Tuesday, February 7, 2012

AFA members, I asked for your comments on the budget … and was overwhelmed with responses. Below my name are a number of your responses. I could not include all of them – as there were more than 1,000, but … in a nutshell, most of you decried the TRICARE cuts for retirees, the TRICARE for Life enrollment fee, the comparison of military health care with civilians', and AF cuts in general. Thank you to those of you who responded – apologize in advance for the length of this note.

Since I last wrote you, the Secretary of the Air Force has released a White Paper on the budget. You can find it here.

The Air Force has announced which states and which bases will be impacted by force structure cuts. You can find the link here.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, Senior Enlisted Leaders, and Commandant of the Coast Guard have signed a letter making some of the same points with which you disagree. You can find it here.

As always, I welcome your comments.

Mike

Michael M. Dunn
President/CEO
Air Force Association

How did the AF lose 7 fighter squadrons and the Navy looses none and retains ALL 11 Carrier Battle Groups... when the rationale for 2 MRCs determined in the BUR in the early 90s was 4-5 carriers per MRC... that's 8-10 for 2 MRCs and we are going to retain 11? Land-based air is 2-4 times more cost effective than sea-based air and with out the vulnerability, so why did DOD cut the most effective air capability, and retain the most vulnerable and expensive naval air forces?

Mostly, I dislike the reduction in aircraft and our air force personnel because of past history on this earth. All great powers seem to have fallen at one time or another and I worry mostly about this great nation and our freedoms (IRAN)
I fear our nation will balance the books by breaking faith with men and women who have given their all in defense of all that our nation stands for... all while funding entitlement programs that provide comfortable lifestyles for folks who haven't paid their fair share, who haven't earned what we have earned.

The government has for years tried to do away with the health benefits for military retired. We put our time in and did the job, but now they want to change the rules. This also applies to retirement pay if they get their way. They must think retired military personnel are rich, guess I missed that boat. ... If they want to change the rules, change them for people coming into the services and leave the retirees alone.

If a new TRICARE For Life enrollment fee is established, in reality it is a second enrollment fee inasmuch as in order to qualify for TRICARE FOR LIFE retirees have to enroll in Medicare part B. That ‘enrollment fee’ runs about $200 per month for a retiree and spouse. Adding another enrollment fee on top of that for what is supplemental medical insurance is unjustified. A real concern is that this would just be the nose under the tent and could lead to much greater fees down the road. All this after being promised free health care for life.

These are not easy times. The SecDef and the CJCS are faced with a plateful of unpleasant choices. On balance I think they have done as best they could in an environment when, as a country, we can NOT afford everything we would like to have.

I spent 3 tours in Vietnam 110 combat missions. Had 5700 flying hours when I retired. Do I deserve my benefits? Hell yes!

The proposed POTUS budget will inevitably only exacerbate the unemployment issue, as the administration will dump more than 80K more servicemen and women back into the civilian work force on top of the tens of thousands already coming home from the war zones and re-integrating back into society. When I left my last USAF position as a wing commander at [name deleted] AFB, unemployment for veteran’s at the state level was at 17% and 13% nationally.
There also needs to be a plan on how we can rapidly expand our forces in the event we need to go to war to protect our nation from aggression. This plan should include an outline of how this rapid expansion would be paid for—short term and long term.

I find it sadly ironic that we are laying off 80,000+ troops to "save" the jobs of teachers, police, and firemen... Huh? One is a fed responsibility; the other is a local one...

… this is indeed a do more with less plan, that will eventually default into being a do less with less plan. The military will subsequently have to manage expectations for policy makers as to what the military arm of national power will actually be able to accomplish.

The nation cannot just spit out squadrons of fighters or bombers, or big deck ships for that matter, at a moment’s notice. Doubly so should we allow the aerospace industrial base to atrophy. I think it would behoove the military at large to communicate the applicable truths to those who are going to be ordering their eventual employment.

In all of the writing I reviewed here I didn't see one “objective” laid out in specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound criteria. Therefore most discussions of strategy are missing the most important element, the objective. That being said and knowing reductions in all government spending are required for our system of governance to survive, there are the big [issues] that need to be addressed.

