

VFW Cautious About Military Cuts

Press conference, written plan 'Extremely light on specifics'

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By Craig Staats, MSNBC

With more questions than answers, the Veterans of Foreign Wars reacted cautiously Thursday to [President Obama's plan](#) for a slimmed-down military and its potential ramifications for future veterans.

Joe Davis, the VFW's director of public affairs, said the press conference and written plan were "extremely light on specifics" and "more of a prelude to the upcoming FY 2013 budget request."

"The president, (Defense) secretary (Leon Panetta) and (Joint Chief of Staff) chairman (Martin E. Dempsey) pledged to preserve the all-volunteer force, to avoid hollowing out the force, and to protect those benefits that are provided right now," Davis said. "This suggests, given all the trial balloons floated recently, that some major changes are coming to the current military retirement system, which in exchange for the immediate receipt of a modest retirement check, requires you to first donate 20 or more years of your youth to the nation.

"The VFW is extremely concerned that requiring those who voluntarily sacrifice the most for our nation to sacrifice even more will spell an end to the all-volunteer force, which is an expense this nation cannot afford to pay," Davis said. "But still, we have to wait until the budget request is released till we know for sure what people and programs are being threatened."

Reductions in force could mean more service members entering the private labor force, and

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confronting the nation's persistent high unemployment.

Already, unemployment among veterans is higher than among the general labor force. In November, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the national rate at 8.6 percent, compared to 12.1 percent for veterans who have left active duty service since 2001. That figure may understate the problem, though. Businessweek magazine reported that among the youngest veterans, age 18 to 24, the unemployment rate was [30.4 percent in October](#).

In November, President Obama signed the [“VOW to Hire Heroes Act,”](#) which provides tax credits to businesses that hire veterans. The credits vary depending on how long the veteran has been looking for work, and whether he or she has any service-connected disabilities, but can be as much as \$9,600. While Congress stalled on most of the president's job package, the hire-a-vet credit received bipartisan support.

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