate on our priorities as a nation. And unfortunately we need “gimmicks” like this, as one of my colleagues has called this project, to stimulate the dialogue that should be constant whenever we are at war. Those who wage war learned their lessons well from Vietnam, and they have been bound and determined to keep the consequences of war from the public. Vietnam was coined the “Living Room War,” because each and every evening our citizens were shown the human costs of war on their T.V. screens. There were teach-ins and debates that educated the public. Sadly, most of our mainstream media have capitulated to the pressure to not show these human costs of war anymore.

But the National Priorities Project has shown the astronomical amounts of money we spend on our current wars, and how this correlates to the lack of important services in our communities. Yes, I am a small city mayor and I would suggest that we are uniquely positioned to understand the consequences of misguided priorities. Because the smaller the budget, the less room for minimizing the impacts of inadequate revenues.

I am here today to tell you that I am sick and tired of telling the three departments that comprise 90% of our City budget—police, fire and public works—that they have to do with less, and I see no end in sight to this scenario unless we change our national priorities. I fear for the future of our city and all the cities, towns and villages that will struggle to provide essential services to their citizens unless we change our national priorities.

You know I could go on and on here, but I hope you get the point. Today I pray that this simple gesture will help stimulate the kind of dialogue that must emerge across our country as we struggle to live up to the potential of our democracy.