When a comment is made that the Air Force is ‘balancing the membership and aircraft in both their active and reserve components’, my concern is that as we have seen in the past, the reductions will not be in proportion to the capabilities of the components. It is common knowledge and well documented that the Air Guard and Air Force Reserve provide significantly more ‘bang for the buck’, than does the active component.
Context with respect to the budget is currently defined by entitlements. It is not surprising to see this current set of "budget initiatives" almost independent of the real budget issues facing the nation. The political motivation is clear. Something, anything must be done -- that is, anything but Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid is fair game.

Seems DoD keeps getting hammered and asked to control their costs and make big sacrifices ($1.1T) over 10 years is almost 2 years worth of budget cuts – 20% while other Departments will only be asked to make cosmetic cuts.

I think people should breathe thru their nose right now and take a glass-half-full approach given our economic challenges: the DoD budget is still $525B, over half-a-trillion dollars and larger than what we had when we entered the 21st century, that we should reduce the size of the ground forces that were increased during the war, that we should reduce some expensive programs falling short of expectations like GH Block IIIs and look to Block 4s and U-2s, that the fifth generation fighter that supports the Air-Sea strategies are in there, that the next generation bomber is there, that the KC-46 is there, that the AF will be strong and leading in ISR, Cyber, Space, computer networks…and much more. Assuming we do not have to go to Sequestration, this could have been much worse for our Air Force.

In talking about increases in Tricare payments, Secretary Panetta states, "the cost borne by military retirees will remain below levels in most comparable private sector plans" when arguing for increases in Tricare fees. There are no "comparable private sector plans" when one thinks of the group, our military and military retirees, for which Tricare exists. No private sector group even comes close to the military, perhaps with the exception of law enforcement and firefighters, when it comes to willingness to go anywhere, do anything, and risk it all to get the job done. I believe in shared sacrifice, but my concern, … is that once the powers that be get their noses into the tent on this one, it will be a slippery slope taking military retirees to a place where their sacrifice will be meaningless. It has happened before in our history. It can happen again.

I support radical changes in the way we do business, (thinking outside of the box), in the Department of Defense, BUT, this has to be a shared responsibility, and ALL areas of the U.S. Government have to be ready to stop doing things as they always have done.
They also need to begin the very real process of serious belt tightening.

I just pray that sequestration can be avoided.

[The President] suggested a mix of initiatives, added spending for government agencies and programs, more regulations and tax loopholes for special interests. But national security requires a "whole of government" approach to be effective... where is the consistency in our efforts? Where are the other tough cuts? My personal position is that it's foolish to cut defense spending that in and of itself falls well short of what's needed to bring debt under control.

I was "promised" a pension and lifetime medical care for my family. These were not the "driving" factors in my decision to serve, nor was pay, but they were collectively major contributors. Lucrative opportunities in civilian life would clearly have drawn me away if retirement and medical care were "non-players"...

TRICARE for Life (TFL) is subordinate to Medicare. Because of the current Medicare reimbursement rates, many doctors ... will no longer accept Medicare. ...So, I have involuntarily paid into Medicare for many, many years even though I was promised "free" medical care for life by virtue of my military service. Unfortunately, because of the Medicare/TLF "connection" imposed by Congress, I have trouble getting ANY medical care because doctors refuse to accept Medicare. Therefore, TFL becomes irrelevant! AND NOW THE DOD HAS THE AUDACITY TO PROPOSE THAT TFL RECIPIENTS PAY AN ANNUAL ENROLLMENT FEE!! GIVE ME A FLIPPING BREAK!! IS THERE ANY SANITY LEFT IN WASHINGTON?? MILITARY RETIREES CAN'T GET MEDICAL CARE AS IT IS, SO WHAT EXACTLY IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS NEW FEE OTHER THAN TO RAISE MONEY FOR THE PENTAGON??????

I think one of the more contentious items being debated regards what we were promised regarding our healthcare during our retirement years. While I agree that we were promised free health care for life, the simple fact is that in today's exceedingly constrained fiscal environment, the Department can no longer afford to keep that promise. I, for one, am not opposed to pitching in to help the Department remain solvent, especially if it ensures that today's soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast
guardsmen are provided the tools and force structure to accomplish their respective mission