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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

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ROBERT L. SIMMONS, II, STAFF DIRECTOR

June 27, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
S-221, The Capitol
Washington DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

We call on you to bring to the Senate floor immediately a plan to resolve sequestration. As you are no doubt aware, unless the House and Senate act before the end of the year to offset over a trillion dollars in debt relief over the next decade, a draconian sequestration process will take place, initiating deep cuts to the discretionary budget. These cuts will have catastrophic impacts on programs upon which our constituents depend; none more so than America's military, which will face an additional across the board cut of \$55 billion each year for the next decade above the \$487 billion already reduced over this timeframe.

We are profoundly concerned about recent comments in the press that have been attributed to you. According to these accounts, you have said, "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."

Our committee has closely scrutinized the scope and impact of the cuts this Congress has already made to the military. Perhaps you have not had the opportunity to do the same. We can tell you with absolute certainty, however, that it is incorrect to suggest that our men and women in uniform have not borne their share of the burden. Indeed, nearly \$500 billion has already been cut from military spending accounts for half of the deficit reduction efforts achieved so far, even though national defense accounts for only 20% of the budget. Senior military commanders have testified to our committee that those cuts take us right to the "razor's edge." After a decade of hard fighting, repeated deployments, and a half trillion dollars cut from their resources, our men and women in uniform have borne more than their share of the burden. To suggest otherwise is disingenuous.

The Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have described the consequences of sequestration in the most dire terms. By all reasonable accounts, these cuts are to be avoided in the interest of national security. The recent ruling by the Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget to apply war funding to sequestration only makes resolution more urgent.

While most pundits and prognosticators have predicted that sequestration won't be resolved until the lame duck session, we implore you to join us in finding a solution immediately. Our commanders, the troops who serve under them, and the industrial base that supports them are all making choices now based on the specter of sequestration. Many of those choices involve job losses. Most are irrevocable. While sequestration won't officially be enforced until next year, it is exacting a cost on our national security and our economy today.

Your recent comments suggest that you believe Republicans view the military as a parochial concern. Such a notion is absurd. Equally absurd is the concept that vital national security programs would be used as leverage in a larger political contest over domestic spending and policy.- Yet both absurdities characterize the current state of play on sequestration.

In May, the House passed a plan to avert sequestration for defense and non-defense spending in FY 2013; thus moving the debate over larger spending issues into a less political season. Members of this Committee and Senators Kyl, McCain, Graham, Rubio, and Ayotte have introduced companion legislation for a one year sequester fix. In an effort to seek a bipartisan path forward, these fixes apply to both defense and non-defense discretionary programs. The President claims that his own budget request would resolve sequestration by increasing revenue. But yet the Senate has still not acted.

We request that you immediately put forward your own plan or stop obstructing plans others have already offered. If you believe that there is still waste in the Defense budget which could be better directed to domestic spending, the time to identify it is now. If you cannot, we suggest that you abandon the unhelpful notion that further arbitrary cuts will improve national security or resolve our debt crisis.

The time for rhetoric has passed. Resolution cannot wait until next month, or a lame duck session, or even the next Congress. News reports indicate that you are waiting for a "better" proposal. If you have a solution in mind, it is incumbent upon you to bring it to the floor of your own chamber, pass it, and allow us to move into a conference. Further cuts to the military don't affect some faceless bureaucracy. The White House has determined that sequestration will arbitrarily gut the funding to our troops who are putting their lives on the line for our country every day. Unless you allow a plan to resolve sequestration to come to the Senate floor, you will not only force the automatic cuts to your domestic agenda, but you will bear responsibility for a morally unconscionable outcome that breaks faith with our service members and their families. We must resolve sequestration now.

Sincerely,



Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Chairman



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