

Two per cent

By Bill Kilpatrick

APPARENTLY SOME 23 United States Senators have their britches in a knot about how much money Canada spends on its defense and how much it contributes to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. A letter was sent to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on May 23 and used some rather strong language about our defense spending. A CBC article quoted excerpts from the letter which stated, "Canada will fail to meet its obligations to the Alliance, to the detriment of all NATO Allies and the free world, without immediate and meaningful action to increase defence spending." One of the senators, Kevin Cramer, a Republican U.S. senator for North Dakota, purportedly stated, "We, the United States, the free world, the North Atlantic Alliance, needs everybody to step up a little more. But Canada's got a long ways to go to get to two per cent." There's a lot to unpack here. First, I didn't know that Canada's defense spending, or rather lack of it, comes at the "detriment of the free world." More on that later. Second, as a Canadian I don't like being lectured by a country who puts themselves before "the free world" in any sentence, especially when that country currently sits below Canada in most of the metrics that measure actual freedom. For example, they sit four points below us on the 2023 human freedom index, Canada is ranked 13 and the U.S. sits at 17. If more military spending makes you free, then it is you, the U.S. who needs to be spending more. Another example comes from Doctors Without Borders who points out that the U.S. currently ranks 55 in terms of freedom of the press, whereas Canada sits in 14. The World Economic Forum lists only 14 countries that have 100 per cent full and equal rights for women under the law. Canada is one of those, but the U.S. is not. While they still scored a 91.3 per cent, for the sake of this argument, Canada still ranked higher. In short, the U.S. needs to stop lecturing other countries about freedom and how to attain it and preserve it when you are continually falling further and further down every scale that measures freedom. Third, Canada spends plenty on its military. In a recent policy perspective paper by the Canadian Global Affairs Institute they acknowledge that Canada has not lived up to its promise made in 2006 that it would bring its military spending up to two per cent of GDP. Currently, the paper goes on to point out that, Canada spends 1.33 per cent of our annual Gross Domestic Product on our military. WorldEconomics.com estimates that Canada's GDP in 2023 was \$2.144 trillion which means that 1.33 per cent equates to approximately \$28.5 billion in annual military spending. The other interesting thing that the Global Affairs article pointed out is that even with Canada spending a mere 1.33 per cent on its military, "Canada ranks as the seventh largest spender (in actual dollars) on defence in NATO [out of 32 countries] and the fourteenth largest in the world." However, this is not enough for these U.S. Senators who would like us to spend another \$16.5 billion on defense. It seems like we spend more than enough on the military and contribute plenty to NATO, except when you consider all the ex-service men and women, and many currently serving, who are struggling to get basic services, food, shelter, and mental health care. Maybe we could deal with this before we consider an increase in the amount we spend on new equipment? Just a thought. Another interesting fact that the Global Affairs article raises is how military spending has varied over the last decade. The CBC article pointed out that "The federal Conservatives have accused the government of neglecting the military and weakening Canada's international image." This was an interesting point to make, and has no doubt been reinforced by this recent letter, but it is in fact a lie. Many, including myself, considered Stephen Harper to be very pro-military, if not pro-war, due to his commitment to the war in Afghanistan; but, as the paper points out, defense spending actually hit its lowest point in 10 years under the Harper government at 0.97 per cent. It seems with all his bluster about Afghanistan, supporting the troops, standing by our allies, especially the U.S., Harper was actually less supportive to the troops than Justin Trudeau. Trudeau raised military and defense spending by \$7.7 billion and the CBC article says that he plans on spending even more stating, "we're not done yet." But will more defense spending actually work to the benefit of the free world as the Senator's suggest? Or should we be spending that money elsewhere? At the end of the day we have one of the largest international borders to defend which sits at 8,891 kilometres. There is no way that this can ever be fully protected from an attack with boots on the ground. Not gonna happen. Nor can we ever spend enough to secure it with weapons, radar, or anything else. It's just too big. In 2001 the U.S. spent \$329 billion on defense and suffered its worst attack since Pearl Harbour. Its massive military investments, for all its innovations and sophisticated weaponry could not stop it. That's because if someone wants to kill you bad enough, they will find a way. Perhaps we should consider another defense strategy to secure our border: ensuring that people do not want to kill us. Investing in healthcare, education, social infrastructure, housing, and real democratic movements both in Canada and in the poorest of nations might be a start. I'm not saying we shouldn't kill them; I'm saying we should kill them? with kindness. We should also remember that the nation's senator's who are pressing us to increase our defense spending have consistently used their military under the guise of spreading freedom and democracy, to undermine those very things throughout the world for the last 70 years. This very same

government invokes the language of freedom while all the time using the actions of tyrants, supporting dictators, torturing, bombing, and destabilizing great swaths of the world from the Middle East to parts of Africa, South America, Indochina, and Central America. The United States' foreign policy over the last 70 years is why they are asking us to increase our defense spending. They have destabilized the world with their military and economic policies and now we have to pay for it. It seems that the 23 senator's economic logic is backwards. It has not been a lack of spending on defense that has negatively impacted the free world, but massive U.S. defense spending that has caused detriment to freedom and democracy throughout the world.