

# Washington Newsletter

Spring 2026 » No. 825



**Empowered and Audacious to Win**

(Page 2)

**My Real World**

(Page 4)

**The Biggest Pentagon Budget Ever**

(Page 6)

Raed Jarrar, expert with Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), speaks at an Advocacy Teams rally with FCNL to urge Congress to repeal the 2002 Iraq AUMF. Photo by DAGFoto/FCNL



# Empowered and Audacious to Win

By Adlai Amor

**Victory came as a brief sentence: “Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iraq (Public Law 102-1; 105 Stat. 3; 50 U.S.C. 1541 noted) is hereby repealed.”**

It was almost a throw-away section, buried in page 290 of the 3,086-page National Defense Authorization Act of fiscal year 2026 signed into law last December.

“It is a huge win to prevent further abuse,” said Heather Brandon-Smith, FCNL’s legislative director of foreign policy. “It is the first time in 55 years since the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that Congress repealed a war powers authorization.”

Now the 2002 Iraq AUMF is completely off the table. The government can no longer use it to justify military interventions, like the 2020 strike in Iran that killed Gen. Qasem Soleimani.

Although this victory came as a brief sentence, behind it was a concerted effort by a coalition of peace activists, veterans, faith leaders, and thousands of grassroots advocates across the country.

When that coalition met in early January, they publicly acknowledged the leadership of FCNL and the Quakers in repealing the 2002 Iraq AUMF. FCNL had always been against the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs which were issued after the 9/11 attacks.

At first, the coalition lobbied against both the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs. When Brandon-Smith joined FCNL in 2018, the coalition changed its strategy. “We decided to go for the low-hanging fruit first—the 2002 Iraq AUMF,” she said. “We wanted Congress to exercise their constitutional war powers muscle.”

While the 2002 Iraq AUMF was also subject to abuse, it was limited in scope compared to the 2001 AUMF which was used to justify the Global War on Terror.

A key aspect of FCNL’s strategy was to get champions in Congress. In the House, former representative Barbara Lee was key because she was the congressional leader on AUMF repeal, having been the only member of Congress to vote against the 2001 AUMF. Rep. Chip Roy (TX-21) later joined her.

In the Senate, Sens. Tim Kaine (VA) and Todd Young (IN) were the champions. Sen. Young was a leader supporting the repeal of the 2002 Iraq AUMF when it was introduced as an amendment in the FY 2026 NDAA.

The chances for a repeal did not become clear until Dec. 9, 2025, when the White House issued the following statement: “Additionally, the NDAA is aligned with the President’s historic commitment to peace and ending ‘forever wars’ by repealing the 1991 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force.”

Yet the coalition that has been working together on this repeal since 2015 did not ease up. Key coalition partners pressured the White House to support this repeal when it appeared that it would be used again as a bargaining chip for the FY 2026 NDAA.

“It was very exciting to announce to the Advocacy Teams that their years of advocacy had paid off and that the 2002 Iraq AUMF had officially been repealed,” said Tim Heishman, FCNL’s senior Advocacy Teams manager. “It is a win but repealing the AUMF is just one part of the larger need to curb U.S. military intervention and aggression around the world.”

While coalition partners and FCNL staff worked hard behind the scenes, it was Advocacy Teams, organized in 2015, that took on the challenging task of educating and organizing more activists. They conducted dozens of trainings throughout the country.

The teams wrote thousands of emails, made hundreds of phone calls and lobby visits to their members of Congress to press the issue. They amplified their voices by partnering with other faith leaders and wrote hundreds of letters in local media outlets.

Sarah Stone, who used to manage the Advocacy Teams, remembers traveling with her predecessor, Shoshana Abrams. “We traveled with our little suitcases to Quaker meeting houses, training them to memorize talking points on connecting their stories with the issue.”

Stone remembers military veterans who broke down during the training. “They cried as they recalled the PTSD they or their relatives experienced and connected that to the need to end wars and U.S. militarism.”

*Continued on page 8*



Advocates kept the pressure up for years to urge Congress for peace.



Bridget Moix, Senator Todd Young (IN), Heather Brandon-Smith, and Amelia Kegan in attendance at a reception honoring the AUMF repeal.



FCNL honored former Rep. Barbara Lee at Annual Meeting 2024 with its first-ever Compass Award, recognizing an individual who has demonstrated a lifetime commitment to moral leadership.



# My Real World

By Bridget Moix

Bridget Moix walked with faith leaders from across the country on a "Pilgrimage for Peace" in 2024, proclaiming that War is Not the Answer. Photo by DAGFoto/FCNL.

In defending the government's violence in Venezuela, White House aide Stephen Miller recently said: "We live in a world, in the real world... that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power... These are the iron laws of the world since the beginning of time."

