

# What do we mean when we say, "Divest from war, invest in people"?

Warfare requires soldiers and weapons. But before governments can buy weapons and hire soldiers, they must first raise the necessary money (or borrow it). That's where taxes come in — most people's biggest investment in militarism.

Investing in war doesn't just mean buying stocks in the private companies that profit from war. In this era of high-priced weapons systems and international military aid, taxation is the closest war-making link between a national government and most of the people who live within its borders.

**"The two decisive powers of the government with respect to war are the power to conscript and the power to tax."**

A.J. Muste

Refusing to pay some or all of the taxes that go to war is a direct way to say "NO!" to over \$1 trillion of military and military-related spending every year.

And we can also say "NO!" to the militarization of the U.S. federal

budget: the wars, occupations, bases around the world, nuclear weapons, foreign military aid and arms sales, and covert CIA violence and torture.

By divesting our taxes from war, we take control over how our money is spent.

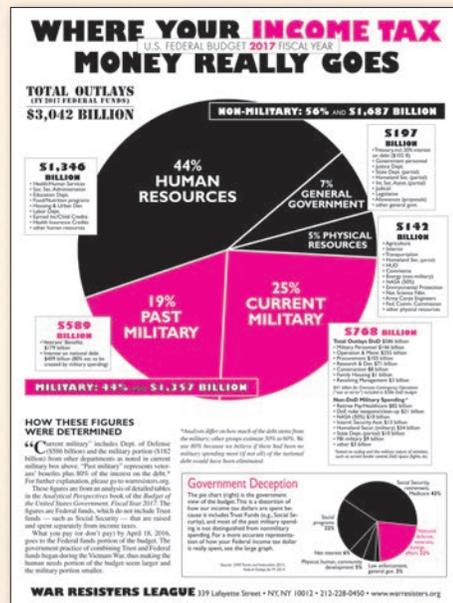
## How much of our taxes are invested in war?

Many people view paying taxes as a positive investment in social goods, such as infrastructure, social services, and education. Others are critical of taxes as an inefficient or even unethical redistribution of wealth by government. Either way, when most people give tax money to the government, they hope that something good comes out of it.

But when we pay income taxes (and some other taxes), we are substantially investing in war and militarism. In the

proposed fiscal year 2017 federal budget, 44% of each income tax dollar paid goes to military-related spending.

While private contractors make millions, and in some cases, billions of dollars from war, the instigator of war is the government — the Pentagon. We certainly support campaigns to put pressure on private contractors, but taxes are the primary way war is funded. That means we need to put pressure on the government by withholding our investments in war.



## Does divestment work?

In the divestment campaigns against South Africa's apartheid system in the 1970s and 1980s, supporters identified companies that did business in South Africa. Then they pressured institutions like banks and universities to divest their pension funds and endowments from those companies.

Divestment campaigns are becoming more and more popular, and are currently widely used by movements focusing on getting money away from Israeli occupation, fossil fuels, and private prisons.

Fossil fuel divestment campaigns have succeeded in getting several institutions and governments to commit to divestment, to name a few: Stanford University in California, Syracuse University in New York, the city of Berlin in Germany, the city of Copenhagen in Denmark, and Oxford University in the United Kingdom.

Enlace's City Prison Divestment Toolkit describes the impact of divestment campaigns this way:

"When many investors in a company decide to sell their stock around the same time, that company's stock comes under pressure. Over time, the stock price decreases due to shareholders selling their stock, and is then eschewed by many investors due to the negative publicity it has received. A low stock price can make it harder for a company to get loans, finance sales, or expand its business. And if the pressure is persistent and high enough, an entire industry — even a national government — can decide it's time to change how they do business, or, can be wiped out entirely."

When we refuse to pay taxes en masse, we can exert the same kind of pressure on the government as divestment causes on companies.

**Divestment campaigns were integral to the international movement against South Africa's apartheid system.**

**Today divestment campaigns are widely used in movements:**

**Against Israel's occupation of Palestine**

**Against private prisons**

**For a transition from fossil fuels**

## How can we divest from the Pentagon?

While many war tax resisters also call for cuts in government or private spending on war, we begin by divesting ourselves from the Pentagon, by refusing to pay taxes for war. There are many different ways to do this, including:

- refusing to pay the telephone tax on long-distance landline service
- earning an income less than the taxable income level

- earning a taxable income, filing a tax return, and refusing to pay

- earning a taxable income, and refusing to file a tax return or pay taxes

Each of these methods has its own pros and cons, risks and benefits. For more information about methods of war tax resistance, see *How to Resist* link at [nwtrcc.org](http://nwtrcc.org).

