



Right, left call for defense cuts

By Jeremy Herb - 12/10/12

Fiscal conservatives and liberal Democrats are calling on party leaders to include “substantial defense savings” in a deficit-reduction deal.

A group of 22 House lawmakers — 11 Democrats and 11 Republicans — sent a letter Monday to President Obama and House and Senate leaders calling for cuts to defense spending to be part of a deal to replace scheduled spending cuts and tax hikes set for January.

Republican hawks have warned of the danger of further cuts to defense spending — particularly the across-the-board spending cuts known as sequestration — arguing that the Pentagon is already cutting \$487 billion from its budgets in the 2011 Budget Control Act.

The lawmakers calling for defense cuts say that the manner of sequestration is not desirable, but argue that the overall level of cuts is achievable.

They point to studies from the Cato Institute, Taxpayers for Common Sense, the National Taxpayers Union and the Project on Defense Alternatives that have identified \$500 billion or more in cuts.

“We have serious concerns about the careless and arbitrary way that sequestration reduces defense spending, but we support its general intent to improve our fiscal condition,” the lawmakers write.

“We know the United States can maintain the best fighting force in the world while also pursuing sensible defense savings.”

The letter includes Republican Reps. Mick Mulvaney (S.C.), Tom McClintock (Calif.) and Justin Amash (Mich.), who was kicked off the Budget Committee last week for not holding the GOP line.

The Democrats on the letter include Reps. Barney Frank (Mass.), Ed Markey (Mass.), Keith Ellison (Minn.) and Barbara Lee (Calif.).

Conservatives and liberals in the House have joined together before to push for a smaller defense budget: the two coalitions helped pass an amendment to the defense authorization bill in May at the tail end of the House floor debate that cut \$1 billion off the top of the Pentagon budget.

The possibility of further defense cuts has played only a minor role in the negotiations on the "fiscal cliff" thus far.

Republican hawks and defense industry CEOs have admitted that some additional defense cuts could be coming in a fiscal-cliff deal, although they have argued that the number should be far less than \$500 billion over the next decade.

Speaker John Boehner's (R-Ohio) proposal last week included \$300 billion in discretionary spending cuts over the next decade. The offer did not say what percentage of those cuts might hit the Pentagon budget.