

Coffman Submits Plan for Defense Cuts to Super Committee

(WASHINGTON) - Today, U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, R-CO, submitted a plan to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to highlight defense budget cuts that can be made without compromising national security.

“I’m a Marine Corps combat veteran who cares about making sure that we have the best equipped and best trained military defending this country, but I also believe that we can make additional cuts without harming national security,” Coffman said.

Coffman’s plan would cut an additional \$103 billion over the next ten years, on top of spending reductions already planned for by drawing down our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and reducing the end strength of our military that will bring it just above the pre-Iraq War level of 2003.

Coffman’s plan does two things: The first part would expand the size of the National Guard and Reserve by 100,000 and require an equivalent reduction from the active duty force structure to save \$90 billion in personnel cost. The second would save up to \$13 billion in construction cost by suspending a plan to change the assignments in South Korea from a one-year unaccompanied tour to a three-year accompanied one that will allow service members to bring their families with them.

According to Coffman, transferring the equivalent of 100,000 active-duty positions to the National Guard and the Reserve would achieve a \$90 billion savings in personnel cost over a ten year period. For example, the average cost of a U.S. Army soldier is \$130,000 per year while that same soldier cost \$43,000 in the National Guard and \$37,000 in the Army Reserve. Currently, the military has 1.42 million on active duty with 740,000 in the National Guard and Reserve.

Coffman would like to see the 100,000 reduction in active duty personnel come out of the equivalent force structure assigned to Europe and South Korea where there are a combined total of 107,000 U.S troops. By redeploying the equivalent force structure into the National

Guard and Reserve, Coffman argues there would be an additional savings beyond the \$103 billion envisioned in his plan by closing overseas bases in Europe and South Korea.

Coffman, a first Gulf War and Iraq War veteran, sees a shift in strategy 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 currently employed in the war against al Qaeda in Somalia and Yemen.

“I’ve served in the Army, the Army Reserve, the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Reserve and I know from experience that we can retain our capability while reducing cost by transferring some of our units from active-duty into the reserve,” Coffman said.

The second part of Coffman’s plan is to continue the policy of limiting assignments in South Korea to one year without dependents instead of the Department of Defense’s plan to change the assignments to three years with all of the cost associated with dependents joining their service members overseas. The military construction cost associated with the building of family housing, expanded health care facilities, and dependent schools in South Korea are projected to be \$13 billion over the next ten years.

Coffman argues that the decision to unite families with their service members in South Korea was made during the height of the Iraq War when dwell times between deployments were far too short, but this is now changing with the scheduled draw down of U.S. troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Coffman believes that drawing down our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan will cause overseas deployments to dramatically slow down allowing service members to spend more time with their families.

“While we are spending 3.6 percent of our GDP on defense the South Koreans are only spending 2.7 percent. We seem more concerned about defending South Korea than the South Koreans and that’s just insane given the fiscal challenges our nation is facing. We should be going in the opposite direction and continue to shift more of the burden on the South Koreans instead of making our presence there even more permanent,” Coffman said.

“The Deficit Reduction Committee has a huge task, but I believe it is achievable. Instead of

cutting across the board, I hope they consider these common sense solutions so we can maintain a strong defense while helping to bring down the deficit," Coffman said.

Please see below to read the text of the letter or [click here](#) for a PDF.

September 23, 2011

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

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