

Hagel Warns Against Budget Cuts

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Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel explained to attendees the need to balance military readiness with mandated cuts to the Pentagon's budget, also known as sequestration. He outlined his department's four main objectives going forward: prioritizing core mission capabilities, maximizing combat power, strengthening military readiness, and honoring service and sacrifice. "DoD is not a corporation and cannot be run like one," the secretary said, noting the Pentagon pays for everything from family support to missing personnel searches.

Hagel pointed out that the Pentagon has already cut \$487 billion, and unless laws change regarding sequestration, the department plans to cut \$500 billion over the next decade. The VFW life member of Post 3407 in Columbus, Neb., said these mandated budget cuts are "irresponsible policy." He added that "our people have been pushed to the breaking point."

On the issue of maximizing combat power, Hagel said "every dollar we spend [on unnecessary items] is a dollar we can't spend on troops." He said that he and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey have cut their staff budgets by 20% each.

Hagel warned that looming cuts could curtail training activities and the modernization of weapons, stressing that "you can't buy back readiness." He told vets in attendance that today's active-duty force deserves the same level of preparedness that they had. "If trends continue, we could end up with a smaller number of well-paid troops who are ill-equipped and under-trained," the Vietnam veteran said.

Honoring service and sacrifice is paramount, too, he said. With active-duty troops transitioning to the civilian world, Hagel emphasized we must continue to pay close attention to their needs: "We are also dealing with debilitating, insidious and destructive challenges such as alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Our military leaders do everything possible to protect our men and women on the battlefield. We must make this same commitment to our people here at home."

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

Hagel underscored the Pentagon's and VA's partnership to reduce the VA claims backlog and commitment to a seamless transition. He recalled last year's overhaul of the Pentagon's transition assistance program, Transition GPS, which he said is "working well."

The defense secretary also made sure to acknowledge the 60th anniversary of the Korean War's end, saying that "your fellow citizens are proud of what you [Korean War vets] accomplished."

Kentucky Senators Tackle Foreign/Domestic Policies

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) declared that America should stay out of the world's civil wars. He criticized U.S. arms deals with military dictators and the Muslim Brotherhood. "Common sense tells us we shouldn't send arms to countries that burn our flags," he said to rousing applause. Specifically mentioning Egypt and the \$60 billion given to former president Hosni Mubarak, he said that 75% of the public is against arming the Brotherhood, but 75% of the Senate voted to continue military aid.

On Syria, Paul criticized military support for the 17 rebel groups "where we can't tell friend from foe." "The Constitution is clear," he said to thunderous applause, "Congress declares war, not the President." Rand continued: "I'm not sending my kids or yours to fight for stalemate," adding that "our weapons could be used against the 2 million Christians in Syria."

The senator also faulted U.S. policy toward Pakistan and Libya. He said the U.S. should not give "one penny more to any nation that burns our flag" and elicited a strong audience reaction by stating that "no politician should ever stand in the way of American soldiers doing their job."

Paul suggested a new course by recalling former President Eisenhower's "yardstick" for military intervention, asking "Is it good for America?" He concluded by saying it is "our sacred duty to provide care for those who protected us."

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) attacked the nation's massive debt, urging a 2%-3% reduction in government spending. However, "support for America's veterans should always remain a top priority," he said. He also pointed out that some 750,000 vets are "stuck" in VA's claims backlog, which he termed "a national disgrace" and "totally unacceptable." With help from VFW's Washington Office, McConnell led a legislative fight to reduce the precedence of the recently proposed Distinguished Warfare Medal, which was totally eliminated by the Pentagon.

Recognizing Outstanding Service

The U.S. Navy Special Warfare Command received VFW's *Armed Forces Award*. Accepting the award was the Deputy Commander Rear Adm. Scott Moore, who provided some background on the elite Navy SEALs, some 80% of whom are combat veterans. He said the average SEAL is 28 years old who has completed around 100 missions and 10 deployments in 12 years. Adding that most are married, he said the SEALs have "enough Gold Star wives to make a SEAL Team."

Retired Army Gen. Peter Chiarelli received VFW's *Americanism Award* for his work with One Mind for Research, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the research, funding and public awareness of mental illness and traumatic brain injury. Chiarelli, who served 24 months in Iraq including as commander of the Multinational Force-Iraq, said the rate of troops diagnosed with TBI or PTSD increased from 36% in 2008 to 67% in 2012. "Do everything you can to make sure this generation of veterans gets the treatment it deserves," Chiarelli said.

The commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Adm. Robert J. Papp, Jr., received VFW's *Eisenhower Award*. He reported that 1,700 Coast Guardsmen are deployed in 30 countries. He mentioned that during WWII one out of every eight families had a veteran in it, whereas today that number is one out of every 150 families. Papp became a member of VFW's Department of Virginia at the conclusion of his speech. "I have my check right here," he said to a standing ovation.

Various Awards and Speakers

Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer updated attendees on his city's veterans' initiatives. On Nov. 11, 2011, Louisville revived its Veterans Day parade along the city's Main Street, which Fischer called "the highlight of my administration." He announced that the Louisville-based health care system Humana hired 1,000 vets in an 18-month period, plans to hire 1,000 more, and that the city is actively recruiting recently discharged troops from the state's military bases.

Mick Kicklighter, executive director of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration Committee, encouraged VFW Posts and Auxiliaries to become commemorative partners.

John Bird, senior vice president of military affairs for USAA, told attendees that between 2011 and 2016 more than 1 million vets will have transitioned to the civilian world. Bird said his San Antonio-based company wants veterans to account for 30% of its workforce, which is currently composed of 25% veterans or their spouses. He urged all concerned with

employment to “keep the momentum going.”

Matthew J. Capozzoli, vice president of flight operations at UPS Airlines, announced the company’s goal of hiring 25,000 veterans over the next five years. He said that 10% of UPS pilots currently serve in the National Guard or Reserves.

Delegates Approve Dues Increase

After impassioned debate, a voice vote and finally a roll call vote, delegates approved an increase in annual member dues. Though the measure passed by voice vote, a roll call vote also was taken. The final tally was 10,713 “yes” votes to 3,792 “no” votes. Consequently, *Section 606* was amended (by *B-14* and *M-12*) with more than the required two-thirds majority.

The \$10 annual dues increase will be apportioned as follows: National Headquarters will pay \$6 to National Veterans Service, \$3 to programs and \$1 to the member’s respective Department.