

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legion scolds supercommittee

National commander “profoundly disappointed” by impasse, concerned about national security consequences.

WASHINGTON (November 21, 2011) -- American Legion National Commander Fang A. Wong says he is “profoundly disappointed” that the bipartisan Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (the so-called “supercommittee) failed to reach an agreement to cut \$1.2 trillion from the federal budget over the next decade.

“They were given an important job to do, and they failed,” Wong said. “What this means to the future of our military and our veterans remains to be seen, but the challenges have now intensified for those who believe in a strong national defense and want to protect the hard-earned benefits of veterans. We are profoundly disappointed in the work of this committee.”

The failure to reach an agreement triggers \$1.2 trillion in budget cuts set to take effect in January 2013. Among the reductions is an automatic \$492 billion in defense spending.

In a letter to the ranking Republican member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, John McCain, R-Ariz., Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said the automatic cuts would roll back ground forces to pre-World War II levels, leave the Navy with a fleet the size of the one in the years before World War I, and reduce the Air Force to its smallest size ever.

“That may be the worst-case scenario, but it could certainly occur unless these automatic cuts are rolled back between now and 2013,” Wong said. “There is still time to avoid Panetta’s nightmare, but we need to use it wisely in pressuring our lawmakers to make sure the Department of Defense has adequate funding to do its vital job.”

The deadlock also triggers another \$492 billion in federal cuts starting in 2013 from health, education, drug enforcement, national parks, agriculture programs and social programs.

“Even if VA is OK, that doesn’t mean all veterans’ support programs are necessarily protected, because not all of them are administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs,” American Legion Legislative Division Deputy Director Ian de Planque explained. In recent remarks to the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, de Planque noted the vulnerability of veterans’ jobs and homeless programs within the Departments of Labor and Housing and Urban Development.

“That,” said Tim Tetz, director of the Legion’s Legislative Division, “is another good reason to keep up strong post-supercommittee pressure on Congress. Restricting Labor and Housing and Urban Development efforts on behalf of veterans could really damage VA Secretary (Eric) Shinseki’s efforts to end homelessness among veterans, and even the president’s work to curtail veteran joblessness.”

“Because the supercommittee failed to do its job,” Wong said, “it is critically important for us to do ours as advocates. It is vitally important to the future of our nation that Congress does what it must to protect the safety of our nation and the rights of our veterans.”

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