MIKE COFFMAN 6TH DISTRICT, COLORADO

ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515-0606

September 23, 2011

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The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
The Honorable Xavier Becerra
The Honorable James E. Clyburn
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable Fred Upton

The Honorable Patty Murray
The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Pat Toomey
The Honorable Jon Kyl
The Honorable Rob Portman

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction:

I understand that you are facing extraordinary pressures to reduce the deficit, and I feel, as I am sure you do, that bringing our nation's spending under control is absolutely necessary. As a Marine Corps combat veteran and member of the House Armed Services Committee, I have been particularly concerned about the Department of Defense, and have considered various proposals regarding defense spending. For instance, increasing the size of the National Guard and Reserve with a commensurate reduction in active-duty personnel and halting proposed military construction projects in South Korea could save \$103 billion over ten years without diminishing the core capabilities of our military forces.

I am confident we can make reductions to the defense budget that will not compromise our national security. As such, I respectfully request you consider this proposal as you seek to trim government spending.

Savings of \$103 Billion from Defense Budget Over Ten Years

The first element of my proposal would increase the size of the National Guard and Reserve with a corresponding reduction in active duty personnel yielding a savings of \$90 billion over ten years. The second involves suspending a Department of Defense proposal for military construction projects in South Korea, saving \$13 billion over the next ten years.

As we draw down from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, we must reevaluate our military force structure to ensure that it is best suited to meet the constantly evolving threats facing our nation. I believe the best way to curb costs while being able to meet the security challenges facing our nation is to expand the size of the National Guard and Reserves in exchange for a commensurate, conditions-based reduction in our active-duty forces.

It is clear that the United States is shifting away from the costly counterinsurgency/nation building doctrine, which has demanded large troop deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, to a counterterrorism approach that leverages a very light footprint of specialized personnel and equipment to carry out surgical strike operations as demonstrated in the war against al Qaeda in Somalia and Yemen. No doubt, we must maintain strong conventional forces as a deterrent to any nation who poses a threat to our national security, but we must also recognize that this shift in strategy places a much greater emphasis on countering the asymmetric tactics of irregular warfare using much smaller and more elite special operations teams.

By phasing the functions of 100,000 active-duty service members into the National Guard and Reserve, our nation could realize significant cost-savings without compromising our national security. For example, the average cost of an active-duty U.S. Army soldier is \$130,000 per year, not including retirement pay and retiree health care benefits. That same soldier costs \$43,000 in the National Guard and \$37,000 in the Reserves. If the functions of 100,000 active-duty service members were shifted to the National Guard and Reserve, with fifty percent of their functions phased into the National Guard and the other fifty percent phased into the Reserves, the average \$90,000 savings per soldier per year means our nation could save \$90 billion over ten years.

In addition to these short-term savings, the nation would also realize savings in military retirement benefits. On average, the retirement benefits earned by National Guard and Reserve retirees cost only one-third the amount of the benefits earned by active-duty retirees. The increased use of the National Guard and Reserves would yield billions of dollars in lifetime retirement savings and would ease the burden on the currently strained military retirement system.

Some of the active-duty forces to be phased into the National Guard and Reserve could come from our nation's extensive force structure based in Europe and South Korea. Redeploying some of the 107,000 service members back to the U.S. – as well as closing some of the numerous bases in Europe and South Korea where they are stationed – could result in additional cost savings to our nation.

In spite of the high cost of maintaining garrisons in Europe and South Korea, the Department of Defense is actually seeking to expand our overseas presence by changing the tours of duty in South Korea from a one year assignment, unaccompanied by family members, to a three year tour of duty in which the service member's families would accompany them.

The proposed military construction necessary to accommodate these families in South Korea would cost the American taxpayers a further \$13 billion over the next 10 years. While I certainly understand the value of minimizing the separation of our service members from their families whenever possible, I believe we should suspend the plan to change the tours of duty in South Korea and save the planned \$13 billion in military construction cost.

The decision to increase accompanied tours to South Korea was made during the height of the Iraq War when service members had little dwell time between overseas deployments. As troops draw down from Iraq and Afghanistan, the number of overseas deployments required of them will dramatically decrease, easing the burden on their families. The proposed \$13 billion in military construction costs would be better spent reducing our national debt than unnecessarily deepening our military presence in South Korea.

You are currently considering various proposals that would make great strides in reducing our ruinous national debt. I will continue to pursue options that streamline the Department of Defense without compromising our military's core mission of national defense. I am currently analyzing additional initiatives, such as reforming the Department of Defense's Tuition Assistance program, the military promotion and retirement system, and identifying obsolete government programs such as the Selective Service System, and will forward all actionable proposals for your consideration.

I understand the weight of the decisions before you and urge you to make choices that are responsible to both our nation's fiscal health and to our nation's security. In his parting remarks before stepping down as Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates cautioned against making easy decisions that are politically palatable in the short-term, but will ultimately hollow out our armed forces in the long run. We can make responsible decisions that will reverse our ruinous course on deficit spending while ensuring that we fulfill our role to provide for the common defense of the United States.

Sincerely,

Mike Coffman

Member of Congress

Mike Coffman