



CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

Serving the 5th Congressional District of Georgia

The Cost of War Act of 2015

On May 15, 2015, Congressman Lewis reintroduced H.R. 2376, the Cost of War Act. This legislation was adopted as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Acts in 2013, 2014, and most recently on May 18, 2016.

Bill Summary

The Cost of War Act is simply about transparency and accountability. This legislation simply requires the Department of Defense to work with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to calculate and post the cost of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Syria to every American taxpayer on their websites. The Cost of War Act is currently pending before the House Armed Services Committee.

Background

As the cost of war and its share of the federal deficit continue to skyrocket, it is important that Americans fully understand their actual contributions towards these efforts.

As the debt and deficit debates continue, many are proposing cuts to Medicare, Social Security, and programs serving the elderly, the unemployed, women, families and children. The Cost of War Act helps inform the discourse by calculating the exact price tag of these ongoing conflicts to each American. A full, detailed accounting is long overdue.

This legislation was inspired by an amendment which Rep. Lewis initially offered to the fiscal year 2012 Defense Appropriations bill. In October 2011, Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) first introduced the Cost of War Act as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi's birthday.

In recent years, Congressman Lewis offered the legislation as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA). The Lewis amendment was adopted by the House of Representatives as part of an en bloc package, but unfortunately was not included in the final House-Senate conference reports in 2013 and 2014. In 2015, Congressman Lewis again filed the Cost of War Act as an NDAA amendment, but it was not accepted by the House Rules Committee.

In May 2016, the Lewis amendment again passed the House as part of an en bloc, bipartisan amendment package. Rep. Lewis will work for his amendment to survive the Conference process and finally be signed into law. The Cost of War Act is currently included in Conference Report 114-840 which accompanies S. 2943, the 2017 NDAA authorization. The Conference Report passed the U.S. Senate and is awaiting Presidential signature.

Notable Highlights

- When the Cost of War Act was first introduced, it was selected as the bill of the day by PopVox and featured in an [Economic Policy Institute](#) blog.
- For the past four years, the White House launched a [Federal Taxpayer Receipt Calculator](#), so that Americans will better understand how their tax dollars are being spent. The Cost of War act would authorize additional information to personalize this tool for each American taxpayers.
- In recent years, Congressman Lewis also sponsored a congressional briefing on the Institute for Economics and Peace's report on the [Consequences of War on the U.S. Economy](#). The report found that taxes would have been "lower, inflation would have been lower, there would have been higher consumption and investment and lower budget deficits" in the absence of war.
- According to a Brown University study that quantifies the [Cost of War](#), the U.S. has spent over \$2.2 trillion dollars on the conflict in Iraq alone. The study notes that there are 6.7 million refugees --a mass of people equaling the population of the state of Massachusetts--who have been displaced from their homes.