

By Rep. Allen West

During President Barack Obama's tenure, the national debt has risen to almost \$15 trillion, up from \$10.6 trillion when he first took office. A significant portion of this debt can be attributed to the immense growth of the federal government since 2009.

The president has increased the federal debt by nearly \$5 trillion since taking office, and historic levels of excessive spending have created record deficits in the past three fiscal years. Now, more than 41 cents of every dollar spent by the government is borrowed and 47 percent of the federal debt is owned by foreign nations.

Apart from defense, federal spending has hovered around 16.5 percent of the economy since 1980, through Democratic and Republican administrations. But under Obama, nondefense spending is soaring to 23 percent of the economy this year and is projected to remain at historically high levels in the future.

While I can agree in certain instances with across-the-board spending cuts, defense cuts must never hinder the ability of those serving on the front lines of battle from completing their missions. We cannot put the failures of this president and his massive spending agenda on the backs of the men, women and families of our armed forces. The United States must remain the most powerful military force in the world, and we must always stand with our troops as they ensure our national security.

However, that doesn't mean we cannot find savings within the Department of Defense budget. In fact, I found three places to cut spending and sponsored three bills to do so: H.R. 1246, H.R. 1247 and H.R. 1248.

- H.R. 1246 will reduce the printing and reproduction budget by 10 percent.
- H.R. 1247 will reduce funding for defense studies, analysis and evaluations by 10 percent.

- H.R. 1248 will restrict payout of annual nationwide adjustment and locality pay for below satisfactory workers.

I have since challenged all 435 voting Members of the House to find their own programs to trim. Importantly, none of these cuts would affect our ability to be the most powerful military force in the world.

Nonetheless, Members on the other side of the aisle are claiming we need to make significantly larger cuts to defense, and we are now confronted with hundreds of billions in defense cuts over a decade because of the failure of the Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction.

Even senior Obama administration officials are opposed to such enormous and damaging reductions. According to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, "The roughly \$1 trillion in cuts ... would seriously weaken our military, and ... make us unable to protect this nation from a range of security threats that we face."

Adm. Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, agreed, saying, "We are not going to solve the national debt challenge on the back of the military."

Trillion-dollar defense cuts would be devastating for the military, forcing spending reductions that would likely necessitate shrinking the size of the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps to the smallest numbers in decades and lead to the smallest Navy in nearly 100 years.

As China has begun sea trials with its first aircraft carrier and Iran is potentially plotting attacks on our soil, it is not the time to reduce and weaken our national defense.

We have already cut defense by an estimated \$470 billion over 10 years. I believe we can reduce military spending by moving from an outdated Cold War-era "forward deployed" posture to a posture of "power projection."

We must recognize the 21st-century battlefield, end nation-building and occupation-style warfare, and move toward strike-oriented operations. We must end the practice of providing "peaks and valleys" in our military funding and establish a steady state of force capability based on national security objectives and requirements.

Above all, our military and veterans must never be the bill-payers for failed economic policies and fiscal irresponsibility.

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