

**Testimony before New York City Council Committee on State and Federal Legislation  
June 9th, 2005  
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National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee**

**Statement Regarding Resolution No. 367 In support of the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Act - H.R. 2037**

My name is Ruth Benn. I live in Brooklyn and work with the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee, which was founded in 1982 by a coalition of groups as a resource center for people who cannot in good conscience pay for war. Some of our affiliates are here in New York City. Many of our activists work for the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund bill.

When you reach a point where you know that if asked you would refuse to fight in a war, the dilemma of paying for it can hit you square in the face. This is not a new issue, and it has a long tradition in this land. In 1637 Algonquin Indians opposed a tax levied by the Dutch to help build a Dutch fort on Long Island. Quakers were among the earliest war tax resisters here, refusing to pay for military expeditions by the King of England. The most famous case of war tax resistance in the U.S. is that of Henry David Thoreau, whose essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" was written after his night in jail in 1847, because he would not pay a \$1 poll tax levied to fund the Mexican War.

If a specific war tax were levied today to pay for the war in Iraq, many more people would face a direct choice. But, the government was smart to mingle all the monies into a general fund to obfuscate how our money is being used. An important aspect Resolution 367 asks the Council and Congress people to report military expenditures to the people of New York. Trade offs are being made every day. For the money New Yorkers will spend on the war in Iraq, we could build more than 100,000 units of affordable housing. Instead of training a young person to guard a missile silo, we could train that person to teach. This resolution can help people better understand these choices.

Like myself, there are hundreds of others in New York City who have felt we must break the law and not give our tax dollars to the IRS. Some put the money aside in case of collection; others pay their taxes to groups who work for peace, take care of people, or aid victims of war. When threatening collection letters come from the IRS, I often ask myself, "why am I doing this?!" But to find the answer I have only to think about Iraq, Afghanistan, the trillions spent building and housing the largest collection of WMDs on earth, or the unmet needs here at home and abroad. These are actions in which I do not want to be complicit. Like millions I believe there are nonmilitary means to national security.

Resolution 367 before the New York City Council acknowledges how the current tax system forces thousands of people to choose between their conscience and the law. It recognizes that decisions made in Washington affect us deeply here in New York City. I hope that it will gain the support of this Committee.

*If a thousand men [and women] were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the state to commit violence and shed innocent blood.*

- Henry David Thoreau, from "On The Duty of Civil Disobedience"