## What do war tax resisters reinvest in?

If you owe war taxes and refuse to pay them, you'll have eliminated a payment to the federal government each year. But war tax resisters don't refuse so that we can put more money in our pockets. So what do we use this money for?

Some resisters set aside tax money in a personal escrow account to await IRS collection. Others pool this money in an escrow account with other resisters — these accounts are called *alternative funds*. In an alternative fund, deposits may be at lower risk of seizure from the IRS, since all deposits are held in one common account under an organization's name rather than an individual resister's name.

Some alternative funds only serve as escrow accounts holding money until the government allows taxpayers to pay taxes without any of that money going to war. They may not earn or distribute interest on that money.

Other alternative funds distribute the interest from their deposits each year, distributing hundreds or thousands of dollars to non-governmental organizations and groups. For example, in 2016, the People's Life Fund in Berkeley redirected \$20,000 to 16 community groups. Other alternative funds that make significant redirections each year include the People's

Life Fund in New York City, the Conscience and Military Tax Campaign (whose redirection ceremony is pictured below), and New England War Tax Resistance.

And many resisters also personally redirect their taxes to groups they support. It's much more difficult to track individual redirections, but here are some examples:

- Jason Rawn made 1,000 stickers that read, "Defund Militarism" and distributed them to people around the US and the world.

- Robin Harper, who popularized the idea of war tax redirection, has tracked his redirections since 1958 on an enormous chart. He has given to the American Friends Service Committee, Greenpeace, Fellowship of Reconciliation, and dozens of other organizations in his 50+ years of redirection.

- John and Pat Schwiebert of Portland, Oregon, have refused to pay some or all of their federal income tax in protest of military violence for more than 30 years. For many years, they have gone to the offices of the Multnomah County government in person and explained their resistance as they present a check in the amount of their resisted taxes.



## Organizing Stories

Jason Rawn traveled to Okinawa (below) to support US military base resisters, including getting arrested with them as they protested the bases. He worked with local organizers to create banners saying, “Dive\$t from the Pentagon! No taxes for war!” in Korean, English, and Japanese.



In 2016, San Diego organizer Anne Barron put together a Divest from the Pentagon, Invest in People press conference on Tax Day, featuring Southern California War Tax Alternative Fund and its grantees. She also conducted a “teach-in” on war tax resistance using the heading Invest in People, Divest from the Pentagon, using David Gross’ book *99 Tactics of Successful Tax Resistance*.

Peter Smith (right) created this Divest from the Pentagon sign for South Bend, Indiana’s annual Tax Day protest.

In 2008, the War Tax Boycott campaign initiated by NWTRCC pooled refused war taxes from over 300 resisters and redirected \$10,000 to the Direct Aid Iraq, a humanitarian relief and peace-building project, and more than \$6,000 to Common Ground Health Clinic in New Orleans, which was providing services to people after Hurricane Katrina.



### Other divestment campaigns

- US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, [uscpr.org/campaign/bds](http://uscpr.org/campaign/bds)
- Go Fossil Free, [gofossilfree.org](http://gofossilfree.org)
- Prison Divestment Campaign, [prisondivest.com](http://prisondivest.com)
- Movement for Black Lives Platform: Invest-Divest, [policy.m4bl.org/invest-divest/](http://policy.m4bl.org/invest-divest/)

## Organizing Ideas

1. Hold a war tax redirection event themed around divestment and investment. See the enclosed information about the 2017 coordinated redirection here.
2. Connect with organizers in other divestment movements. As we’ve mentioned, war taxes are definitely connected to Israeli occupation, fossil fuels, and private prisons, for example. Table together or organize an event with speakers from multiple divestment movements.
3. Conduct a “Divest from war, invest in people” event with other antiwar groups in your area. War tax resistance is one tactic among many that can further the peace movement, and not many peace/antiwar activists are aware of it — or aware of the many different ways a person can be a war tax resister.
4. Use public war tax resistance as a tactic in a divestment campaign to urge a bank, university or other institution to stop investing in war contractors or government bonds. (You might ask, “If we won’t pay, why do you?”)

