

Report of The American Legion  
**Joint Special Committee on Budget Reduction Task Force**  
Washington D.C.  
November 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011

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With the passage of the Budget Control Act of 2011 in August, Congress created a process for further deficit reduction through a Joint Special Committee on Deficit Reduction (JSC) known as the “supercommittee.”<sup>1</sup> The JSC was tasked with identifying at least \$1.2 trillion in deficit reductions before November 23<sup>rd</sup>. The 12 member committee has been the subject of significant scrutiny, lobbying, and speculation in the past months. The American Legion has been involved through our grassroots lobbying efforts and professional staff during the entire debate.

During the National Commander’s testimony in September, PNC Spanogle and National Adjutant Wheeler envisioned the creation of a “working group” of Legion members tasked with visiting the offices of the JSC members to present our thoughts on proposed reductions by the committee. From that vision, a plan was submitted to bring four members of each department containing a JSC member to Washington in early November to lobby on our issues and concerns.

The original call-in list consisted of the National Executive Committeeman, Department Commander, Department Legislative Council Vice Chairman, and the legislative council liaison for each of the 12 members of the JSC. Of the potential 48 attendees, 42 ultimately made arrangements to attend. The ability to quickly produce the full complement of delegations, as well as quickly make the necessary hotel and flight arrangements, is testament to the superb efforts and professionalism of Dick Holmes and his entire team. They were essential to our success.

Prior to their arrival, the media marketing team put together a press release that targeted the local print media of the 42 attendees. In addition to mentioning The American Legion member the release was scripted for the local market of the individual member of the JSC. We have been unable to gather the success of these efforts, but because many of the minor markets don’t publish their paper digitally, we’ll be unaware unless the task force member sends us a copy. Yet at least one congressional office mentioned the article, and follow-up interviews in other media markets were beneficial.

On November 1<sup>st</sup>, the task force members and the Legislative Division’s professional staff met for an orientation session led by Legislative Commission Chairman Kenneth Governor (NY). Every one of the national call-ins was in attendance. The 90-minute briefing included review of the JSC, possible areas for reductions, a video and summary of recent hearings, and The American Legion position relating to the variety of proposals being considered. At the conclusion of the meeting, each delegation met with the professional staff member who would accompany them to their meetings the next day on Capitol Hill.

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<sup>1</sup> A full description of this committee can be found within The American Legion’s Legislative point paper on the subject.

<sup>2</sup> Rep. Walz (MN) was present when he said this statement. The following day he approached The American Legion at another meeting and told him that he’d discussed this statement with Rep. VanHollen and chastised him for equating military service with civilian service. Walz noted, “That definitely won’t come up in the

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, each of the 11 delegations (Michigan has two members on the JSC) were accompanied by Legislative staff for a meeting with the member and/or staff. In meeting with 8 of the 12 JSC members, The American Legion surpassed efforts of every other organization that has attempted a similar activity. This success is in part due to the respect of The American Legion, as well as the fact that the delegation represented constituents rather than paid staff or lobbyists. Summaries of the meeting are attached. An illustration of the "drop sheet" is on this page.

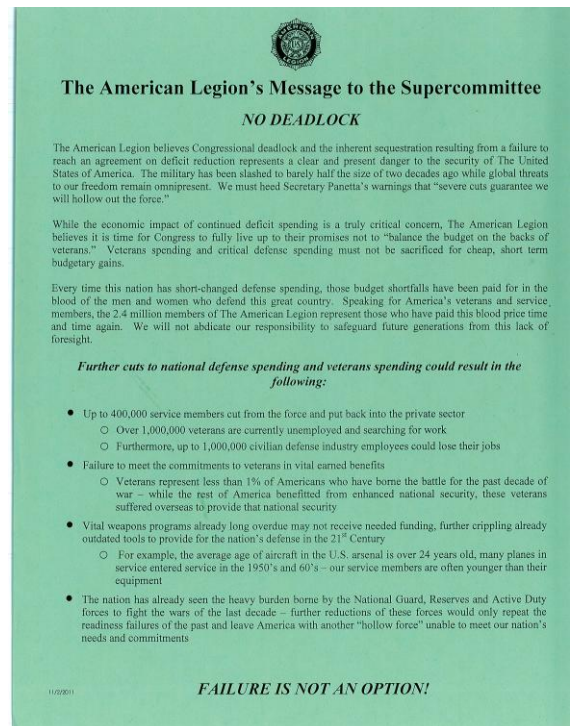
To a large extent, the meetings went exceptionally well and as expected. While there was a wide disparity in the breadth of knowledge amongst the delegations and the ability to interact with a member and his/her staff, there was a uniform passion to give The American Legion's message. JSC members behaved as the media and many people would have predicted based on their party affiliation or previous statements.

A majority of the committee was totally against any cuts to VA programs. One-third of the JSC was totally supportive of further cuts to DoD while another third was against further reductions. A pragmatic one-third remained caught in the reality that some of the next round of cuts will come from DoD savings. Very little new information regarding items of consideration or disposition of the committee members was gathered. Few legitimate promises were delivered.

The task force efforts were important because The American Legion was the only military or veterans organization who was attacking the efforts of the JSC beyond media releases and professional staff involvement. Even though the secrecy surrounding the deliberations within the JSC hampered efforts to truly opine on specific proposals, congressional staff who saw the background information and point papers felt The American Legion material "was on par with the internal documents of the committee."

