

THE TRUE COST OF DEFENSE

Strength at What Price? *The True Cost of Defense* Explores America's Military Investment

Releases November 1, 2025 via American Public Television and the PBS Video App

ERIE, PA (DATE) -- *The True Cost of Defense*, a one-hour public television documentary from Free To Choose® Media, examines the full human and financial impact of America's military might. The program will be available via American Public Television for national broadcast and streaming via the PBS Video App on November 1, 2025.

America's annual defense budget exceeds \$800 billion, the largest in the world—surpassing the military budgets of China and Russia combined. But the true cost is not limited to bombs or bullets or the machines of war. *The True Cost of Defense* follows quadruple-amputee veteran Travis Mills, military recruiters, families on overseas bases, and communities shaped by global military commitments to show the most profound price of America's defense: the human one.

"The real cost of defense is not about the price of tanks and planes, or bombs and bullets," says Robert Chatfield, President & CEO of Free To Choose Media. "The cost of defense is always and unequivocally about people. This documentary examines how the United States balances the precarious relationship between the benefits of strength and global stability, while asking the important question: What do Americans get in return?"

The True Cost of Defense is the third installment of a series of documentaries focused on American foreign policy and explores multiple dimensions of military spending:

- **The Human Investment:** The film follows military recruiters working to build our all-volunteer force and visits basic training, where each recruit costs approximately \$55,000 to train, before joining a fighting force that costs taxpayers an average of \$140,000 per soldier annually.
- **Infrastructure and Community:** Viewers will visit both domestic military installations that serve as economic anchors for their communities in America and overseas bases like Camp Humphreys in South Korea, which houses 40,000 people and operates as a small American city.
- **The Global Mission:** The documentary examines how America's network of alliances and military partnerships shapes both foreign policy and the individual lives of those who serve, including footage from NATO's eastern flank in Poland.



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- **The Long Aftermath:** The film reveals how the costs of service echo across generations, with veterans' care needs creating expenses that continue decades after conflicts end.

The documentary features insights from distinguished military leaders, policy experts, and veterans' advocates, including former Secretary of Defense General James Mattis, renowned author and security expert Kori Schake, actor and veterans' advocate Gary Sinise, and economist Tim Kane.

Additional commentary is by Elaine McCusker, former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Mackenzie Eaglen, American Enterprise Institute, Jack Segal, former State Department diplomat and advisor to NATO, and Rose Gottemoeller, former Deputy Secretary General of NATO.

"What you don't spend in deterring wars, you have to spend in fighting them. And once you're fighting them, that means lives lost and lives ruined," notes Kori Schake in the film, highlighting the complex calculus of defense spending.

The True Cost of Defense is a production of Free To Choose Media. The program is produced and directed by Kip Perry and Elan Bentov. Thomas Skinner and Robert Chatfield are the Executive Producers.

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About Free To Choose Media

Free To Choose Media produces award-winning documentaries and series for public television, offering diverse voices, powerful stories, and a fresh perspective on a range of important global and national issues. For more than 35 years, Free To Choose Media production teams have traveled the world to explore topics and issues that stimulate thought and cultivate conversations. Recent acclaimed productions include *Free To Speak*, a three-part series on free speech hosted by former ACLU president Nadine Strossen; *We Hold These Truths*, exploring the global quest for liberty hosted by Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg; and *Thomas Sowell: Common Sense in a Senseless World*, a biography of the influential economist. *The True Cost of Defense* is the third production in a series of documentaries on America's military and foreign policy, including *Is American in Retreat?* and *The Price of Peace*. For more information, visit the website at FreeToChooseMedia.org.



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About American Public Television

American Public Television (APT) is the leading syndicator of high-quality, top-rated programming to the nation's public television stations. Founded in 1961, APT distributes 250 new program titles per year and nearly one-half of the top 100 highest-rated public television titles in the U.S. APT's diverse catalog includes prominent documentaries, performance, dramas, how-to programs, classic movies, children's series and news and current affairs programs. *America's Test Kitchen*, *The Best of the Joy of Painting with Bob Ross*, *The Chavis Chronicles*, *Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Television*, *Doc Martin*, *Hope Street*, *Lidia's Kitchen*, *Midsomer Murders*, *My Life is Murder*, *Pati's Mexican Table*, *The Real Wild West*, *Rick Steves' Europe*, *Samantha Brown's Places to Love*, *Table for All with Bukie Elegbede*, *Willie Nelson's 90th Birthday Celebration* and *NHK Newsline* are a sampling of APT's programs, considered some of the most popular on public television. APT also licenses programs internationally through its **APT Worldwide** service and distributes **Create®TV** — featuring the best of public television's lifestyle programming — and **WORLD™**, public television's premier news, science and documentary channel. More information at APTonline.org.

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