**As a Quaker, a peace scholar, a mother, and an ordinary human being, I disagree. I do not know what "real world" Miller and the Trump administration live in or are trying to create. But people of faith know that a much deeper and more lasting power exists than the temporary victories that military force and violence might provide.**

This is not a naive or idealistic view of the challenges we face. Our communities and the governments, kingdoms, and nation-states we have created have a long history of war, violence, tyranny, and oppression.

In the United States, militarism pervades our politics, economy, society, and culture. However, that is a choice—not a destiny. We make different choices all the time.

In Venezuela, the Trump administration chose to attack a sovereign country, kidnap its president, and forcibly take control of its oil industry. In doing so, the administration blatantly violated U.S. and international law. It tossed aside international norms and openly proclaimed its imperial agenda.

The Trump administration declared victory, but it is not successfully "running" Venezuela. It has no real plan for the real-world disaster it has sparked. It will certainly not bring peace, prosperity, or democracy to the Venezuelan people.

# “In my real world, war is not the answer, and peace is possible—if we choose it.”

Here in the U.S., the White House’s militarized deportation campaign is also failing to address any real problems related to immigration. Two days after Miller’s remarks, an ICE agent fatally shot an innocent woman in Minneapolis, Rene Good. Several days later, agents also fatally shot an ICU nurse, Alex Pretti.

At home and abroad, the Trump administration has moved quickly to create its own world — one ruled by military force and shaped by lies. We are all paying the price for this. Even as I write this, Trump is threatening military action against Iran and has not given up on claiming Greenland.

In the real world, we know that the Trump administration is destined to fail in its military escapades abroad, as have previous administrations. History has proven repeatedly that the United States’ militarized approach to problems may bring swift short-term victories, but they are followed by long and painful outcomes.

After briefing Congress on its “plan” for Venezuela, some legislators questioned what world the administration was living in. “It’s like they’ll wave a magic wand, and things will turn out like they want,” said Rep. Jason Crow (CO-06). Sen. Chris Murphy (CT) described the plan as “insane.”


As the White House ramps up its reliance on violence, members of all political parties should remind the president how our country is meant to be governed.

In the real world, we have three equal branches of government that provide checks and balances to ensure our country is not ruled by corrupt dictators or dragged into endless wars. In the real world, only Congress can authorize military action, and only Congress can decide how to spend taxpayer dollars.

We as people of faith must use every opportunity to help our members of Congress shape the real world we believe in. We must keep speaking up and showing up, standing in solidarity, bridging divides, and building relationships.

Unlike Miller’s narrow vision of an iron law of violence, the real world is one where most people, most of the time, in most places, take care of one another. We want to make the world a little better for our children and grandchildren. In this real world, we want peace and safety for our families, our communities, and ourselves.

My real world is governed by the unyielding power of love and unending pursuit of justice. In this real world, we understand that our security is inextricably connected to the security of others and that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

In my real world, war is not the answer, and peace is possible—if we choose it. 

*Bridget Moix is also a regular columnist for the Religion News Service, where this was originally published. It has been edited for length.*



Bridget Moix joins Cornell West and others in carrying the banner for peace. Photo by DAGFoto/FCNL

# The Biggest Pentagon Budget Ever

Q&A with Allen Hester, who leads FCNL's Nuclear Disarmament and Pentagon Spending lobbying program



**What stands out in the military policy bill, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of FY 2026, that became law in December 2025?**

This NDAA authorizes a record \$901 billion for the Pentagon—the largest military budget in U.S. history and \$8 billion more than Trump requested. This is on top of the military provisions in the One Big Beautiful Act passed last year.

This spending entrenches a militarized vision of security that has repeatedly failed to keep people safe, at home or abroad. At a time when housing instability, hunger, climate crises, and affordability are harming families across the country, the NDAA commits resources toward weapons and war instead of crucial human needs.

**Does it authorize the creation of new weapons of war? Or purchase more?**

The NDAA authorizes all Pentagon spending which is a significant portion of the broader U.S. defense budget. The Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Energy have some national defense aspects.

For the Pentagon, the NDAA authorizes the restocking of weapons and funds research and development of new weapons and technologies.

◀ FCNL's Allen Hester, Shawn Adams, and Bridget Moix with advocate Lon Burnam in front of an illustration of the U.S. nuclear spending. Photo by Eric Bond/FCNL

## What does this NDAA mean for our nuclear arsenal?

We do not have the specifics yet, but nuclear modernization has been underway for a long time. Modernizing all our nukes is a 30+ year effort. There is funding for our current nuclear weapons, but Congress is also continuing to fund the building of new weapons like the SLCM-N tactical nuclear weapon and the new Sentinel ICBMs.

