

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 16, 2013

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta:

I write concerning your January 10, 2013 press conference and Department-wide memo regarding budget uncertainty in Fiscal Year 2013. I agree with your assessment that, despite the range of serious threats and adversaries we face around the world, the most immediate threat to our national security is the Department's inability to provide resources, readiness and training to carry out our national military strategy due to the fiscal uncertainty of drastic budget cuts. For the past four years, this Administration has pursued the systematic disarming of U.S. military power under the guise of defense budget cuts in order to maintain significantly higher levels of funding for non-security related domestic programs. Consistent with the President's direction to the Secretary of Defense in April 2011, the Office of Management and Budget directed the Department of Defense to cut another \$487 billion from defense budgets, resulting in a revised budget-driven military strategy that increases risk in our operational plans to protect national security objectives both at home and around the world. As you point out, the potential for lower defense budgets are now driving the need to further revise our national military strategy. This should not, and can not be the case. I fully agree that the fiscal uncertainty we face is unacceptable and, if left unaddressed, will result in serious and lasting harm to the capabilities and readiness of our military. While the possibility of a year-long Continuing Resolution has the potential to impact readiness accounts, the Department can mitigate the impact by transferring funds from other accounts with excess funds. The more serious threat is the real possibility of a sequestration of defense accounts.

Over the past fourteen months, the Senate Armed Services Committee has requested on multiple occasions detailed information from the Department on the impact of sequestration on the military in order to avoid these devastating cuts. The threat of sequestration has loomed for well over a year and I find it deeply troubling that despite these repeated requests from Congress, you are just now instructing Department Components to conduct this long-overdue assessment and implementation plan. Detailed information on the number of civilians impacted by hiring freezes; specifics on reductions in flying hours, steaming days, vehicles miles; plans for large programs; and essential reprogramming actions, would have led to a better understanding of the military risk posed by these cuts and should have been made privy to long before the original January 2, 2013 sequestration date. Moreover, I am deeply concerned that severe budget cuts could adversely impact defense health and family support programs, which would lower service members' morale and negatively affect recruitment and retention. Budget cuts must not harm the medical and dental readiness of our active or reserve forces, and cuts must not limit, in any way, the superb care that we give our wounded warriors.

Given the importance of this information to our oversight responsibilities, I request that you provide the Committee, as soon as it's available, with the responses of each of the Department Components tasked in the January 10, 2013 memo along with any additional information that may be necessary for the Committee to fully understand these anticipated impacts as soon as possible. I also request within 30 days, an assessment by the Joint Staff on the extent to which the cuts you direct will have an impact on military training and operations as well as the risk of a hollow force.

As you have stated on numerous occasions, the consequences of sequestration would be devastating. Given the other cuts the Defense Department has been asked to endure, I couldn't agree more. Both Congress and the Administration have a shared responsibility and, rather than simply blaming Congress as you did repeatedly in your press conference, it is my hope that you and the President will work with Congress to ensure that an agreement can be reached to spare our military from further devastating cuts. I continue to stand ready and willing to work with you and the President and my colleagues in Congress on this vitally important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James M. Inhofe", is positioned above the printed name.

James M. Inhofe