At this stage, The American Legion focus must move from individual influence to massive effort. As a follow-up to last week's meetings, task force members will be asked to reach out again and touch base with the congressional offices. It will be imperative the message not only goes back to the departments, but also echoes back to Washington. Every Legion family member must act in the coming weeks to make sure our position is heard.

In his meeting, Senator Baucus told the Montana delegation that calls from their state were resoundingly asking for bigger reductions to DoD. Our delegation doesn't agree with this, based on their communities, yet is chagrined to accept it as "Senator Baucus' reality." Without a concerted effort to email the members of the JSC and eventually all members of Congress, that may become America's reality.



### **Sen. Baucus (MT)**

- Would not take a stance of no further cutting to DoD. The Senator believes there is waste everywhere and everyone must pitch in. Yet he remains supportive of a strong national defense and opposes cutting for the sake of cutting.
- Felt that perhaps consolidation/elimination of overseas bases could produce savings to add to those already known to exist by exiting from Iraq.
- Pushed for American Legion support of revenue increases, although those in attendance wouldn't/didn't give. Those in attendance pushed that 1% of the population fought the war for the past decade and now 50% of the cuts come from that same group. Look elsewhere first.

### **Rep. Becerra (CA)**

- No one on the committee wants to fail, yet deep divides remain.
- JSC must look for a "balanced approach" that includes revenue and smart reductions in spending. If we have a balance, we'll have a solution.
- In the past decade, 2/3 of the growth in government occurred within DoD. We must go where the spending has occurred to make the cuts. "Dealing with military personnel is different than dealing with the Pentagon."
- "There are twelve people (on JSC) who believe that to change the bargain we made with those who are serving would be unfair."
- "Under sequestration, veteran benefits were protected, so when we look at proposals (to meet the \$1.2trillion) we keep that in mind."
- If we're going to send our men and women to war, we must be willing to pay for that war without borrowing to cover the costs.
- Shouldn't undercut programs and services owed Americans who earned them.

### **Rep. Camp (MI)**

- Michigan delegation met with staff from Rep. Camp's office prior to scheduled appointment without Legislative Division staff. They did not meet with member.

### **Rep. Clyburn (SC)**

- Chances of a deal occurring were better than 50/50. It would be foolhardy to say no additional cuts were possible.
- "No deal (sequestration) is a really bad deal."
- Concurred that VA mandatory spending is off the table, but if discretionary cuts within VA were to occur, 247,000 employees would be lost from VHA. (Note: *This is a new allegation we haven't verified.*)
- Seeming more concerned with cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, and other programs than cuts to impact VA and DoD programs within South Carolina.

### **Rep. Hensarling (TX)**

- Was non-committal on cuts to DoD and VA, yet sympathetic that we needed to limit the exposure of DoD from further cuts.
- "You know there are a number of members . . . who want to make pretty strong cuts in our national defense. That's not a surprise to anybody."
- Hensarling promised not to give up hope to overcome deadlock until "midnight on the 22<sup>nd</sup>."

### **Sen. Kerry (MA)**

- Overall concern that VA benefits will be available in the next 10-50 years.
- Senator supports highest possible funding for VA.
- Senator is diligently working towards "big deal" that would help resolve long-term funding challenges.

- Unwilling to pledge support for no further cuts, but hedged the bet to protect against “disproportionate cuts.”
- The Senator is doing everything he can, not just for Democrats, but for the country. He will not allow reductions in spending to demonstrably affect our commitment to veterans.

#### **Sen. Kyl (AZ)**

- Senator believes DoD has already borne more than their fair share of cuts and further cuts would be devastating.
- Agreed that deadlock/sequestration would be as troubling as direct cuts by the committee.
- Senator Kyl will fight hard to guard defense budgets from further cuts. Pledged to call upon The American Legion to lend a voice in that fight.

#### **Sen. Murray (WA)**

- Was supportive of The American Legion's language to avoid further cuts to DoD.
- “I know what you're concerned about in terms of sequestration. If we are not able to come up with some kind of compromise in our subcommittee, sequestration is going to be devastating. I completely understand the challenges to that. You know where my heart and soul is. I am fighting every day to make sure the men and women who have served us get the support and services that they deserve. You know I won't forget that. “

#### **Sen. Portman (OH)** (quotes not readily available as team met with Senator without Legion Legislative team)

- Agrees with The American Legion's positions
- “I don't know how many ways I can assure you that the Senator is with you.”

#### **Sen. Toomey (PA)**

- Very receptive to The American Legion message of no further cuts to DoD.
- Further cuts past the \$450-billion in the first round – perhaps too deep as it was – would be “devastating.” Noted strong bipartisan support for this belief.
- Was quite impressed to learn of the \$6.2 billion in military contracts that could suffer within PA if further cuts were implemented.
- Excellent comment on our national defense strategy from NEC Cocomiglio, “We don't fight wars. We deter wars. We don't take over countries; we go in and protect people when others try to do that.”

#### **Rep. Upton (MI)**

- Michigan delegation met with staff from Rep. Upton's office prior to scheduled appointment without Legislative Division staff. They did not meet with member.

#### **Rep. Van Hollen (MD)**

- Agreed “100%” with The American Legion stance on no funding cuts for VA.
- Agreed that no cuts should occur to replacement of aging weapon systems but purchases needed to be made based on national defense strategy and necessity.
- “Changing retirement, strengthening it for those with less than 20 years is important but too difficult to fix during the supercommittee process.<sup>2</sup>”
- Believes there's ability for further end strength reductions in 2012 and beyond due to Iraq drawdown.

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