

MontCo lawmakers urge Congress to cut military spending

By: [Rachel Baye](#) | 10/03/11 10:00 PM

Examiner Staff Writer

Council wants money shifted to local programs lawmakers in Montgomery County -- home to giant defense contractor Lockheed Martin -- want Washington to slash military spending to save their own roads and education programs.

But critics say such cuts would only hurt the county's finances and the thousands of residents who work in defense-related industries.

The County Council on Tuesday is scheduled to introduce a resolution urging Congress to "make major reductions in the Pentagon budget" and spend the savings on infrastructure, education and health care across Maryland.

Sponsored by four council members, the resolution aims to redirect the nation's focus away from wars and toward funding local schools or helping people in Montgomery who are homeless, said Councilman Craig Rice, D-Germantown. Rice, as well as Marc Elrich, D-at large, Nancy Navarro, D-Eastern County, and Council President Valerie Ervin, D-Silver Spring, are sponsoring the resolution.

Montgomery County residents will pay \$2.5 billion for defense spending in fiscal 2012, says the resolution, which wouldn't necessarily lead to any action since the council doesn't control military spending.

"A different military strategy and an end to the wars abroad would free up hundreds of billions of dollars."

But local economists and defense agencies say such cuts likely would hurt local residents more than it would help them.

Cutting defense funding would hurt the thousands of Montgomery residents who work for the Department of Defense, military contractors and related industries, said Steve Silverman, director of the county Department of Economic Development.

The aerospace and defense industry employs more than 30,000 people in Maryland, said Aerospace Industries Association spokeswoman Alexis Allen, citing estimates by Deloitte Consulting.

Bethesda-based Lockheed Martin, the nation's largest defense contractor and one of the Washington area's largest employers, employs about 5,200 workers in Montgomery County alone, according to spokesman Chris Williams.

"Lockheed Martin contributes to Maryland's position as one of the top states for high-tech jobs in the country," said Williams, adding that "massive across-the-board cuts" could damage that status.

If the defense budget were to see the kinds of cuts the council is urging Congress to make, Montgomery County would see a large drop in income tax revenue from residents who work in the local defense industry, said Stephen Fuller, director of George Mason University's Center for Regional Analysis. That would mean less money to spend on roads, education and health care.

Montgomery received \$20.66 billion in federal spending last year, Fuller said. Of that, \$9.2 billion was spent on federal contracts -- including defense -- \$5.1 billion on payroll.

"It's not self-evident that you can make major reductions in the Pentagon budget and not have some negative effects on Montgomery County, so that's a whole other issue and it's not one the council is able to or has time to focus on," said Councilman Phil Andrews, D-Rockville/Gaithersburg, who opposes the resolution.

Gov. Martin O'Malley's office declined to endorse the resolution, and Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett declined to comment via spokesman Patrick Lacefield.

In all likelihood, experts say, the resolution would not have the intended impact.

The defense budget almost definitely will be cut as part of a reduction in government spending, said American Enterprise Institute budget expert Joseph Antos. But the money wouldn't be shifted to local governments.

It warns residents, said Antos, a Gaithersburg resident. "Montgomery County residents are going to have to cough up \$2.5 billion ... unless the federal government chooses to bail them out."