

Remarks To the National Defense Industrial
Association

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Remarks as prepared for delivery

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Thank you Sean for those warm words and for this important award. As I look around the room tonight, I see some of the past recipients of the Eisenhower award, like General Myers.

I am deeply honored to be considered in the same class of public servant as these men and women.

As I address you tonight, I will try and keep the words of President Eisenhower in mind when he said, “I can think of nothing more boring for the American people than to have to sit in their living rooms for a whole half hour looking at my face on their television screens.”

But of course, that isn't the line that Ike is most famous for - at least in this room. At the end of his administration, President Eisenhower warned the country about the dangers of a “military industrial complex.”

His concerns were well placed, but too many focus on one line in that speech, and missed the

larger point, that, in Ike's own words - "A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction."

President Eisenhower, like President Reagan, understood that peace through strength was the best policy. He understood, that only with leaders who are willing to take responsibility and tell hard truths when they need telling, could that strength endure.

Today, America and the forces of freedom face threats at every turn. Enemies like Iran and North Korea are building nuclear weapons targeted on America and our allies.

Al Qaeda, though weakened, continues to search for safe havens. They continue to plot to attack us at home and abroad. They aspire to kill thousands.

Continued economic turmoil has forced many of our most stalwart allies to turn inward, and in some cases gut their own military forces to pay for an unaffordable social welfare state.

One of our most senior military officers recently told me that in his long career in uniform, this is the most dangerous time he has ever seen.

He is right.

And as we face these dangers, we have to face the grim reality that the worst of them – crippling cuts to our military- will be self-inflicted.

By now you know the facts of sequestration. On top of the half trillion in cuts the President and Congress have already imposed, we face an additional \$50 billion a year- every year- for the next decade.

A total of \$100 billion a year – for the next ten years- cut from our men and women in uniform.

By now you've heard the talking points; the smallest Navy since World War I, the smallest Air Force in our history, hundreds of thousands of men and women in uniform who deserve ticker tape parades, but are facing pink slips instead.

My friends, tonight I will speak more directly about sequestration than I have before. The time to find a solution is running out. The time for guarded language has past.

Sequestration will do what the greatest generation fought so hard to prevent and defend against more than a half century ago. It will do what the Soviets exhausted themselves attempting. It will do what countless tin pot dictators, ideological madmen, and ruthless suicide bombers have failed to do.

Sequestration will limit the United States' power and influence in the world. It will restrict our ability to defend vital interests. It will take America off the ramparts of freedom.

When it does, it won't be because we were defeated by an enemy. It will happen because our own elected leaders- from the President down - have failed.

What is worse is that it will be caused not by a single point of failure or miscalculation, but by a string of failures, an unwillingness to recognize the situation for what it is, and a refusal to exercise the leadership to stop it.

I'll give you an example. Last week President Obama gave a commencement address at the Air Force Academy. There, he presented cadets with his vision for an "American Century" of peace and prosperity.

This era, the President said, would come about because of a "new confidence in our leadership."

In this era, our men and women in uniform would experience fewer deployments. They would have more time to train with better equipment.

America would keep faith with men and women in uniform. When danger does come, the President promised the cadets, they would be better prepared.

You know what I say? To quote another famous World War II general, “Nuts”

How will our forces face fewer deployments when the total size of our military is dramatically smaller and will only be gutted further by sequestration?

In fact, General Allen told me that under sequestration, our Marines won't be able to achieve rotational deployments. They will be the first in when a conflict begins, and they will have to stay until that conflict ends.

How are they better equipped when the President backs cutting vital equipment? Can the President really tell graduating Air Force Cadets with a straight face, that they will be better prepared with 60's era U2 reconnaissance than with cutting edge drone technology?

How does the President plan to keep faith with our troops when he proposed to dramatically increase TRICARE fees on military retirees, and create whole new fees?

How can we inspire confidence in our leadership by leading from behind? How can we expect our allies to stay in the thick of the fight when we base our withdrawal schedules not on the advice of commanders on the ground, but on the political schedule here at home?

The President's vision of an "American Century" is hollow, dangerous, and takes for granted the military strength and power required to protect the homeland, assure our allies, and keep our enemies at bay.

Speaking softly is all well and good, but we cannot forget that it only works when you carry a big stick.

President Obama closed his remarks by reminding the Cadets that those who bet against America have always been wrong. That is true, but I am not willing to bet that this President will show the leadership we need to keep America's military strong.

Just last week, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid expressed his **preference** for sequestration. "My people in the state of Nevada, and I think the country, have had enough of whacking all the programs. We've cut them to a bare bone and defense is going to have to bear their share of the burden."

Senator Reid has apparently forgotten that 50% of all the cuts we've had so far have come from the military, even though it is only 20% of the budget.

We all know what Senator Reid won't admit; that he is using cuts to our military as a cynical tool to force his domestic agenda in the Senate. An agenda of increased taxes, increased regulations, and more government programs we don't want and can't afford.

