

From: [March, Joseph H.](#)
To: [Public Relations Division](#)
Subject: Press Release: "Houston, we have a problem!"
Date: Tuesday, August 27, 2013 4:54:50 PM
Importance: High

The American Legion

For God and country

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Houston, we have a problem!”

National commander delivers strong message to Congress and the White House to

stop sequestration from affecting the troops and veterans.

HOUSTON (Aug. 27, 2013) -- American Legion National Commander James E. Koutz provided a list of what he calls “anti-sequestration” incentives in a message before the 95th national convention of the nation’s largest veterans organization Tuesday.

Drastic budget cuts imposed this year after Congress was unable to produce a solution to the federal deficit crisis “are failing our troops,” he told thousands gathered in Houston. “They are failing veterans. And they are failing the American people.”

“Houston, we have a problem!” Koutz shouted from the podium in his convention-opening

remarks. “The fault is bipartisan, and blame lies both within Congress and the executive branch.”

Among his list of “anti-sequestration” incentives are protections for VA health care, TRICARE and military pensions, all of which attract top men and women to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces and stay in. “These are reasonable benefits earned through years of service and sacrifice... Anyone who believes that these benefits are too generous is certainly welcome to visit their local military recruiter and sign on the dotted line. A career in the military might change their way of thinking, unless, of course, they have already let that opportunity pass by and are trying to increase the burden on those who serve in their place.”

Koutz argued that benefits and quality-of-life programs for veterans and members of the armed forces, including the post-9/11 GI Bill, contribute favorably to the nation’s prosperity and would not, as some have argued, “break the treasury. Time doesn’t allow me to even list the multitudes of CEOs, senators, doctors and ordinary Americans who told us they owe their success to the education and other benefits obtained by what has been called the greatest legislation (the GI Bill) ever passed by Congress.”

The commander reflected on his appearance in Normandy during the 69th anniversary of the D-Day invasion that liberated France from Nazi tyranny during World War II. Sequestration, he said, had kept active-duty U.S. troops from participating in this year’s anniversary, sending a message “to the world that the U.S. government and – most importantly, our military – are closed for business.

“One reason I take the slight by our military so seriously is because of the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion. We promise to ‘preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars.’”

Koutz looked back with gratitude for his fellow Legionnaires. “Your generosity surpassed even my expectations,” he said, noting that an original fundraising goal of \$500,000 was surpassed by last May for Operation Comfort Warriors, a program that provides comfort items for active-duty servicemembers recovering in military hospitals and transition units. He said he was certain the revised OCW goal of \$750,000 was likely to be beaten by the end of the convention.

The commander commended the Legion’s corps of some 2,600 accredited service officers who are working day and night to reduce the backlog of unresolved VA disability claims. He also told the crowd about the importance of the Legion’s veteran job fairs and career events. “We understand and appreciate the skills and training required to succeed in the military. Not only is this a service to the veteran seeking a job, but it is a huge benefit to the employers that need good, dedicated and smart workers.”

The commander drew an ovation when he renewed The American Legion’s commitment to seek passage of a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from desecration. “The American Legion wholeheartedly supports a flag protection amendment to the U.S. Constitution,” he said. “Please call on your congressional delegation to support House Joint Resolution 47 and Senate Joint Resolution 17, so we can give Old Glory the respect and protection that she deserves.”

He also urged his fellow Legionnaires to use the coming 100th anniversary of the organization to stimulate membership growth. “What better way to mark The American

Legion centennial than with an all-time high in membership? It is an ambitious goal, and it won't happen if we don't bust our tails recruiting and retaining members... The eligible members are out there. We just need to sign them up."

And, he added, "If people ask you for a reason to join, tell them you are inviting them to a holiday party. The holiday is Veterans Day. And, as I have been saying all year, every day is Veterans Day."

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