## Did the NDAA change our nuclear testing policy?

The NDAA keeps in place the prohibition on aboveground nuclear testing, but it leaves the U.S. open to underground nuclear weapons tests if other countries conduct similar tests. Returning to nuclear weapons testing would undermine decades of U.S. leadership and restraint.

It ultimately gives other countries a way to incite a tit-for-tat dynamic that can quickly escalate. The U.S. already maintains confidence in its nuclear arsenal through non-explosive, science-based programs. Returning to explosive testing is unnecessary, and it would introduce environmental, health, and geopolitical risks.

“It ultimately gives other countries a way to incite a tit-for-tat dynamic that can quickly escalate”


## Are there indications in the NDAA that we are on the cusp of another arms race, especially with the expiration of the New START Treaty?

Upgrading our nuclear weapons arsenal is something we have been doing, just as other countries are doing as well. The indicator of an arms race will come more into the picture this year now that the New START treaty has expired.

Without that treaty, we are already seeing members of Congress pose questions to the administration and other experts about whether we should deploy more nuclear weapons beyond the current 1,550 nukes. They are also asking if we should build different types of nukes, increase funding to produce more, and increase nuclear testing in some way (not necessarily explosive testing).

## What other changes in the NDAA should we be aware of?

The NDAA finally repealed the 2002 Iraq Authorization for Use of Military Force—which we have been advocating for a long time.

The NDAA also significantly changed the Selective Service, a government agency that keeps track of men eligible for military conscription. Instead of a voluntary process, all men aged between 18–26 will now be automatically registered using information gathered from other federal databases. 

*Allen Hester leads FCNL's Nuclear Disarmament and Pentagon Spending portfolio. Interview by Adlai Amor, FCNL editorial consultant.*



## Friends Committee on National Legislation



*The Washington Newsletter* is a publication of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and the FCNL Education Fund, two national nonpartisan Quaker organizations working for peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

**Clerk:** Kitty Ufford-Chase  
**Assistant Clerk:** Michael M. Fuson  
**General Secretary:** Bridget Moix

**Editors:** Greg Williams, Celia Acedo  
**Writers:** FCNL Staff  
**Design/Layout:** Wesley Pinkham, Rebekah Longoria

**Reprinting:** Encouraged with credit  
**Cost:** Free upon request  
**Frequency:** Published 4 times a year

245 2nd Street NE  
 Washington, DC 20002  
 202-547-6000

 **Website:** [fcnl.org](http://fcnl.org)  
 **Email:** [info@fcnl.org](mailto:info@fcnl.org)  
 **Facebook:** [quakerlobby](https://www.facebook.com/quakerlobby)  
 **Bluesky:** [fcnl.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/fcnl.bsky.social)  
 **Instagram:** [quakerlobby](https://www.instagram.com/quakerlobby)  
 **TikTok:** [quakerlobby](https://www.tiktok.com/@quakerlobby)

**Cover Photo:**  
 FCNL staff pose with other advocates with the paragraph that repealed the 2002 Iraq AUMF.



*Audacious to Win from page 3*


The victory affirms FCNL's advocacy model—ensuring that activists are trained well and are provided with the right information. “They become empowered and have the audacity to tell their members of Congress that they, as constituents, care about the issue,” said Stone.

Eventually, the issue resonated across the aisles in Congress. When it came to a floor vote in 2019, 19 Republicans voted to repeal. In 2020, 49 Republicans supported the repeal.

“It took 23 years to repeal the 2002 Iraq AUMF. I hope it will not take another 23 years to repeal the 2001 AUMF,” said Heishman. This AUMF is being used to justify military actions in Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Niger, and elsewhere.

It was ironic, however, that the victory came in a legislative package that increased the Pentagon's budget to nearly \$1 trillion—the largest ever budgeted for the military. Yet, by focusing on the low-hanging fruit, it affirms the practical and pragmatic approach of FCNL's advocacy.

**“It is the first time in 55 years—since the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution—that Congress repealed a war powers authorization.”**

“This campaign is inspiring, and it has taught us lessons in tackling the 2001 AUMF and the growing militarism of the government—both within the country and abroad,” said Amelia Kegan, FCNL associate general secretary for policy and advocacy. “We are in this game for the long term as we work for a world without war.” 

*Adlai Amor is an editorial consultant for FCNL.*

## Make a Monthly Gift for Peace & Justice

Join the 2,000+ donors whose gifts support FCNL every month.

 Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Lobbying with Quakers

Sign up securely at [fcnl.org/sustainers](https://fcnl.org/sustainers)

Questions? Email [development@fcnl.org](mailto:development@fcnl.org).

