A Letter to Congress from VFW Executive Director

Sep 13, 2013

To: All Members of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives
From: Robert E. Wallace
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.
Washington Office
Re: Department of Defense Budget
Date: September 12, 2013

The Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., John Biedrzycki, and I recently returned from visiting NATO and American Forces stationed in Europe. From SHAPE and NATO headquarters to EUCOM, AFRICOM, U.S. Army Europe and U.S. Air Forces Europe, the troops and civilians in the field are very worried about what's going on in Washington, and how it is directly impacting morale, readiness and training, allied partnerships, and personal career opportunities in a military they love dearly.

I have already shared with Defense Secretary Hagel the five universal concerns we heard from our forward-deployed forces of all ranks and pay grades. Now I want to share those concerns with you. They are:

- The direct impact an uncertain budget environment and sequestration is having on military training and readiness, civilian furloughs, official travel, and military Quality of Life programs, such as daycare, DOD schools, commissaries and exchanges.
- The effects an uncertain budget and sequestration will have on future force reductions and reduced career opportunities for mid-grade military personnel.
- Pay and benefits concerns over future pay increases, healthcare costs should they reach retirement, and what type retirement system will exist for future service members.
- The need to maintain a forward deployed force in Europe in support of NATO partners, and to maintain the relationships and joint training exercises forged over 12 years of war with those partners.
- And the negative impact of eliminating Living Quarters Allowances for 659 DOD civilians serving overseas, and the Catch-22 requirement that they must first admit owing a debt to the government before a waiver request can be submitted. These

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civilians were paid LQA through no fault of their own, and some of this "alleged debt" could range up to seven figures. The VFW shares the concerns already expressed by every overseas combatant commander about the negative morale issue, the additional cost of an unscheduled civilian PCS at a time the Department is trying to save money, and the absurdity of knowing that their replacements will be authorized LQA. If the Defense Department does not fix this problem, Congressional action will be required.

In addition, over the past two weeks, I have had the opportunity to visit Fort Lewis and Nellis Air Force Base where the concerns of assigned military and civilian personnel echo those we met in Europe.

The failure of Congress to pass a budget is having a perilous impact on a Defense Department that is struggling to maintain a strong face, but in reality isn't flying its aircraft, sailing its ships or training its ground forces. Breaking faith with an all-volunteer force and their families who have shouldered 12 years of war is not how you solve our nation's budget problems; all it does is further weaken an overtasked military and embolden our enemies to stretch and stress our remaining resources even further.

The troops are willing to go into harm's way at a moment's notice. In return, all they ask from our nation—from our Congress—is that they be properly trained and equipped, and that their families be cared for while they are deployed and should the worst occur. The lack of a budget and sequestration is causing concerns our fighting force and their families do not need or deserve.

Congress must pass a budget for the Department of Defense and do so now. The VFW stands ready to work with you to ensure that America's Armed Forces have a budget to carry out their vital national security mission.

Respectfully,

Robert E. Wallace
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.
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