

Legislators: Spend more for vets

Albany County lawmakers want Pentagon spending diverted to other areas

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ALBANY — Albany's County Legislature has signed off on a proclamation urging the federal government to pull U.S. troops from Afghanistan and slash the Pentagon budget, using that money to bankroll public services for veterans.

The proclamation, signed by 20 of the 39 legislators, comes the week of the 11th anniversary of the war in Afghanistan.

"We're spending too much on the war and not enough at home," said Legislator Doug Bullock, an Albany Democrat. "We think it should go to the veterans coming home."

On Tuesday evening, Bullock gathered alongside activists and Legislators Noelle Kinsch, Joseph O'Brien, Bryan Clenahan and Chris Higgins to present the proclamation and ring a bell in honor of its passage.

"Enough is enough," said Larry Wittner, executive secretary of the Albany County Central Federation of Labor and a member of the Albany chapter of United University Professors, both of which support the proclamation. "It's time to stop squandering U.S. resources on foreign wars."

The proclamation, entitled "Proclamation Calling on Congress to Fund Urgently Needed Services in Albany County and Throughout the United States by Reducing Military Spending," has thus far garnered the support of 30 community organizations, including Upper Hudson Peace Action, Occupy Albany, the Interfaith Alliance of New York State, the Capital District chapter of the Working Families Party and the Muslim Solidarity Committee.

It calls for taking money saved by reducing military spending to fund education, job creation and care for veterans and their families, as well as special protections for military-sector employees, environmental and infrastructure restoration and "human services that our counties, cities and states so desperately need."

"The counties are starved," said Bullock. "We can't afford four more years of a war we've already been fighting for 11 years."

Similar proclamations have been passed in other cities, including Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Cleveland.

In 2011, the U.S. Conference of Mayors also passed a proclamation urging military spending be redirected to domestic concerns.

A copy of the legislation will now be sent to Rep. Paul D. Tonko, and Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer, as well as President Barack Obama.

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