

Charlottesville, Va., City Council Passes Resolution Opposing War on Iran

By David Swanson

<http://warisacrime.org/content/charlottesville-va-city-council-passes-resolution-opposing-war-iran>

The City Council of Charlottesville, Virginia, home of Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and the University of Virginia, passed on Tuesday evening, January 17, 2012, a resolution believed to be a first in the country, opposing the launching of a war on Iran, as well as calling for an end to current ground and drone wars engaged in by the United States and urging Congress and the President of the United States to significantly reduce military spending. Below is the text of the resolution, followed by an account of how it came to be. As other towns and cities have been inquiring about how they can do the same, this may prove helpful.

RESOLUTION

Calling on Congress and the President to Redirect Military Spending to Domestic Priorities

WHEREAS, the severity of the ongoing economic crisis has created budget shortfalls at all levels of government and requires us to re-examine our national spending priorities; and
WHEREAS, every dollar spent on the military produces fewer jobs than spending the same dollar on education, healthcare, clean energy, or even tax cuts for household consumption; and
WHEREAS, U.S. military spending has approximately doubled in the past decade, in real dollars and as a percentage of federal discretionary spending, and well over half of federal discretionary spending is now spent on the military, and we are spending more money on the military now than during the Cold War, the Vietnam War, or the Korean War; and
WHEREAS, the U.S. military budget could be cut by 80% and remain the largest in the world; and

WHEREAS, the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform proposed major reductions in military spending in both its Co-Chairs' proposal in November 2010 and its final report in December 2010; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, with the support of Charlottesville's then Mayor Dave Norris, passed a resolution in June 2011 calling on Congress to redirect spending to domestic priorities; and

WHEREAS, the people of the United States, in numerous opinion polls, favor redirecting spending to domestic priorities and withdrawing the U.S. military from Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, the United States has armed forces stationed at approximately 1,000 foreign bases in approximately 150 foreign countries; and

WHEREAS, the United States is the wealthiest nation on earth but trails many other nations in life expectancy, infant mortality, education level, housing, and environmental sustainability, as well as non-military aid to foreign nations;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City Council of Charlottesville, Virginia, calls on the U.S. Congress and the U.S. President to end foreign ground and drone wars, refrain from entering new military ventures in Iran, and reduce base military spending in order to meet vital human needs, promote job creation, re-train and re-employ those losing jobs in the process of conversion to non-military industries, rebuild our infrastructure, aid municipal and state governments, and develop a new economy based upon renewable, sustainable energy.

The story behind this resolution begins with a conference held in September, 2011, in Charlottesville at which experts from around the country presented their views on the growth of the Military Industrial Complex. The proceedings of that conference were published as a book on Martin Luther King Day, the day prior to passage of the resolution. They can be found at <http://MIC50.org>

The resolution was passed on the 51st anniversary of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's warning of the dangers of the Military Industrial Complex.

Two city council members in September attended the conference, Dave Norris and Kristin Szakos. A candidate for city council who was elected in November also attended, Dede Smith. Those three members were well informed, understood the issues, understood the public's position, and had enough backbone to face controversy. Norris had already been an early supporter of a resolution on military spending passed in 2011 by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. The resolution that came out of the conference and which is included in the book is almost identical to what is above. It does not, however, include mention of Iran. The resolution presented to the new City Council at its first public meeting on January 3, 2012, is posted on the website of the longstanding peace organization in Charlottesville, the Charlottesville Center for Peace and Justice: <http://www.charlottesvillepeace.org/node/2630>

At that meeting, Norris proposed adding in the words about Iran. A report on the meeting and video are posted here: <http://www.charlottesvillepeace.org/node/2657>

As you'll see at the link, we had several members of the public speak in support of the resolution and we presented a petition with hundreds of additional signatures. At that time, our three reliable council members publicly expressed support, but one of them suggested changes should be made. A fourth, Satyendra Huja, also expressed weak support, while the fifth, Kathy Galvin remained silent.

By January 12th, the City Council had made public its amended version, the only significant change being the addition of the language on Iran.

The council was scheduled to vote at its January 17th meeting, and on the morning of the 17th made public a proposal from Galvin to radically revise the resolution, omitting any reference to war on Iran or to the existence of both ground and drone wars, claiming the military is protecting our rights despite the erosion of our rights facilitated by war, inaccurately describing the powers the Constitution gives the President, expressing support for the office of the President less than a month after the power to imprison people without trial was made a part of that office, asking the President and Congress to "continue" working to redirect military spending to domestic priorities which falsely implied that such work was already underway, eliminating a paragraph pointing to the tradeoffs our wealthy nation makes in comparison with other countries by funding the military so heavily, and claiming that reducing military spending might endanger the safety of troops.

We immediately privately and publicly urged our three most reliable city council members to recognize this as unacceptable and to stand strong for the previous version of the resolution. See these statements: <http://www.charlottesvillepeace.org/node/2672> and <http://www.charlottesvillepeace.org/node/2673>

The three original supporters, Norris, Smith, and Szakos told us they agreed.

Come time for the meeting, we packed the room. We also had enough people arrive early and sign up to speak that we dominated the public speaking period at the start of the meeting. And the people who spoke really outdid themselves. We also presented the council with a peace lily.

The video will soon be posted here:

http://charlottesville.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=2

We had so packed the room that some people had to stand. To accommodate us, the council changed the agenda and addressed the resolution first. Galvin made her proposals. Norris spoke for the strong resolution. Smith did the same. And when Szakos did the same we'd won. With three voting in favor of the stronger resolution, Huja joined them and Galvin abstained, while everyone else applauded.

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