



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 29, 2011

GOP Leaders Refuse to Support Pentagon Budget Cut

It is curious that among so many “conservatives” there is such explicit intent to preserve the size of the federal government. While it is true that the Constitution does provide authority to the legislative branch of the federal government to “provide for the common defense” of our nation, the current spending level of the Pentagon far exceeds that level necessary to carry out this constitutional mandate. Not only that, but the automatic cuts associated with the failure of the super committee are not cuts in the absolute sense, but cuts in future planned spending. Even if these cuts are made, defense spending would still increase, but not as much as otherwise.



When Congress ceded its authority to a single committee, that committee was tasked with presenting a plan to reduce the federal deficit by \$1.2 trillion over 10 years. Failure to accomplish this goal would result in a slate of “automatic cuts” in the same amount, \$600 billion of which would be siphoned from future planned spending for the Department of Defense.

There is real waste at the Pentagon that goes beyond the legendary “[\\$600 hammer](#).” One member of the U.S. Senate has proposed his own plan to trim the federal budget, including \$1 trillion from the sacred cow itself. “The severity of our fiscal crisis is not lost on our senior military leaders,” says Tom Coburn (R-Okla.). “In fact, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen stated the national debt is our nation's greatest national security threat. In light of this threat, the Department of Defense can and must play a role in bringing our budgets into balance,” he continued in his report.

Oklahoma City's *Oklahoman* published the [following breakdown](#) of Senator Coburn's plan to prune the runaway defense budget:

Nearly \$185 billion in savings would come in the area of health care for military retirees and their dependents by changing the rules and payment levels for Tricare.

He would delay or scale back several weapons programs, including the Army Ground Combat Vehicle, the V-22 Osprey, the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, the C-27 Joint Cargo Aircraft and the Medium Extended Air Defense System.

He would reduce aircraft carriers from 11 to 10 and Navy Air Wings from 10 to nine, cut active-duty personnel in the U.S. Army back to pre-2007 levels and reduce military personnel in Europe and Asia.

On the nuclear side, he would reduce the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile force from 500 to 300, reduce the ballistic nuclear submarine fleet from 14 to 11, delay the purchase of new bombers and terminate the Missile Defense Agency's Precision Tracking Space System.

Research and development funding would be cut by \$79 billion.



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There are numerous other recommendations in the report, including ones to freeze civilian pay, reduce contractors, replace some military personnel with civilians, close schools on domestic military bases, eliminate a tuition aid program and reduce funding for the National Guard's counter-drug program.

Most Republicans, even those who have made their name as rock-ribbed “conservatives,” run from association with any proposal calling for cuts in military spending. There are few of that caucus who are willing to run the risk of being cast as “anti-military” by the media and the dust-up it would cause among constituents.

It isn't that conservatives are against all reduction of federal spending. Many of them have for years called for the elimination of the Department of Education, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other federal agencies which are rightly regarded as drains on the national treasury.

The rubber hits the road, however, when any cuts in spending by the Pentagon are thrown into that discussion. Republicans suddenly seem to forget their dedication to shrinking the size of the government when the Pentagon is the subject of the reduction.

Witness this from The Daily Caller:

The truth is that we don't need to spend as much on defense as we're spending now. We're spending more on defense than at any time since World War II and almost as much as every other nation combined.

To that end, Senator Rand Paul [explained on CNN](#) the day the super committee failed that the proposed cuts would not even result in a reduction in spending compared to current spending levels:

This may surprise some people, but there will be no cuts in military spending because we're only cutting proposed increases. If we do nothing, military spending goes up 23% over 10 years. If we [make these cuts], it will still go up 16%.

Senator Paul is not new to the fight to apply constitutional corrections to the federal budget. Last year he introduced a measure which would have balanced the budget in five years and reduced the debt by \$4 trillion.

There was no competing proposal (by members of either party) that even approximated the degree of reduction recommended by Senator Paul.

As usual, as the scent of defense cuts wafted through the Capitol, Republicans scurried to find the fresh air of big government.

There were a couple of Senators not offended by the smell, however. Two influential colleagues joined Paul's fight — Senator Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) and Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah), but their support was insufficient to garner the votes necessary to pass such a “radical” resolution. The vote on the Paul proposal was seven for and 90 against.

It isn't difficult to puzzle out why such a constitutionally sound measure as the one authored by Senator Paul would fail to attract the support of more than seven Senators. The key to understanding this conservative conundrum is found in the [words of Senator Lindsey Graham](#) (R-S.C.): “I'm not going to vote for any budget that reduces defense spending by over 40 percent.”

An examination of the plan proffered by Senator Paul reveals that he called for the defense budget to be



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reduced by only six percent, not the significantly larger 40 percent cited by Senator Graham. Whence comes the discrepancy?

The answer is found in the distinct definitions of “cut” used by the respective Senators. Graham read the word “decrease” and assumed it was a cut, whereas Senator Paul intended “decrease” to mean a reduction in the *rate of spending*.

In response to the call by Senator Paul and others to include the Pentagon in the budget cutting process, Senator Graham is reportedly writing his own bills which would “protect our military” from any attempts by Congress to cut the budget of the Defense Department, fearing that such action was imminent in light of the failure of the Super Committee.

Said [Graham](#): “As every military and civilian defense official has stated, these cuts represent a threat to the national security interests of the United States. They cannot be allowed to occur.”

Regardless of the wisdom in the plans penned by Coburn and Paul, there is little chance that their fellow “conservatives” will sign on and commit themselves to adhering steadfastly to enumerated powers listed in the Constitution. As [The Daily Caller](#) commented:

The problem is there’s simply no way to actually do what every Republican loves to talk about — limiting government, balancing budgets, cutting waste — without reducing defense spending. After entitlement spending, defense spending is the second largest part of our budget. You could feasibly gut the entire entitlement system and not touch Pentagon spending, but what politician is going to tell America’s seniors they must do without so Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and God-knows-where-else can have more?

Photo: Mitt Romney



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