

The Military Spending Cut Scare

By [David Swanson](#)

Region: [USA](#)

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[War is a Crime](#)

The fearmongering is on. Here's a typical article, this one from the only daily newspaper in my hometown:

“Defense spending could face large loss from federal cuts

“By: NATE DELESLINE III | ndelesline@dailyprogress.com | 978-7243

“Published: September 17, 2012

“[Charlottesville Daily Progress](#)

“Charlottesville and Albemarle County could see a potential loss of \$46.5 million in defense-related spending if federally mandated cuts, which are slated to start next year, come to fruition.”

There are several ways in which this is misleading. First, “defense” here means military, whether or not defensive. Second, “cuts” in Washington-talk includes reductions in a budget from one year to the next, *OR* reductions from a desired dream-budget to a less-desired budget, even one that is an increase over last year’s. For the past 13 years, military spending has grown to levels not seen since World War II. It’s [over half of](#) federal [discretionary spending](#), and as much as the rest of the world combined. The Pentagon’s budget grew each year George W. Bush was president and the first three years that Barack Obama was president. It is being [cut by 2.6%](#) this year, not the 9% used to calculate a portion of that \$46.5 million figure. If the mandated cuts mentioned above go through, the Pentagon will still be spending next year more than it did in 2006 at the height of the war on Iraq.

In addition, military contractors have been bringing in more federal dollars while cutting jobs. They [employed fewer people](#) in 2011 with bigger contracts than in 2006 with smaller ones. So the logic of *bigger contracts = more jobs* is essentially a bucket of hope and change.

And the Pentagon’s base budget is [less than half of total](#) military spending. It’s necessary to add in war spending (over \$80 billion nationally this year), nuclear weapons spending through the Department of Energy, military operations through the State Department, USAID, and the CIA, the Department of Homeland Security, etc., to get the real total. The Pentagon also has [\\$83 billion](#) in unobligated balances it can draw on.

The war industries in the United States are also by no means limited to the U.S. government. U.S. weapons makers brought in [\\$66.3 billion](#) last year from foreign governments. Many of those governments, like our own, are engaged in horrendous human rights abuses, but as long as we’re being sociopathic about job creation, there’s no reason to leave this out.

The article continues:

“The figures - compiled by the Center for Security Policy and the Coalition for the Common Defense, conservative-leaning Washington, D.C.-based think tanks - are based on publicly available information on Department of Defense contracts compiled and made available online through the Federal Procurement Data System website.

“The coalition describes itself as a group of individuals and local and national organizations ‘committed to the Constitutional imperative to provide for the common defense and returning the United States to sensible fiscal principles without sacrificing its national security.’”

Never mind that the Constitution was written to include the creation of armies in times of war, not the permanent maintenance of a military industrial complex as a jobs program. The above is how the two groups pushing the “news” in this article describe themselves. How would a journalist describe them? Well, as long as they’re promoting military spending, it seems most relevant and significant to describe the ways in which they benefit from that spending.

The [Center for Security Policy](#) has a board of advisors packed with weapons makers executives and lobbyists from such disinterested parties as Boeing, Lockheed Martin, TRW, Raytheon, Ball Aerospace & Technologies, and Hewlett-Packard. The Coalition for the Common Defense has been maneuvering the anti-spending Tea Party behind massive military spending. Hence the Constitution-talk. But the “Coalition” isn’t run by Constitutional scholars. It’s [dominated by](#) weapons company lobbyists, including the Aerospace Industry Association, which represents Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Honeywell, L-3 Communications, and other military industry corporations. The Aerospace Industry Association spends over \$2 million a year lobbying our government in Washington. Much of that money ends up being spent on luxurious lobbyist lifestyles in the great Commonwealth of Virginia. Never forget the danger of the loss of that source of job creation should Congress simply and unquestioningly take direction from the weapons makers.

The article goes on:

“The data is reported by fiscal year and does not include grants or loans.

“From 2000-2011, more than 14,000 Virginia businesses provided defense-related goods and services, according to a state level report prepared by for Common Defense.

“Based on fiscal year 2011 defense contract date, the estimated reduction in Albemarle County in 2013 would be \$43.25 million; in the city, the reduction would be an estimated \$3.25 million.

“Earlier this year, defense budgets were cut by about \$487 billion, an average of a 9 percent cut over a decade. In addition, the reports reflect the impact of sequestration, a 2011 mandate for about \$500 billion more in defense spending reductions from 2013-2021, which averages to about an overall 18

percent cut in defense spending.”

