STATEMENT BY CONGRESSMAN DAVID E. PRICE
BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF THE ARMY
JUNE 10, 2015
FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

As the Commission evaluates the size and structure of the United States Army, I urge you to ensure that any recommendations regarding future capabilities are based on long-term mission requirements and not on short-term budgetary pressures.

As a senior member of the House Committee on Appropriations and a representative from one of the most military-friendly states in the nation, I have worked throughout my career to ensure that our government meets the needs of our service members, veterans, and military families. I have strongly supported robust funding for personnel accounts at the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including health care, education and career training, and other support services. I have also supported responsible reductions to other defense-related accounts when these reductions are driven by rational decision-making processes with input from senior military commanders. While I do not necessarily agree with all of the recommendations it contained, the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG) review, undertaken by the Department of Defense at the direction of President Obama, was an example of a prudent approach to planning in an austere budget environment.

Unfortunately, the spending reductions of recent years – to both defense and non-defense accounts – have been anything but rational. The discretionary spending caps and "sequestration" cuts imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011 have largely failed as fiscal policy, as Congress has left the major drivers of the deficit, the revenue code and "entitlements," virtually untouched. Yet the spending caps and cuts already imposed – and the perpetual uncertainty created by the threat of future cuts – have already inflicted severe damage throughout the federal government, undermining our economic vitality and our national security. These are self-inflicted wounds that do not befit a great nation or an indispensable world power.

Although military pay and veterans' programs are exempt from sequestration, the cuts have forced the Pentagon to shift resources internally to meet pressing needs, affecting our men and women in uniform as well as our future capabilities. The evidence of this can be seen in the services' attempts (thus far reversed by Congress) to cut funding for tuition assistance programs. Regrettably, I believe it is also evident in the Air Force's short-sighted and misguided decision to inactivate the 440th Airlift Wing at Pope Army Air Field – a decision I have worked with my colleagues in the North Carolina congressional delegation, on a bipartisan basis, to oppose.

More recently, I signed another bipartisan letter from members of the North Carolina delegation urging that the balance between the Active and Reserve Components, and the North Carolina National Guard in particular, be carefully considered during broader consideration of the structure of the United States Army. I am especially troubled by the fact that the Republican House majority will bring to the floor this week a Fiscal Year 2016 Department of Defense spending bill that evades spending caps by classifying tens of billions of dollars as Overseas Contingency Operations funding – a precedent that senior Pentagon officials have warned against.

While I do not wish to understate the challenge the Commission faces as it seeks to navigate these uncertain waters, I want to close by emphasizing that our current fiscal problems are man-made and are thus eminently solvable. Their solution lies in the sort of comprehensive agreement that helped produce budget surpluses, pay down the national debt, and stimulate a roaring economy during the 1990s – an agreement that puts all options on the table and provides long-term budgetary certainty for our military planners, for government at all levels, and for the U.S. economy as a whole.

I am committed to continuing to work toward such an agreement with like-minded members of both political parties. In the meantime, I urge the Commission to remain focused on long-term mission requirements and resist short-term budgetary pressures that could negatively affect military communities such as Fayetteville, as well as our nation's future military readiness. I am well aware of the responsibility such an approach will place on the institution in which I serve, and I look forward to reviewing the Commission's forthcoming report with great interest.

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