

From Yorktown to Fredericksburg and A.P. Hill to Quantico, the spirits of patriotism and selflessness are powerful in Virginia's First District; it is truly a place where folks understand the sacrifices that are an unforgettable part of the history of our nation. It is also a region where we remember those who have served selflessly in the past and honor those who are currently defending our freedoms, not just on Memorial Day or Veterans Day, but every day. At the same time, Virginia's First District is a place where we understand the importance of ensuring that those who serve this nation in the future are as well-equipped and well-prepared as possible. In Washington, guaranteeing these principles are carried out has never been so critical in the discussion of our economy, and the effects of the federal budget.

The Budget Control Act, passed in August of 2011, charged the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, also known as the "super committee," with finding at least \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts from FY2012 to FY2021. Unfortunately, the super committee failed in its duty to accomplish this, setting off a trigger known as "sequestration," a set of automatic spending cuts worth \$1.2 trillion that will take effect in January of 2013. It is expected that defense cuts will make up 10% of these reductions in 2013 and 50% from FY14 through FY2021. I am outraged that the super committee failed to carry out its charge and make the tough decisions necessary to prevent sequestration. Reducing our national security capabilities so drastically, especially when the Department of Defense is already slated to be cut by nearly half a trillion dollars, would be disastrous. As a member of the Armed Services Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, I have discussed the effect of these cuts with folks across the First District, across the country, and with some of the highest-ranking officials in the U.S. military. Without a successful change in course, the dangerous spending cuts, "sequestration," will take effect, irreparably harming our national security capabilities.

I have fought against these cuts and will continue to fight for the survival of our strong defense community, both here in Virginia and across the world.

Our defense infrastructure is about more than just war fighting; it is a system that is ever evolving and adapting to a volatile world, anticipating future threats and developing capabilities to protect our citizens and our interests. The shifting dynamics across the globe in turn require that our defense capacities remain flexible and adaptable, with highly competent manpower and sufficient resources to ensure that no stone is left unturned and no flank is left unprotected. From shipyards to science labs, the highly valuable members of our national security community are constantly searching for ways to maximize effectiveness and efficiency, researching and developing new technologies that will offer innovative ways to defend our liberties.

Contractors and other folks in the defense industry play an important role in this effort. Creativity, initiative, scientific innovation, and engineering genius are alive and well in our defense contracting community. Innovation and the efficient use of taxpayer dollars strengthen the potency of our military, with contracts guided by free market principles. They ensure that our remarkable all-volunteer force has the very best hardware and equipment in the world, so that when they are called upon to execute the trade for which they have been trained, they are never entering in to a fair fight, but will always have overwhelming superiority. However, sequestration will inevitably curtail such initiatives as a part of overall reductions in Department of Defense capabilities. These cuts in our broad defense strategy will unquestionably reduce the flexibility, innovation, reactivity, and strength of our military. This is simply unacceptable.

Despite the super committee's failure, efforts to avoid looming cuts because of sequestration are underway. Several initiatives have been introduced to combat sequestration, including the House-passed budget, House Continuing Resolution 112, which eliminates the threat of these cuts by requiring spending reductions in areas other than defense. This important component was a major reason for me to support this bill. Military leaders have stated that further cuts to our defense budget would be "catastrophic;" I trust their judgment. H.Con.Res. 112 currently awaits consideration in the Senate. I also recently cosponsored a bill, House Resolution 3895, which would ensure that all veterans programs are exempt from sequestration. I am hopeful that this bill will be considered soon by the full House of Representatives.

Without a doubt, our nation must address the growing deficit and reevaluate our spending priorities; nevertheless, it is critical that we not risk jeopardizing the security of our citizens or the safeguarding of our freedoms. Congress must address the nation's economic woes in a responsible way by targeting the true drivers of our debt, not by cutting indiscriminately at the expense of our national security. The Constitution instructs Congress to "provide for the common Defence... of the United States." I take this duty extremely seriously, and I will work hard to fight these devastating cuts so that we can continue to live freely, in the greatest country on Earth.

*Rob Wittman represents the First Congressional District of Virginia, which includes the Fredericksburg Region. Wittman serves on the House Armed Services Committee where he is the Chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.*

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