

Sequestration Must End!

VFW again calls on Congress to end the sequester

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The national commander of the nation's largest and oldest major combat veterans organization blames Congress for the Defense Department's fiscal year 2015 budget request that further reduces troop strengths and military compensation and benefits.

"The longer the threat of sequestration continues to remain the law of the land, the more our nation's military will continue to shrink to meet ever-declining budgets," said William A. Thien, who leads more than 1.9 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its Auxiliaries.

"There are consequences to forcing the Pentagon to first reduce its budget by \$487 billion over 10 years, then to double that amount due to sequestration," he said. "Sequestration jeopardizes readiness and modernization programs and the continued viability of the all-volunteer force, which is why the VFW will redouble our efforts to work with Congress and the administration to end the sequester and help bring financial stability to a military that is still at war, and who will still be required to operate in a very dangerous and unpredictable world."

Key personnel proposals contained in the \$496 billion FY 2015 budget proposal:

Continue lowering active-duty Army troop strengths from the planned 80,000 reduction to about 130,000. This would drop the active Army from its post-9/11 high of 570,000 to 440,000. Sequestration could force the active Army down to 420,000 soldiers.

- The Army National Guard and Army Reserve would drop from 358,000 and 205,000 to 335,000 and 195,000, respectively. Sequestration could force the Guard as low as 315,000 and the Reserves to 185,000.
- The budget plan had no new troop reductions for the Air Force or Navy, though the

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proposed loss of some major weapons systems — most notably the entire A-10 and U-2 aircraft fleets, and 11 Navy cruisers — could further reduce manning requirements.

- The Marine Corps is on pace to draw down to 182,000 Marines, a number that could go to 175,000 if the sequester continues.
- Limit military pay raises for the next five years, which could recreate the double-digit, military-civilian pay gap of a decade ago. In FY 2015, DOD is recommending a 1 percent increase for everyone below the pay grade of O-7.
- Housing allowances would be gradually reduced from 100 percent of costs to 95 percent; payments would be grandfathered for troops in their current assignments.
- A TRICARE for Life enrollment fee equal to 1 percent of retiree pay — not to exceed \$300 per person — plus additional increases to pharmaceutical copayments, which would impact military dependents as well as retirees. DOD also recommends merging the three TRICARE Prime, Standard and Extra programs into one, which could create a new enrollment fee for those currently subscribed to TRICARE Standard and Extra, and increased copayments for those enrolled in TRICARE Prime. The Pentagon has been asked to provide more details.
- Regarding military commissaries, DOD wants to reduce over three years the current \$1.4 billion in appropriated support to \$400 million, which could force the Defense Commissary Agency to offset the difference either by raising prices, increasing the 5 percent surcharge, or both. DOD estimates that such decisions would lower overall commissary savings from 30 percent to 10 percent, which could close some smaller U.S. stores. This recommendation would not affect DeCA's 75 overseas commissaries.
- A call for Congress to authorize a base realignment and closure round in 2017.

Read more at http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf.