

The Washington Post

Just how ‘draconian’ is the sequester? (in 4 infographics)

By: Aaron Blake - February 21, 2013

At this point, the word “draconian” is becoming a cliché in Washington.

Specifically, the word is being used as nauseum to describe the steep spending cuts contained in the sequester — especially when it comes to the defense budget, which takes the brunt of nearly half of the sequester cuts.

But some are arguing that the cuts aren’t all that spectacular at all. And below are a couple illustrations of their points.

First is a new pair of infographics from the conservative American Action Forum and ex-Congressional Budget Office director Douglas Holtz-Eakin.

Next, a chart from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a bipartisan foreign policy think tank that counts foreign policy heavyweights like Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski as members of its board.

As the chart above shows, the defense cuts contained in the sequester are actually pretty standard for a time in which the country is scaling back its overseas military operations.

And finally, the chart below from the libertarian Cato Institute shows how defense spending would be reduced over the next decade under the sequester.

The baseline spending (red line) is the budget without the sequester, while the blue line shows how much spending would decline under the sequester.

Now, we need to emphasize that charts don’t tell the whole story, as the 800,000 civilian Defense Department employees who were issued furlough notices this week can attest. Proponents of avoiding the sequester would also note that the cuts are likely to lead to a hike in the unemployment rate — anywhere from 0.25 percent to 1.5 percent, depending on whom you believe — and some have projected it could stunt the economic recovery.

That itself is a good enough reason for many to want to avoid the sequester.

But as the sequester gets closer, look for Republicans in particular to argue that the cuts involved aren’t all that “draconian” at all.

(Worth noting: The definition of “draconian” is: 1. of, relating to, or characteristic of Draco or the severe code of laws held to have been framed by him 2. cruel; also: severe)