

SPENDING ON WEAPONS OF WAR IS THE CAUSE OF THE US BUDGET DEFICIT

Veterans for Peace Leah Bolger Faces Jail for Challenging the US Government on how it Uses its Tax Dollars

By [Kevin Zeese](#)

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In 45 Seconds Leah Bolger Did More to Represent the Views of Americans than the Supercommittee Ever Did:
Now She Faces Jail

On April 12th, Leah Bolger, the president of Veterans for Peace and an occupier at Freedom Plaza, will appear in DC Superior Court to face charges stemming from her interruption of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, also known as the Super Committee. Below is the statement I will submit on her behalf.

See [20 Year Veteran Faces Jail Time for Civil Disobedience](#)

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF LEAH BOLGER SUBMITTED BY KEVIN ZEESE April 12, 2012

This statement is submitted in support of Leah Bolger for her action to stop the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, also known as the “super committee,” from reducing government deficit spending by cutting desperately needed social programs primarily for senior citizens and the disabled, rather than taxing the wealthiest 1% of Americans and reducing military spending.

The Joint Select Committee was a congressional aberration with only one precedent, the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. The Joint Select Committee was made up of senators and members of Congress from both parties and was designed to avoid the normal legislative process, especially public hearings and the ability of Americans to hold their elected representatives accountable for their actions. The Joint Committee was called a super committee because it would put forward cuts in the budget and increased taxes and the full Congress would then vote on the full proposal without any amendments. This process usurped the authority of elected officials to write and revise legislation.

The Joint Committee met almost completely in private without opportunity for public testimony. There were only a few public meetings of the Committee with carefully selected witnesses. News reports indicated that President Obama and the Democrats were negotiating with the Republicans to cut Social Security and Medicare. This was being done even though both those programs are funded by separate tax revenues, the payroll tax, which withholds taxes from the pay checks of all Americans to fund these programs. These programs are a contract with Americans who pay throughout their working lives for these

benefits.

Neither of these programs was in deficit spending. Indeed, since 1982 Social Security has maintained a budget surplus. Social Security remains strong with a \$2.7 trillion surplus and will be able to pay full benefits for the next 25 years – until 2036. Despite the gloom and doom rhetoric of those who want to cut Social Security to balance the budget, the program continues to run an annual surplus – and is separate from the general fund and the deficit problems the country faces.

Medicare presents greater challenges because of the failure to control health care costs in the United States. Medicare is the victim of this problem not the cause. Spending per beneficiary rose more than 400 percent over the last 30 years but this is much less than inflation-adjusted premiums on private health insurance which rose more than 700 percent. Throughout this time administrative costs for Medicare have been 2 to 3 percent, compared to nearly 18 percent for private insurance. Slight changes in tax structure would be sufficient to fully fund Medicare and Social Security for the foreseeable future. As with Social Security, the challenges in funding Medicare are separate from the general federal deficit.

Both these programs are immensely popular with polls consistently showing that super majorities of Americans – more than 60 percent – supporting them. Polls also show that Americans want to see other cuts, including to military spending, rather than cuts to these desperately needed social programs for which there is contract between government and the American people. For these reasons Congress sought to circumvent the normal open and transparent democratic process, with opportunities for public comment, in order to cut them.

Instead of listening to and representing the views of the American people, the Joint Committee was representing the interests of big money. The twelve Members of the Joint Committee had received \$41 million from the financial sector during their time in Congress. In the previous five years they received more than \$1 million in contributions from the health care industry and at least \$700,000 from weapons makers. The Joint Committee was carefully selected so it would protect the wealthiest Americans, weapons makers and the for-profit health industry rather than the American people. The only path they would consider in reducing the deficit was on the backs of working Americans.

In 45 seconds retired Commander Leah Bolger did more to represent the views of Americans and tell the true facts about the deficit than all of the elected representatives on the Joint Committee. Commander Bolger correctly said that the cause of the deficit was spending on weapons and war – on which the United States spends a trillion dollars annually, as much as the whole world combined; and failure to progressively tax the wealthiest Americans who despite their record-setting wealth pay less than working Americans. Indeed, the 400 hundred wealthiest Americans have wealth equal to more 154 million Americans, but they pay an average tax of 17% while working Americans pay 30%.

Commander Bolger was a member of the Occupation at Freedom Plaza. On Freedom Plaza we held our own Occupied Super Committee hearing which was aired on CSPAN. And, we produced our own report, *The 99% Deficit Proposal: How to Create Jobs, Reduce the Wealth Divide and Control Spending*. We found that by making reasonable cuts to the military budget – cuts recommended by many former military officials; and taxing the wealthiest at rates that had been common in the 20th Century, the United States could achieve the \$1.2

trillion in budget savings that the congressional super committee sought to achieve in 10 years, in merely two years.

Commander Bolger did an incredibly brave and patriotic act of citizenship – during one of the rare public hearings of the Joint Committee she walked to the front of the hearing room, into the well, and told the elected officials the truth: if we taxed the wealthy and cut the military budget there would be no deficit problem. She also told the American public the truth that this aberration of the democratic process was designed to hide from all of us.

Once again, Leah Bolger was an American hero. Her personal story is one that deserves note. She joined the Navy at 22 years old and served until the year 2000. Over two decades she served all over the world, including tours in Iceland, Bermuda, Japan and Tunisia. She served as an anti-submarine warfare specialist and rose to the rank of a Commander in the Navy, equivalent to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Army. She did not leave the Navy as an opponent of war, indeed like many in the military she did not think about what she was doing when serving the country; she followed orders and did her job.

In 2005 she attended an exhibit of the American Friends Service Committee called “Eyes Wide Open,” and had a “moment of epiphany.” The exhibit showed a pair of army boots for every soldier that had been killed since 2001. Each boot had tags which gave the name of each soldier and where they were from. Rows and rows of boots lined up. There were posters of Americans and Iraqis who had died in the war. She says she remembers it affecting her “viscerally, the feeling in my stomach — it was a kick in the gut when I saw that. It really, really hit me.”

She took action, became an active citizen and spoke out against war. She joined Veterans for Peace and in 2009 she was elected the national Board of Directors and served as the national vice-president until 2012 when she was reelected to her second term on the board, and became the first female national president of the organization.

When she spoke before the Joint Committee she delivered a message on behalf of the vast majority of Americans – a message the committee was trying hard not to hear, nor to allow others to hear: End the wars and tax the rich to fix the deficit.

Her action helped changed the course of American history. While she was not alone in protesting the Joint Committee – indeed there were protests outside the committee room and dozens of people walked from New York City, Philadelphia and Baltimore to oppose the cuts that were being talked about – she did something no one else did – she went before the elected officials and did something radical in that committee room – she told the truth. In the end, the truth won and the committee backed off of cuts to Social Security and Medicare.

When I speak in praise of Leah Bolger for her actions, I know I am not speaking only for myself as Leah spoke for millions of Americans who were not being heard. I urge you to recognize that this was an act of conscience taken on behalf of the American people at a time when representative government no longer serves us.

More Information:

The 99%’s Deficit Proposal: How to create jobs, reduce the wealth divide and control spending

We Stand With the Majority of Americans: Human Needs, Not Corporate Greed

A Naval Commander for the 99% Stands Trial

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