

**Testimony before New York City Council Committee on State and Federal Legislation
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Honored Members of the New York City Council,

My name is G. Simon Harak. I am the Anti-Militarism Coordinator of the War Resisters League, the oldest secular peace group in the United States. I am also a Jesuit priest. And even though – like most Jesuit priests – I have a bunch of academic degrees, I have to confess that the mysteries of mathematics have always escaped me. Still, when I was a professor teaching the ethics of peace and war at the university, I had to try to explain to my students how much money the US government was spending on the military.

So I went to a Jesuit mathematician friend of mine, and he explained it to me this way:

What's the difference between a million and a billion?

If we were here in this council room, talking about these important matters for one million seconds, how long would we be here?

About eleven days.

If we were here discussing these matters for one billion seconds, how long would we be here?

About thirty-one *years*. In other words, to spend a billion dollars, you would have to spend a dollar a second, every second for thirty-one years.

I know you're all aware of this, dealing as you do with the nearly \$50 billion New York City annual budget, but to me the difference is astonishing. One little letter – “m” to “b.” The difference between eleven days and thirty-one years.

But of course knowing this difference is not enough. This year, the proposed Pentagon budget is not one billion – thirty-one years, not 100 billion – three thousand, one hundred years, but about **419 billion dollars** – for a **single year**.

And that's not all. If we get into a war, that costs extra. Nearly **\$100 billion** in supplemental military spending **each year** for the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That's something like paying \$400,000 a year for car insurance, and then when you get into an accident, you have to pay for that, too.

So now, at least **\$500 billion a year** on the military. How can we conceive of that much money? It works out to be about \$16,000 – *a second*. Every second, every hour, every day, all year long. \$16,000 a second spent on – let's face it – killing people, spent on destroying the earth, spent on

consuming our dwindling and imperiled environmental resources.

And that's the point. As you know, every budget is a moral document. Where and how we allocate our money shows in concrete terms where our values are, shows right there on the tally sheet where we wish to spend – or squander – our time, our talents, our treasure. That's why I'm coming to you today not as a poor mathematician, but as pretty well educated ethicist and hopefully, as a principled man. There are so many of us who want a **Peace Tax Fund**, who wish to spend our tax money not on Halliburton but on housing, not on mass killing but on mass transit, not on bombing hospitals but on building them.

When I was living in the Midwest, I heard some Chicago comedians referring to Chicago as “the Second City.” That's because everyone recognized New York as the First City. One day, a while ago, New York became the first city in our nation to suffer the horror what former CIA operative Chalmers Johnson called the “blowback” of our national government's misguided and impossibly militarized foreign policy. But we New Yorkers never lost our head – or our heart. Let New York now be the first city in the nation, through this Council's endorsement of Resolution 367, to support the Peace Tax Fund, to speak out to stanch the flow of blood and money into warmaking, and to pursue instead the works of justice that lead to peace.

Peace and Justice,

G. Simon Harak
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