War Spending and the ‘Fiscal Cliff’

The short-term danger of the “fiscal cliff” may be resolved either before or after the New Year, but the longer-term threat to the Republic is the never-ending demand from the Military-Industrial Complex for more and more money to finance war and empire, says ex-FBI agent Coleen Rowley.

By Coleen Rowley

As the final scene of *Thelma and Louise* seems to be playing out these last few days, it might be a good time to recall the dramatic end of that movie. It’s true that some think the fiscal cliff is real while others say it’s just a mirage.

Some in the U.S. want to just “keep goin’” as Thelma urges. But most of us probably don’t see much of a choice — it seems more like we are trapped in a car with its gas pedal stuck in the full speed ahead mode and someone has disabled the brakes. For even at this 11th hour, almost no one in the Punch and Judy Show in Washington is able to home in on, much less intelligently discuss, the real problem.

However, as President Obama urges a last-ditch budget deal, one clarion voice, that of Rep. Dennis Kucinich, was heard on *Democracy Now*. Here are some of Kucinich’s parting words of wisdom about the phoniness of the entire fiscal cliff debate, ignoring as it does the terrible elephant in the room, the war machine:

“So, you know, this is — we really have to decide who we are as a nation. We’re spending more and more money for wars. We’re spending more and more money for interventions abroad. We’re spending more and more money for military buildups. And we seem to be prepared to spend less and less on domestic programs and on job creation.

“This whole idea of a debt-based economic system is linked to a war machine. … We’re increasingly dysfunctional as a nation because of our unwillingness to challenge the military-industrial complex, which Dwight Eisenhower warned about generations ago. And so, we really have to look at America’s role in the world. We have a right to defend ourselves, but we have no right to aggress. And we’re continuing to aggress.

“And that’s coming at a cost to our domestic priorities here, this idea of guns and butter. We are now thoroughly mired in an economy that’s based on guns. We are not providing for the practical needs of the American people. And this
budget — and this fiscal cliff — does in no way get into that debate.”

Also amidst the darkness comes a news flash of a way by which ordinary people can still make a difference: “DULUTH CITY COUNCIL JOINS SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS PASSING THE MN ASAP RESOLUTION CALLING FOR PENTAGON SPENDING REDUCTIONS: the MN ASAP resolution connects the dots between federal military spending, cuts to city council budgets, and the debate about sequestration and the fiscal cliff.”

As part of the Minnesota Arms Spending Alternatives Project (MN ASAP), citizens in Minnesota have effectively begun pointing to U.S. war machine spending as the elephant in the room that needs to be noticed, then discussed and addressed. We have found that our city councilpersons and mayors, on the whole, seem more clear-headed, more approachable, less corrupted by the Military Industrial Complex and less defensive than the federal characters responsible for getting us into the costly wars and fiscal mess.

As a result, on Dec. 17, the Duluth City Council passed the resolution, calling on Congress for a reduction and redirection of Pentagon spending back to local communities. [Click here for TV news coverage.]

The resolution initiative is getting real traction not only in Minnesotabut around the country. The Saint Paul City Council unanimously passed a similar resolution, Oct. 10. And the Minneapolis City Council unanimously passed a similar version of the MN ASAP resolution on Dec. 7. (Just a few days before, Des Moines, Iowa joined a growing group of larger U.S. cities that have passed or are passing similar resolutions.)

We have to start somewhere and everyone can do this. For instance on Dec. 13, I requested, for the second time, that the MN ASAP resolution be put on (my own) Apple Valley City Council’s agenda warning that the wars are bankrupting America and that the “fiscal cliff” is unlikely to go away as long as the U.S. continues to spend more on the Pentagon, its wars abroad and its military occupations, than on programs of social uplift. I intend to keep knocking on my city’s door until they wake up and open it and put this discussion on their official agenda.

Guns or butter is, of course, the real issue. It’s unfortunate, all these decades after Eisenhower’s warning about the pernicious, corrupting influence of the Military Industrial Complex, that we cannot count on those in Washington to heed the dangers. In fact, their plan seems to raise taxes on everyone to pay for more wars.

More citizens and grassroots efforts like the successful actions of MN ASAP and the National Priorities Project are therefore necessary. People who care about
their children and grandchildren’s future need to replicate these types of presentations in cities and state legislatures all over the country if we are ever to end the unethical, illegal wars and get our priorities back in order.

And if we citizens choose to do nothing but go along? Note that the old movie mercifully spared its audience of watching crazy Thelma and Louise hit rock bottom. Rest assured, however, that in real life, Washington’s collective euphoria and currently prevalent belief that war is the answer will undoubtedly come to a very sad crashing end.

Coleen Rowley is a retired FBI agent and former chief division counsel in Minneapolis. She’s now a dedicated peace and justice activist and board member of the Women Against Military Madness. [This article was originally posted at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/coleen-rowley/only-one-good-way-to-brak_b_2384964.html]