

By: Anita Dancs

As tax day approaches and the Iraq war rages on, each one of us should think about where our money is going.

The House and Senate, despite the rhetoric, recently voted for more war funding, raising the total bill for the Iraq war to nearly half a trillion dollars.

That's a whole lot of zeroes.

That money comes from you and me. But right now, the war is being paid for with borrowed money, which racks up interest, which then is paid by you and me -- and then our kids, and then their kids.

Out of every federal income tax dollar that we will pay come tax day April 17, nearly half -- or 46 cents -- will go for the military and for interest payments on the national debt. Of that, 27 cents will go to the military and 19 cents will go to interest payments.

Each year the Iraq war continues, we will need to throw another \$100 billion-plus just to fund operations. Already for next fiscal year, the Bush administration is seeking \$142 billion more to fund the war. Health care and disability payments for the many veterans who have, or will have, lifetime disabling wounds will run into the hundreds of billions of dollars.

So what's left to pay for?

Higher education gets two and a half cents of every tax dollar.

Natural resources and the environment get a little more than one cent.

Housing gets two cents.

It's all small potatoes except for health care, which eats up 21 cents of every dollar, even though 46 million Americans continue to live without health insurance. Meanwhile, for what the government has spent so far on the Iraq War, we could have granted four-year scholarships (tuition and fees) to a public university for all of this year's graduating seniors.

And we could have built 1 million affordable housing units.

And we could have tripled the federal commitment to renewable energy and energy conservation.

And provided health care coverage for all uninsured children since the Iraq war began.

And there would still be enough money left over to cut this year's budget deficit in half.

For all the opportunity costs of the war, the most ironic cost is to our national security. The war has alienated both enemies and allies alike. To have true security in this globalized world, we must work hand in hand with our allies to fight our enemies.

Instead, we have strained most of those relationships and encouraged a backlash against us. The ranks of those willing to commit violence against us have grown. Every year on tax day, we stare our federal priorities in the face.

This time around we are in the uncomfortable position of having the consequences of a failed war

stare back at us.

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