By Scott Rigell, Randy Forbes and Rob Wittman

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In a House Armed Services Committee hearing, a picture of Naval Station Norfolk was circulated, showing five U.S. aircraft carriers and four large deck amphibious assault ships moored to the pier. Various other logistic support ships and surface combatants idled in port.

While these carriers and warships are all in Norfolk for various reasons, what this picture reveals could be the future of the U.S. military if looming defense cuts, known as sequestration, are not averted - ships not at sea, where they should be, conducting training operations or forward deployed to project power and protect our national security and economic interests around the globe.

The future of our military and national security hangs in the balance. With sequestration, our nation would face major risk: a readiness crisis, decreased capability, limited response, lack of resources, complacency and loss of talent. This must not represent "the new normal."

As representatives of the Hampton Roads region and members of the House Armed Services Committee, we fully understand this and have been active in doing everything possible to stop defense sequestration and explain its harmful effects to our colleagues, both Democrats and Republicans.

Leaders of this nation are elected to make decisions, and the House has chosen to avert these cuts. Last year, we voted not once but twice to replace the shortsighted cuts of sequestration with broad-based, common sense spending reforms. The Sequestration Replacement Reconciliation Act of 2012 and the Spending Reduction Act of 2012 would both replace the sequestration of discretionary spending called for in 2013.

Unfortunately, the Senate has failed to act. The Senate's refusal to even consider these measures prevented both chambers from the opportunity to negotiate and find common ground. It is difficult to make progress when the Senate refuses to even consider a starting point in our

efforts to solve this problem.

It has also become very apparent that sequestration has become a political weapon in the arsenal of both parties, and our region stands to suffer because of this.

Some members who do not represent military communities, both Republican and Democrat, see this as an opportunity to score political points at the cost of jobs and America's national security. This is an irresponsible game that Washington cannot afford to play.

Without action, Virginia stands to bear a large brunt of the sequester's impact. A George Mason University study estimates over 200,000 job losses just in Virginia, nearly 10 percent of the nation's job loss.

There is no question that the budget challenges facing America are a culmination of poor decisions and a lack of courage and leadership from both parties spanning the past few decades. It was not created overnight, nor will it be solved overnight. Political differences need to be put aside and what is best for America's future must be put first.

Last fall, President Barack Obama declared that the defense sequester "will not happen." As commander in chief, he should use the power of the White House to stop the harmful effects of sequestration. He must lead and bring the House and Senate together.

We stand ready to work with the administration, the Senate, and our House colleagues to put America first, which means stopping sequestration.

U.S. Reps. Scott Rigell, Randy Forbes and Rob Wittman represent the Hampton Roads area and serve on the House Armed Services Committee. Forbes is chairman of the Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces, and Wittman leads the Subcommittee on Readiness.