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Ben & Jerry: Cut military spending to help other areas

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By Anthony Watt ,

DAVENPORT -- The creators of Ben & Jerry's ice cream were in Davenport Thursday -- not to talk about frozen treats but about how to spend federal money more wisely.

Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield are part of Businessmen for Sensible Priorities, a group that believes about 15 percent of military spending can be spent on other areas of the federal budget, including education, health care and energy independence, without affecting the safety of U.S. troops.

The money would be pulled from the production of conventional weapons designed for the Cold War and from the nuclear arsenal, they said.

"We continue to spend \$60 billion a year to continue manufacturing weapons to fight the Cold War and serve no purpose today," Mr. Cohen said.

The group formed a panel of military experts, including a former Navy fleet commander and a former head of the CIA, who concluded \$10 billion could be safely shaved from the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

The rest would come from funding for weapons like fighter aircraft and submarines meant to fight the next generation of Soviet weapons--weapons that were never built, they said.



[More photos from this shoot](#)

Photo: Paul Colletti

Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, founders of Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, talk with Maria Cummings after signing her poster at Thursday's address by the ice cream entrepreneurs. As part of their swing through Iowa Ben and Jerry stopped at St. Ambrose University talk about government spending.

Mr. Cohen said cutting money from the defense budget might cost jobs, but the jobs lost would be outnumbered by the jobs created from that money going to other areas.

Mr. Cohen and Mr. Greenfield , co-founders of Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc., were in Iowa this week, promoting the group's message and congratulating Iowans who have pledged to only caucus for presidential candidates who support that change.

They said the campaign was shooting for 8,000 people, but recruited 10,000.

"We have a real chance to finally elect a president that is going to put their money where their mouth is," Mr. Cohen said.

About 300 people, the majority of them students, came to St. Ambrose University's Rogalski Center to hear Mr. Cohen and Mr. Greenfield speak of that accomplishment and explain Sensible Priorities' message.

To explain the scale of America's nuclear arsenal, Mr. Cohen dropped a BB into a wastebasket. He said that represented the strength of 15 bombs like the one that destroyed Hiroshima, Japan during World War II.

Six BBs represented enough atomic firepower to destroy Russia, he said.

When he wanted to show the actual strength of the U.S. arsenal, he poured in 10,000 BBs. The rattle of the BBs landing in the metal wastebasket echoed through the ballroom as the crowd watched intently.

Throughout the speech, they urged the audience to fill out their own pledge cards, joining the other 10,000 Iowans who have signed up. Sensible Priorities staffers said afterwards that at least 150 made the pledge.

Mr. Cohen said public involvement is essential for change to happen.

"The public, that's the whole campaign," he said. "Without the public, this campaign isn't going to happen."