That agenda can't get passed on the backs of public support- so he is trying to pass it on the backs of our troops.

If we continue on Senator Reid's path, who is going to have our backs the next time we are attacked?

I will not stand by and let our national security, much less the livelihoods of the men and women who support our troops, be held hostage in a game of political chicken.

Senator Reid is ignoring the fact that Sequestration isn't something that happens in January, it is happening NOW.

I understand what you're facing.

All of you in this room are making plans now to prepare for Sequestration. You are looking at payrolls, plants, and benefits- and finding places to cut. Many of the choices you are making can't be undone, even if Sequestration is entirely resolved sometime next year.

What a shame it will be for those men and women who lose their jobs this month or next, to watch Senator Reid finally do his part to resolve this crisis in November or December. What can Harry Reid expect to say to them, other than "just kidding"?

Senator Reid speaks of making revenue part of the solution. His answer is to bring more taxpayer dollars into the treasury. This, from a man who hasn't passed a budget- even his own President's budget- in more than a thousand days.

Senator Reid, if you are going to ask the American people for more of their hard-earned money, don't they at least deserve to know how you'd spend it first?

I sincerely doubt that it would be spent to prevent more cuts to the military.

We all know that Washington doesn't have a revenue problem. We have a spending problem. We can eliminate 100% of the discretionary budget- including the military- and we will still be running a deficit of 500 billion dollars a year. To save our military, to keep this country strong, and to assure a true American century, we have to get our mandatory spending under control.

House Republicans have put multiple plans on the table to avert sequestration and get our finances back on the right track.

Most recently, we adopted Chairman Ryan's plan to pay down the first year of sequestration for Defense and non-defense by making needed reforms to entitlement programs.

I have my own proposal, to pay off the first year of sequestration simply by reducing the federal workforce by 10% over ten years through attrition. For DoD, that means returning to the size of the defense workforce in 2009 simply by limiting new hires. Under sequestration, on the other hand, the Pentagon expects to furlough a quarter of its civilian workforce.

These are reasonable proposals, but the President maintains a veto threat over them and Harry Reid continues to block them in the Senate. At the same time, they offer no plans of their own.

It is time we change that, and together we can.

I remind you that that every prediction about this debt crisis was wrong. Those who predicted that we wouldn't force spending cuts to earn an increase in the debt ceiling were wrong.

Those who said the super-committee would do their jobs and get a deal were wrong.

There are those who say that Congress and the President would never just "let" sequestration happen. Some among them may be sitting in this very room thinking, "There must be some secret plan out there that will allow all of us to get to the table at the stroke of midnight and iron out a fix."

But folks, we know what that table looks like. We have been there time and time again. Leader Cantor and Vice President Biden were last spring. The Speaker and the President were last summer. The supercommittee was last fall. And yet sequester is the law of the land.

It will happen unless we stop ignoring it and the political will of the House, Senate and Executive forces a fix.

Those who believe that a lame duck session of Congress will suddenly come to its senses and resolve sequestration, without damaging our national security, **are foolish.**

And that political will does not come without the combined strength of your voice. No one gets to sit this one out and expect a successful result.

I am often reminded of one final Eisenhower story. On the eve of the Normandy landings, General Eisenhower drafted a statement to be released if the D-Day invasion failed. It said, *“Our landings have failed and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based on the best information available. The troops, the air and the Navy did all that bravery could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.”*

It is a powerful reminder of the kind of leadership we are lacking in this country, from those our troops rely on most to protect their interests.

In the coming days I will be calling on the President to be more explicit about the consequences Sequestration will have on our military. He owes it to our men and women in uniform and to lawmakers, to tell us what the impacts will be and how the Pentagon is planning for the cuts that will fall in January.

I will also be calling on Senator Reid to come to the table with a plan. Sequestration isn't a political football, it is a national crisis- and it could turn into a national disgrace. If Senator Reid doesn't have a plan of his own, he must allow the Senate to consider one of the other plans that have been introduced.

Those of you in this room have a unique story to tell.

Tonight I am calling on you to tell it.

Many of you stood tonight to salute your service, and those you served with.

I understand that even though you are no longer in uniform, you continue to serve. You stand next to and behind our men and women on the front lines. You know better than anyone how irrational cuts can hurt them.

You stand next to and behind the men and women on the assembly lines, in the labs, and on the testing range. You know what these cuts will do to their jobs. You know when those jobs are gone, the people may not ever come back.

Yours will be the horrible task of thanking them for their service as they walk out the door and into an uncertain future.

You must fight with me to avert this disaster that is entirely of our own making. You must begin to tell your story, and you must tell it today. To wait for the next election, the next congress, or even the next month, is to accept sequestration and all the consequences it brings.

You must tell your story. You must talk about the jobs lost, the corners cut, the innovation and opportunities deferred.

A year from now, I fear we will find ourselves back in this room asking what happened? How did we fail - again?

If we do, to paraphrase General Eisenhower, the blame for our silence is ours alone.

Thank you again for this important award. Good night.