Friends,

We have a long history of demanding fair taxes here in Boston. I think there was a Tea Party not far from here, and for years people have been out on Tax Day urging that our tax dollars go for what Martin Luther King described as social uplift, not for the endless wars that make our country the world’s greatest purveyor of violence. It was only a few years ago that some of the people who organized today’s protest organized the statewide Budget for All referendum. By a 3 to 1 margin, voters put our elected representatives on notice that we want to protect essential social services and invest in essential infrastructure – creating good jobs along the way. And paying for these by cutting the Pentagon’s massively inflated budget and increasing taxes on the richest 2%.

In recent years, these protests have been associated with the Global Days of Action on Military Spending, a global initiative of the International Peace Bureau which takes place between Tax Day here in the United States and the May 9 release of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s report on global military spending, As this year’s GDAMS call stated military spending “accounts for 2.3% of global GDP [more than 4% here in the United States.] and diverts resources to the military that are crucial to achieve sustainable human development and the enjoyment of economic and social rights” as enshrined in the United Nations Charter. People in other countries actually do take the U.N. charter seriously.

People are taking action across the United States in at least 25 cities, as well as in Europe, Asia and Africa to reduce the world’s catastrophic $1.7 trillion in annual military spending, to press for peace, and to move the money from war fighting and war preparations to addressing urgent human needs.
Our efforts have their impact. U.N. Secretary General Guterres has echoed our call, urging the international community to “rethink” unconstrained military spending by prioritizing investment that generates growth and opportunity for communities. Of course, with the United States military budget the size of the world’s next eight greatest military spenders – combined and now at war in seven countries, With all of this, and now with the U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty and Trump calling for new and very dangerous nuclear arms race, we have special responsibilities.

Of necessity, our protests here in the U.S. focus on the Trump budget, the $1.7 trillion to be spent in the coming years for a new generation of omnicidal nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. We oppose plans to deploy cruise missiles in Poland, Taiwan, Japan and other European and Asia-Pacific nations. We don’t want our tax dollars going to Raytheon’s missiles and bombs that with Trump’s veto yesterday will continue the Saudi/US savaging of Yemen. And, just as years ago we blocked funding for the Vietnam War, it’s time to stop the funding for the murderous and endless wars from Afghanistan and Syria to Africa and the Philippines. The Bible and our instincts urge us to choose life, and we do!

It’s about more than the money and the wars. Here in the United States our GDAMS campaigning is also democracy, equality and intersectional organizing. The military-industrial complex and the plutocrats have misruled our nation, subverted democracy, and truncated people’s hopes and possibilities. Our demonstrations are reaffirmations of our commitments to constitutional democracy, to peace, to economic and social equality and to recreating the sustainable environment that is the foundation of all life.
Years ago, Rev. Ulysses Torres, a former Chilean political prisoner who had been tortured by the Pinochet dictatorship was asked, “When do you know if you have a military government?” His answer: “Look at your national budget.”

The Trump budget envisions an increase of the Pentagon’s budget to $750 billion – including a massive increase in the OCO (“Overseas Contingencies Operations”) slush fund. Between Trump’s increases and slashing commitments to the Environmental Protection Agency, food assistance, education and housing, 63% of the national budget will be devoted to the Pentagon and militarization. That’s not only money for the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Trump’s new Space Force. It also includes billions for nuclear weapons, roughly $80 billion for the so-called intelligence community’s black budget, for Veterans of past wars and their benefits which, not coincidentally, help to prepare the nation for future wars. It includes billions to militarize our borders, and for the militarization of police departments across the country as we saw in the over the top response to the Marathon bombing six years ago. I can say something about that because I live just five houses away from where Tsarnaev was captured.

I want to celebrate that Representative Pressley has joined us. She distinguished herself during her election campaign with a platform calling for a 25% cut in military spending. I hope she will hold to that commitment and vote accordingly, that she will press the Progressive Caucus to make deep cuts to the Pentagon with the People’s Budget, and that she’ll help us to raise up the Poor People’s Campaign’s Moral Budget when it is issued in June.

Would that more of Rep. Pressley’s Democratic colleagues shared her stated commitment. Like an addict reaching for the next hit, too many in Congress – including some Massachusetts Democrats - embrace their roles as hostages to what President
Eisenhower termed the military-industrial-Congressional complex. It’s no secret that the Daddy Warbucks of our era - Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics and the other major merchants of death have gamed the system. They disperse weapons production contracts for each new major weapons system to a majority of Congressional districts, to buy the votes they need to win Congressional authorizations. Thinking primarily about their next election campaigns, but not how this military spending distorts our economy, our values, our society, and who and how they are likely to kill, most members of Congress belly up for a share of the murderous pie. Given how these weapons have been used, how they threaten human survival, and how this system undermines democracy and our real security, it qualifies as what Hannah Arendt termed the banality of evil.

Friends, we’re told that we don’t have the money for the Green New Deal or for health care for all. Nonsense! The Pentagon budget is ten times larger that Russia’s! Instead of expanding NATO to Russia’s borders and preparing for war with China in the competition for hegemony over the South China Sea, we should be pursuing Common Security diplomacy, like the negotiations that gave us the INF Treaty and played a major role in bringing the Cold War to an end. We should be investing in what even a number of leading military figures understand is most essential for our national security: financing economic, social and infrastructure development here in the United States.

I’ve been never a fan of Republican President Eisenhower. But he was dead on when he began his presidency with economic revitalization as his top priority. He taught that "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed ...." And, when he left office, he warned that "we must guard against the
acquisition of unwarranted influence ... by the military industrial complex" whose "total influence - economic, political and even spiritual - is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government."

Sixty years on, that complex has become a state within a state, undermining our real security.

Instead of imitating the “good Germans” of the Nazi era, by turning our heads away in silence or kowtowing to Daddy Warbucks, we need to stand up and press our political leaders to say no to our military-industrial-plutocratic state as we have done with “Bridges Not Bombs” bill recently introduced into the state legislature.

Massachusetts has long been in the lead, with our successful Budget for All referendum, the work of the National Priorities Project out in Northampton, and the University of Massachusetts study, "Military Spending and Jobs in Massachusetts" that demonstrated that investment in real job creation – education, housing and infrastructure, not more nuclear weapons, missiles and outdated fighter aircraft, creates more jobs, more economic prosperity, and ultimately more security.

Friends, over the decades the people of Massachusetts have sent our representatives to Congress to oppose slavery, to lead the 1980s nuclear weapons freeze campaign, and to defend our most essential rights. In this tradition that – even as it means taking risks, like the Poor Peoples campaigners who were arrested in the State House last spring – we need to demand that the people we send to Washington work to Move the money from the military to the people. Let the Pentagon hold a bake sale, while we build the country we, our children and grandchildren need. We all deserve real security.

Thanks for coming out this evening. And keep on keepin’ on!
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