

## COMMENTARY: possible cuts to the National Guard

Written by Grassley Press  
Tuesday, 04 March 2014 08:54

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### Q & A on the National Guard

with U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley

Q: What are your thoughts on the President's military budget proposal?

A: First, getting this administration to propose less federal spending in any area ought to be music to the ears of the taxpaying public. It's long overdue for Washington to exercise across-the-board fiscal discipline and dial back Uncle Sam's spending spree that puts taxpayers on the hook for generations to come. That's why I voted against raising the debt ceiling and against the budget agreement in December that raised fees and lifted the spending lid previously agreed to in the Budget Control Act of 2011. The Obama administration's \$496 billion military spending request previewed by the Defense Secretary raises important questions. As a tight-fisted fiscal conservative, I'm all for trimming the fat. But the plans put forward by Secretary Chuck Hagel may do more harm than good. Specifically, does the proposed reduction in troops put at greater risk our men and women in uniform? We can't

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afford to gut America's military muscle that may undermine the federal government's most fundamental responsibility to provide for the nation's security. Will shrinking the armed forces to pre-World War II levels maintain military readiness to respond to unforeseen, emerging 21st century threats? There are plenty of cuts to go around. But the Pentagon needs to consider cost-saving measures that would not destabilize U.S. military authority and strategic interests around the world. For example, reducing troop levels and trimming military pay and benefits without taking accountable steps to root out systemic financial mismanagement at the Pentagon would be a terrible mistake. I've identified cost savings that could be achieved through better audit procedures, completely apart from personnel levels.

Q: How does the National Guard tie in to the proposed budget request?

A: The U.S. Army is made up of three components: full-time, active duty soldiers; Army National Guard troops (in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and three U.S. territories); and, Army Reservists. The Iowa National Guard includes 9,200 members. The adjutant general of the Iowa Guard recently told state lawmakers that for the first time since 2003, the Iowa National Guard does not have troops serving in combat missions overseas. The National Guard serves a unique dual mission. In addition to training combat-ready soldiers who may be called up to active duty, the Guard also responds to homeland security threats, domestic emergencies and natural disasters in local communities across the state. According to the budget proposal advanced by Secretary Hagel, the U.S. Army would drop from 520,000 to roughly 440,000 soldiers by 2019. The Army National Guard and Army Reserve would see a five percent reduction, trimming the National Guard from today's 335,000 to 315,000; and reducing the Army Reserve from 205,000 to 185,000. The Defense Secretary pitched the budget proposal under the guise of fiscal discipline. And yet, the National Guard has a strong record of making the most cost-effective use of defense dollars. Policymakers need to make sure we don't shortchange the taxpaying public by downsizing the military to levels that would require even more expensive upgrades, recruitments and training in the long run to address unforeseen security needs. The National Guard has proven itself as a capable, experienced force on the front lines when called to active duty. As good coaches know, your team is only as strong as your bench. So as Washington looks to cut costs, we need to make sure the savings aren't misguided shortcuts that turn out to be more expensive down the road.

Q: What is your position on how the budget request would impact the National Guard?

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A: Every tax dollar spent by Uncle Sam deserves scrutiny. No doubt the Defense Department needs to make sound fiscal decisions as it makes adjustments from wartime spending levels and looks ahead to maintain military readiness with looming budgetary restrictions. However, I'm concerned the proposed military spending request fails to adequately reflect the National Guard's role as a fully operational reserve, which is a vital, cost-effective component of the total force structure. That's why I joined bipartisan forces with a dozen lawmakers in a letter to Secretary Hagel that points out the shortsighted approach to the Guard's share of proposed cuts. It would be penny-wise and pound-foolish to squander the investments made to train and outfit the men and women serving in the National Guard. The American people depend on the best Army we can afford to protect the homeland and U.S. strategic interests. Iowa communities, law enforcement and emergency preparedness teams have reason to take pride in their local heroes who work full-time in the private sector and make the time to serve their country and their community as members of the National Guard. They embrace the motto of the National Guard in service to their country and their community: "Always Ready, Always There." As a keeper of the purse strings in Congress, I will work to make sure the Army isn't cutting off its nose to spite its own face. To meet the nation's most urgent threats, America will need a nimble, expandable, affordable and experienced force structure. By that measure, the National Guard is not an expendable part of our military readiness equation.

Friday, February 28, 2014