## Organizing Resources

NWTRCC has many resources that are available for free or at a low price for organizers. Some are designed to share online, others are for handing out in your community or at events that you attend.

- Use our full infographic to spread the word about war tax divestment online.
- Use the infographic, in multiple PowerPoint slides or in multiple downloadable image files below, online or in a presentation in your community.
- Share the infographic (pictured below and at <http://bit.ly/2k4Vm2b>) online or in public presentations in your community; it is downloadable as a PowerPoint slideshow or in multiple downloadable image files.
- Order NWTRCC cards or flyers (samples enclosed) in English or double-sided in English and Spanish by contacting our office. Cards are **free** to organizers who will use them!
- Most flyers can be downloaded from the NWTRCC website, or ask the office for copies (or a white copy that you can print from). See our complete list of resources, which is enclosed and on our website.
- If you would like materials for a literature table at a conference or event you are attending, please ask the NWTRCC office.
- To keep up on news of Divest/Invest organizing, read our newsletter and blog. You'll find both linked on our website, or ask for a sample copy of the newsletter to be mailed to you. Subscriptions are \$15/year for six issues.
- Let us know what you are doing! Write for our newsletter or blog and tell us about your actions and events. Let us know what works and what doesn't. If you have ideas for resources, please let us know by contacting the NWTRCC office.
- The graphics below are online as an infographic and PowerPoint slideshow at <http://bit.ly/2k4Vm2b>. Visit that page for updates about the Divest/Invest campaign.

**Divest from War, Invest in People**  
Redirect your taxes from war to peace!

**WHAT IS DIVESTMENT?**  
Divestment is the opposite of investment. Instead of putting money into something, hoping to get future benefits and security, you take the money out, hoping to get those benefits and security somewhere else.

Today divestment campaigns are widely used in movements:

- Divestment campaigns were targeted to the international movement against South Africa's apartheid system.
- against Israel's occupation of Palestine
- against private prisons
- for a transition from fossil fuels

**WHY DIVEST FROM THE PENTAGON?**

The US Department of "Defense" (the Pentagon) has requested almost \$600 billion in the 2017 fiscal year. But military spending also includes projects in other federal departments, plus veterans' benefits and the debt from past wars.

**TOTAL 2017 MILITARY SPENDING WILL BE OVER \$1.3 TRILLION.**

Any money invested in militarism helps buy:

- weapons, military equipment, and bases in over 100 countries,
- soldiers trained to kill, many of whom return home wounded mentally and/or physically; if they come home at all, and
- death, destruction, and sworn enemies.

**Divest from War, Invest in People**  
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**WHY DIVEST FROM THE PENTAGON?**

If the fiscal year 2017 budget is approved as is, **44% of every dollar you pay in income taxes will go to the military.**

**We need to divest from war so we can invest in solving hunger, homelessness, crumbling infrastructure, environmental destruction, and more.**

Military 44% | Everything Else 56%

Source: War Resisters League

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**HOW DO I DIVEST FROM THE PENTAGON?**

**Stop paying some or all of your federal taxes.**

This may require civil disobedience, so learn about the methods and consequences ahead of time. The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee (NWTRCC) can help.

Since 1982, NWTRCC has been educating people about war tax resistance and supporting war tax resisters.

**Some ways to divest:**

- File a tax return and refuse to pay some or all of the taxes owed.
- Refuse to file a tax return and refuse to pay taxes.
- Resist the local sales, hotel, and tax.
- Avoid owing taxes by earning less than the taxable income limit.

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**HOW DO I INVEST IN PEOPLE?**

- Deposit your divested taxes in an alternative fund that distributes all earned interest to not-for-profit groups. You can withdraw your principal if you need it later.
- Give divested taxes outright to an alternative fund.
- Give divested taxes directly to groups working on issues or meeting community needs that are important to you!

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**WHAT IMPACT DOES DIVESTING FROM WAR HAVE?**

We know we must change ourselves to change society.

We can refuse to yield to coercive demands that we fund violence, and instead invest that money in peace and justice.

War tax resisters are part of a long tradition of civil disobedience that has helped stop violence around the world.

**If enough of us divest, we can start to break down militarism altogether.**

**Resources:**  
<http://nwtrcc.org/res/how-to-resist/>  
<http://warresisters.org>

**NATIONAL WAR TAX RESISTANCE COORDINATING COMMITTEE**  
NWTRCC