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Cut, Cap, and Balance Makes Sense—So Does Providing Adequate Support for Defense

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The Cut, Cap, and Balance Act (H.R. 2560) places a statutory cap on federal spending and requires the passage of a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution before increasing the nation's debt ceiling. This approach makes sense. It takes a concrete step in the direction of resolving the nation's debt crisis. It would also pave the way for raising the debt ceiling.

As Congress moves forward in deciding to control spending, it should remember that getting the debt crisis under control is also a matter of national security. Unless federal spending is reined in, there will be precious few financial resources left over to fund America's military operations and the men and women in uniform.

Recognizing this urgent need to protect America, the authors of the Cut, Cap, and Balance Act have wisely refused to place any spending caps on national defense. This makes sense, too. In order to maintain a trained and ready force and prepare for the future, Congress would have to support a core defense budget that averages \$720 billion per year over five years. This is the minimum financial commitment necessary to provide the nation with a military that can protect its vital national interests. This goal is obtainable under the Cut, Cap, and Balance Act.

No Time Out for National Security. It might be tempting to think that the U.S. can cut defense now and deal with the consequences later. But this only means that the nation would not be able to respond to events as it should. It is never a good idea to

gamble with national security, not the least because lives are at stake. History shows that cutting U.S. military strength for short-term gain often leads to tragedy and to even greater costs in both finances and lives once the mistake is realized.

Thomas Jefferson once said that "the price of freedom is eternal vigilance." Today, as has always been the case, the cause of liberty is under assault. Internationally, authoritarian states and the supporters of Islamist extremism in non-state groups seek to use violent coercion to extinguish liberty everywhere. Failing to prepare for these threats would not only weaken U.S. national security but undermine the international security of world commerce and trade if the U.S. is unable to defend the open seas and maintain a global military presence.

After "Cut, Cap, and Balance." Since H.R. 2560 will place a "cap" on federal spending, this means that at some point federal spending on defense and social programs would come into budgetary competition. It must be realized that every dollar cut from defense to supposedly reduce the deficit is one dollar less that has to be cut from entitlement and other programs that do not enjoy

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the same constitutional importance as providing for the “common defense.”

What is most important in national defense is long-term financial commitment. President Obama has already cut the defense budget. As Congress moves forward, it should allocate sufficient resources to modernize the military, replace and refit equipment and stocks after years of combat operations, and maintain trained and ready forces.

Next Steps. After careful study of our defense requirements, The Heritage Foundation has concluded that providing for defense will require spending an average of \$720 billion per year for each of the next five fiscal years in addition to the funding needed for ongoing contingency operations. Congress should make the defense budget as efficient as possible and redirect dollars achieved from reforms in the military to offsetting the cost of modernizing the forces and developing next-generation equipment.

The last thing Congress should do is compromise on defense. That would have a “double” negative affect on the nation. First, it would make America less safe. Second, it would do so without solving America’s fiscal ills. At the current rate of growth, entitlement spending will consume the entire federal budget in 40 years—even if the Pentagon’s budget were zero.

The intent of the Cut, Cap, and Balance Act is to bring fiscal health back to the country. Congress should also meet its responsibility to ensure that the nation’s security is in equally good health.

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