

VFW Calls White House Proposals a 'Breach of Faith'

'The proposals are all about money, not about people'

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the nation's oldest and largest major combat veterans' organization is sounding the alarm over President Obama's deficit reduction plan because some proposals are clearly designed to balance the budget on the backs of current and future military service members, retirees and their families.

"The proposals are all about money, not about people," said Richard L. DeNoyer, who was elected Sept. 1 as the commander-in-chief of the 2 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.

Released by the White House today was a summary of the president's plan that impacts military retirees as well as those still serving and their families. The plan would impose an initial \$200 annual fee on TRICARE-for-Life recipients, increase TRICARE pharmacy copayments for military dependents and retirees of all ages, and create a commission to examine overhauling the existing military retirement system.

"Our nation's financial situation cannot be solved by breaking faith with those who singlehandedly fight our nations wars — be it today or tomorrow," said DeNoyer, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Middleton, Mass. "You cannot pass along our nation's security to future generations just for short-term financial gain. That is an extremely dangerous assumption, and totally disregards the fact that there is an inherent cost that our nation should be more than willing to pay in exchange for asking someone to join, much less donate 20 or more years of their youth to defend our country."

The VFW national commander said he was surprised by the TRICARE-for-Life fee because "the president has repeatedly said he would not balance the budget on the backs of veterans," said DeNoyer. "We were against TRICARE fee increases when the Defense Department first proposed it for working-age retirees in February, and the VFW is definitely

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against imposing fees on those 65 and older who reside on fixed incomes and who are already forced to make Medicare Part B payments. Imposing a \$200 annual fee with unknown future increases on this age group is an extreme breach of faith."

DeNoyer said the VFW has also been strongly against changing the military retirement system ever since the Pentagon first decided to float as a trial balloon the recommendation made by the Defense Business Board, a civilian advisory group whose purpose is to bring corporate "best practices" to a military institution it has nothing in common with.

"It disregards decades of upfront service and sacrifice that's required of the less than 10 percent of the force who choose to make the military a career," he said. "It ignores the fact that when the economy rebounds the military services won't be fat with record recruiting and retention rates. Plus it fails to mention that any potential savings won't be realized for at least two decades, while our military could still be engaged in a multi-front war on terrorism."

Those in uniform also pushed back. An online survey published Aug. 29 in all four service issues of *The Military Times* showed that 88 percent of the force clearly disliked changing the existing retirement system. A front-page headline in the Sept. 5 editions screamed "Don't mess with our retirement!"

DOD leadership has since been working hard to calm their fears, to include saying the proposal had not yet been presented formally, and that any such change would only impact future recruits, not those currently serving or those already retired. Military retirees and those in uniform can separate rhetoric from reality, however, especially given today's White House announcement.

"Changing the retirement system will provide an incentive to separate after 10 years, which will decimate the ranks of mid-career officers and noncommissioned officers when they are in their prime working age," said DeNoyer. "It will make potential recruits think twice about joining, because they can receive a 401(k)-type retirement plan anywhere and earn it much more safely. And it could mean future military leaders get promoted not because they are the best, but because no one else is around."

The VFW national commander believes demands for the nation's military to sacrifice more is a perfect recipe for another hollow force, and could threaten the continued success of the All Volunteer Force.

"Instead of consistently trying to bring the military closer to parity with civilian or other federal employee plans, perhaps what we most want to hear is how America is going to bridge the shared sacrifice gap with the less than 1 percent of the population who are in the fight — then we can talk about parity," said DeNoyer, who wants VFW representation on the retirement commission.

Threats to the military retirement system and TRICARE are just two of 10 services and programs that the VFW believes Congress or the Administration want to reduce or eliminate to help pay for 10 years of war. Click [here](#) to read more about the "10 for 10" plan, as well as how you can help stop efforts to balance the budget on the backs of veterans, service members and their families.