

From: [Raughter, John B.](#)
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American Legion presses Congress to avoid further DoD cuts

With the Pentagon's release of a five-year budget plan that cuts \$260 billion in defense spending, The American Legion is pressing Congress to find other ways by which to reduce the country's staggering \$15.2 trillion debt.

Over the next decade, defense spending must be cut by \$450 billion as required by the Budget Control Act passed by Congress last August.

"Congress failed to act last year when the Supercommittee failed to cut more than a trillion dollars from federal budgets," American Legion National Commander Fang A. Wong said. "Our congressional leaders must find the courage to act this year before our national security pays the price with further cuts to defense spending."

Wong noted that President Obama spoke of his commitment to "the finest military in the world" during his State of the Union speech. "But how long can America's military remain the finest in the world if we keep bleeding its resources and capabilities?" Wong questioned. "We are seeing a shift in the military's strategic focus from the Middle East to Asia and the Pacific. But what kind of tactical strength will we have to back it up?"

Last October, the 2.4-million member Legion passed a resolution that called upon Congress and the White House "to cease all efforts to reduce the defense budget from its current level."

In its resolution, The American Legion noted that national security spending "did not create the current budget crisis, and further cuts to national defense will not solve it," and that Department of Defense leadership "has continually warned that significant reductions in defense spending pose serious risks to the future security of the United States."

The Legion resolution pointed out that DoD has virtually no research and development for next-generation weapons systems, and its percentage of total federal spending is the lowest since pre-World War II budgets.

If sequestration takes effect next January, DoD will automatically have to cut an additional \$540 billion from spending over the next decade.

"Congress needs to halt this fiscal bludgeoning that will only put our men and women in uniform at greater risk when they respond to outside threats – and those threats will most certainly arise," Wong said. "A trillion dollars in savings might make a dent in our federal deficit, but it will gut our military and turn it into something that betrays the trust of our troops."

The budget cuts will also have a serious impact on employment. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta has warned that a \$1 trillion cut to defense spending could increase the country's unemployment rate by 1 percent – more than a million jobs.

“Washington still has time to make this right,” Wong said. “It needs to take another look at non-discretionary spending and leave the DoD budget alone. After all, what good are entitlements if we can’t defend our own country?”