

VFW: Ending Sequestration the Best 2016 Budget Request

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the 1.9 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and its Auxiliaries said Monday's fiscal 2016 federal budget request for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense were good starting points to continue an important conversation with Congress and the American people about what it means to properly take care of veterans, service members and their families. However, he said the best budget request would be for Congress to first end sequestration.

"The VA is tasked with caring for America's wounded, ill and injured veterans, and DOD is tasked with protecting every freedom we hold dear," said VFW National Commander John W. Stroud, "but as much as their budget submissions look toward the future, the two departments can't ignore a rearview mirror that shows a restart of mandatory sequestration on Oct. 1."

The president exempted the VA from sequestration in 2013, but it is unknown if that exemption still applies; however, how the sequester directly impacts DOD and all federal agencies who support veterans continue to be top VFW concerns.

As mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011, the Pentagon must cut its budget by \$487 billion over 10 years, but sequestration doubles that amount. Cutting almost \$1 trillion from the Pentagon's budget — no matter how dispersed — could eliminate quality of life programs for military personnel and their families, and tremendously impact readiness and modernization programs, to the point of jeopardizing the military's ability to respond when and where needed.

After a brief delay, the sequester began in the second half of FY 2013. In order to meet the mandatory spending cuts without impacting combat operations in Afghanistan, the four military services slashed flying, sailing and troop training, and began furloughing its civilian workforce. A Bipartisan Budget Agreement signed in December 2013 put a temporary hold on sequestration until FY 2016, which begins Oct. 1.

The VA's budget request is a good start, said Stroud, even though its construction account request is \$1 billion less than what the VFW and its three [Independent Budget](#) coauthors

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recommend. The VFW national commander also said the military's request continues the Pentagon's mantra to slow-the-growth in pay and benefits by proposing a mere 1.3-percent pay raise, to further reduce housing allowances, and to create higher out-of-pocket health care costs for active-duty military families and retirees of all ages.

"The VFW looks forward to continuing this most important conversation with Congress and the American people about what it means to properly take care of veterans, service members and their families, but all is for naught as long as sequestration remains the law of the land," said Stroud. "Congress must end it or replace it, so that the rest of America can begin moving forward."