



Congress wants hearing on Pentagon wasteful spending charges

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Lawmakers on Tuesday called for a hearing on a Pentagon study that found as much as \$150 billion in wasteful back-office spending.

The lawmakers also called for the full report, which [The Washington Post](#) reported on Tuesday had been withheld by Pentagon officials, to be made public.

“I think we should have a hearing about that and find out what happened,” Sen. [Lindsey Graham](#) (R-S.C.), a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, said Tuesday.

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.), who is expected to be the ranking member of a Senate oversight committee, called for an investigation.

“If this is true, the Pentagon played Congress and the American public for fools,” she said. “I vow to get to the bottom of this.”

The Post reported on Monday that Deputy Defense Secretary Bob Work ordered the study, but that he and other Pentagon leaders tried to hide it from the public, fearing it would undercut their arguments the Pentagon was starved for funding.

The White House [disputed](#) that the Pentagon sought to hide it, pointing to a January 2015 Defense News [article](#) on the study and its recommendations.

The Post reported that the Pentagon had also posted a 77-page executive summary of the report on its website, but then took it down as part of its efforts to obscure it. But a Pentagon spokesman said on Twitter that the summary was still on the website and tweeted a link to it.

The link “has remained active since January 2015,” Deputy Defense press secretary Gordon Trowbridge tweeted in response to a question by The Hill. “More than 2,800 page views since it went live.”

Lawmakers argued that the full report, however, has never been released.

Defense leaders have been chafing over reduced Pentagon spending in recent years.

In 2013, the Pentagon's projected spending was slashed by \$500 billion over 10 years — or \$50 billion each year — after lawmakers failed to reach a compromise on a larger federal budget.

Pentagon leaders say those cuts came on top of \$487 billion in previous cuts to projected spending over the same period under a process known as sequestration.

Defense hawks have been able to give the Pentagon more money each year despite the proposed cuts, but they are scheduled to return in 2018. President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to overturn sequestration, and increase defense spending.

The Pentagon study's revelations could make overturning sequestration more difficult.

“President-elect Donald Trump largely bought into the notion that the U.S. military has been gutted by the supposedly devastating effects of the bipartisan Budget Control Act. But as the article in the Post makes clear, this is a myth,” said Christopher Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute said.

“The U.S. military remains eminently capable of defending the United States and U.S. vital interests. The greatest threat to American security is U.S. officials' collective inability to prioritize, and their tendency to be drawn into others' disputes,” he said.

Defense analyst Winslow T. Wheeler predicted Trump's pick for Defense secretary, Retired Gen. James Mattis, would have a more difficult time arguing for defense spending.

“Mattis is going to have an interesting time arguing that the Pentagon budget is low and needs pumping up, as many assume he and President Trump plan to do,” he said.

The Post's report was especially damning for civilians and contractors working for the Pentagon. It found that the Pentagon is paying more than one million of these employees and contractors, while there are only 1.3 million active duty members of the military.

A union for Defense civilian workers blamed the wasteful spending on contractors.

“This report confirms what we have known for decades: that the Pentagon is flagrantly wasting taxpayer money by hiring costly and less accountable contractors to do support work that civilians can do for far less,” said AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr.

“By in-sourcing much of this work, the Pentagon could free up tens of billions of dollars a year to invest in our troops. We are glad that this long-suppressed report has seen the light of day and hope it spurs action in Congress to curb the Pentagon's wasteful spending on service contracts,” he said.

Meanwhile, a defense industry organization representing giant aerospace and defense companies and its workers, blamed the Pentagon for inefficiencies.

“I could tell you Defense contracting companies are a pretty lean lot these days,” said David Melcher, chief executive officer of Aerospace Industries Association. “I think our corporations are pretty lean, and I think the governments are not as lean.”

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and his counterpart on the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Ariz.), said they would continue efforts to eliminate wasteful spending, but still pursue overturning sequestration.

“Even if it were possible, achieving every efficiency proposed by the Defense Business Board would not undo the damage of arbitrary defense cuts and the resulting military readiness crisis,” they said in a joint statement.

“That is why we will continue our efforts to end sequestration once and for all and give our men and women in uniform the resources, training, and equipment they need to meet the challenges of a more dangerous world,” they said.