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Fair pay and benefits needed to maintain quality volunteer force

The leader of 2.4 million member American Legion says a Pentagon budget proposal unveiled Monday by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel endangers America's national security and that downsizing force structure and benefits will lead to an exodus of quality men and women from the Armed Forces.

"Secretary Hagel warned about a 'hollowed force,' and The American Legion is concerned that this budget is leading us rapidly in that direction," National Commander Daniel Dellinger said. "Cutting forces to pre-World War II levels makes no sense in a world where countries such as North Korea, Iran and Pakistan could become viable nuclear threats to our very existence. Moreover, we do not know the exact nature of future wars and conflicts. The American Legion believes that we must be prepared for any scenario."

Dellinger called it "unconscionable" that the Pentagon is proposing that members of the military pay for part of their housing allowances out of their own pockets. "Whether it's cutting commissary subsidies or increasing TRI-CARE deductibles and co-pays, these benefits are well deserved and available to anyone willing to serve. Military life is much more challenging than private sector careers. The American Legion will continue to call for an end to sequestration and insufficient defense budgets. Providing for the common defense of our nation is a responsibility required by the U.S. Constitution."

American Legion officials said that although the organization strenuously opposes the current budget proposal, they appreciate the transparency shown by the secretary of defense and look forward to future discussions.

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