

VETERANS FOR PEACE, SHEBOYGAN

March 22, 2014

WHAT TO TITLE THESE WHEN USED AS HANDOUTS??

VETERAN SUICIDE

In the United States every year, 30,000 to 32,000 people die by their own hand. 20% of these deaths are veterans. That amounts to 18 veterans taking their own lives every single day and 950 suicide attempts by veterans every month. Risk factors for suicide that veterans face include multiple and long deployments to hostile environments; exposure to extreme stress, death, and combat; military sexual trauma; and service-related injuries. Perhaps the most significant risk factor is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD can interfere with veterans being able to form and maintain supportive relationships and employment, compounding the problem of suicide. 11-20% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffer from PTSD. 30% of Vietnam veterans do. It is important to remember that as the United States pulls back from its most recent ground wars in the Middle East that they're not over back home and won't be for decades.

DRONES

The post-9/11 era has seen a rise in the use of drones as killing machines. The first lethal drone strike occurred in 2002 and the use of the technology has been embraced and increased under the Obama administration. The United States operates drones in Afghanistan, but also in countries where we have no declared war, such as Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia. Only 2% of those killed represent high level targets. According to the Brookings Institution, for every mid level or high level al Qaeda or Taliban leader killed, 10 civilians may have been killed. It is very difficult to get accurate figures on the number of civilian casualties. Adding to the problem is that the U.S. government arbitrarily declares all males between the ages of 20 and 40 as militants in order to conceal civilian casualties. In December this past year, a U.S. drone strike hit a wedding party, killing 12. People in the countries where the U.S. operates drones live in fear that they or their loved ones could become the next casualties. Former U.S. officials even admit that drone strikes only serve to create even more enemies of the United States.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Income inequality in the United States is at levels not seen since the 1920s and is growing faster than in any other developed country. The top 1% in the U.S. own 40% of the country's wealth. The bottom 80% own only 7%. 95% of the post-recession growth went to the top 1% while 90% of Americans saw their wealth decline.

Meanwhile, the value of the minimum wage has decreased by \$2.77 since 1968 despite workers only becoming more productive over time. Here in Wisconsin, since 1979 the income for the bottom 99% has fallen by 0.4%. During this same period, the top 1% experienced their income grow by 104%. Political scientists have long known that economic inequality can contribute to political instability and societal breakdown.

Economic inequality is a true national defense issue.

FINANCIAL COST OF WAR

In Fiscal Year 2013, the United States spent 672.9 billion dollars on the military, accounting for 17.7% of all spending. The only items in the budget where the United States spends a larger percent than the military are for Health and Human Services (Medicare and Medicaid) and Social Security, which accounted for 24.7% and 23.2% of the FY 2013 budget respectively. 3.7% of federal spending went to the Department of Veteran Affairs. In 2012, the United States spent 682 billion dollars on defense. The next ten countries combined still spent less at a figure of 652 billion dollars. The United States accounts for 39% of global military expenditures. According to Brown University, the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan will cost between \$3.2 and \$4 trillion dollars. In the same report, obligations to the veterans of these wars will cost between \$600 and \$950 billion dollars. These figures are astounding. These are trillions of dollars that could have been devoted to things like universal health care, infrastructure investments, job programs—the possibilities are numerous. Instead, this money resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, the displacement of millions more, and physical and environmental destruction that will be long-lasting.

MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Military sexual trauma is an issue that has received increasing public scrutiny in recent years. 23% of female veterans reported a sexual assault when they were in the military.

52% of women and 38% of men experienced sexual harassment while in the military.

Men also can be sexually assaulted and, since the vast majority of service members are men, more than half of all victims of MST are men. However, only 9.8% of sexual assaults within the military are reported. Prosecution of the aggressors is outrageously low. Less than 8% of sexual assault cases went to trial in 2011. 10% of the aggressors resigned in lieu of courts-martial, meaning they were allowed to leave the military to avoid the charges. Survivors of MST and their advocates recommend that sexual assault cases be handled outside the chain of command because the perpetrators are either friends of or the person to which the assault needs to be reported. The Senate recently blocked a bill that would have removed the authority to prosecute sexual assault from the chain of command. However, it unanimously passed a bill that would prohibit the use of the “good soldier defense,” give accusers more influence in whether to have the case litigated by the military or by civilian courts, and require increased accountability from commanders.

MORAL INJURY

An emerging concept, coined by Dr. Jonathan Shay, is moral injury. Dr. Shay saw some of the emotional difficulties returning veterans were having were similar, yet distinct from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. While Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a reaction to being in a life-threatening situation, moral injury results when the service member senses an act of betrayal by someone with authority. Moral injury has three components: (1) a betrayal of what is morally correct, (2) by someone holding legitimate authority, and (3) in a high-stress situation. The afflicted veteran experiences guilt and shame and suffers from dissonance and internal conflict. They condemn themselves and often exercise self-sabotaging and -harmful behaviors. Because of the shame and guilt involved, it requires a different treatment approach than PTSD and, like PTSD, is a contributor to veteran suicides.