Here it's worth pausing to note that the \$487 billion figure has been multiplied by 10. It's a figure “over a decade.” Divided by 10 it would be \$48.7 billion “over a year.” Or, it could be multiplied by 100 to give us \$4,870 billion “over a century.” The reasons to talk about the decade are two. First, it sounds bigger that way. Second, by loading the later years heavily, politicians can claim to be making big cuts while actually passing those cuts on to future politicians who may not make them. While all the news articles deal with cuts “over a decade,” Congress actually only passes budgets for a year at a time.

“Published earlier this year, the reports indicate the Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads regions would see the most severe losses if the cuts are fully implemented, while the state overall could lose \$7.24 billion in earnings and more than 122,000 jobs.

“‘There's no question that Virginia will be the most impacted,’ Christine Brim, chief operating officer of the Center for Security Policy told The Daily Progress. ‘Virginia has the largest amount of defense spending. This is, without a doubt, the state that is the most impacted.’

“Furthermore, Brim said the effects go beyond just the financial to the core of Virginia's identity, history and culture as a state important to America's defense, character traits that still hold true today.”

Here's Democratic Virginia Senate candidate [Tim Kaine](#) claiming that one in three Virginians depends directly on military spending. These claims are almost certainly exaggerated. They are for [Albemarle County](#). The county's website says: *“The economy of Albemarle County is vital and growing. The predominant economic sectors are services, manufacturing, education, retail, tourism, trade, care & social assistance, technical & professional services and agriculture. The County of Albemarle's labor force is roughly 53,000 and its unemployment rate of 2.6% is consistently lower than the state and national averages.”*

“However, Jeff Caldwell, a spokesman for Gov. Bob McDonnell, said the state does not yet have any estimates for the effect of sequestration in Virginia.

“‘With so many variables involved, there is no firm number to delineate that impact on the commonwealth or any particular area,’ Caldwell said by email.

“Rep. Robert Hurt, R-5th, called the looming cuts ‘devastating’ for his district, which encompasses most of the Charlottesville region.

“‘The White House and the Senate must join with the House [of Representatives] in addressing this impending crisis so we can keep our military men and women adequately equipped, protect jobs across the 5th District and the Commonwealth, and reduce our national debt in a responsible manner,’ Hurt said in a statement.”

A few points missed in the above: First, refusing to cut military spending does the opposite of reducing the national debt. Second, military spending is [the least cost-efficient way to](#)

[produce jobs](#). It produces fewer jobs than spending on infrastructure, green energy, education, or even tax cuts for working people. So, if the goal is to save money while producing jobs, military spending is exactly the place to cut. Third, there is absolutely no evidence that “adequate equipment” is what’s on the chopping block here. Hurt makes it sound like putting the U.S. navy on Jeju Island, South Korea, against the passionate will of the people there, is being done not to threaten China but as an act of philanthropy for U.S. sailors.

“House Minority Leader Eric Cantor, whose 7th District encompasses portions of the Charlottesville region, issued an even more sharply worded statement on his website, calling the planned cuts a ‘dangerous threat’ and urging President Obama and Senate Democrats ‘to take serious action to prevent these arbitrary, devastating cuts from taking place.’”

Did he offer any evidence for those sharp words?

“While Brim acknowledged the need and desire to cut federal spending, she said gutting the defense budget would derail America’s recovery from the recession.

“That’s because conflict would interrupt trade and commerce and ‘there would be nothing more costly than having our trade routes disrupted,’ she said.”

Now this is a new one. Unless we continue to borrow money from China with which to build up our military presence all over the globe, including in every location strategically helpful in cutting off China’s trade routes, our trade routes will be disrupted. What trade routes?! Can she name one? Conflict, indeed, disrupts peaceful activity. But conflict comes from war spending. War spending and war preparation spending does not reduce conflict.

“Local leaders, however, were more measured in their assessment of the effect of the cuts on the local economy.

“‘While our area would be affected by any change in federal spending, the overall impact would be minimal given that defense spending constitutes a small percentage of our overall economy,’ Chris Engel, Charlottesville’s economic development director said by email.

“Albemarle County spokeswoman Lee Catlin said recent reaffirmations of the county’s AAA bond rating in spite of potential defense-related reductions is an indicator of confidence and stability in the local economy.

“‘However, we are home to several major federal installations and associated defense contractors who are valued and important partners in our economy, so we are concerned about funding uncertainty,’ Catlin said by email.

“And if the spending cuts do come to pass, Engel expressed confidence that the region’s economy would persevere. ‘I think our business community has proven itself to be very adaptable in the past and this could be another instance where that trait will be needed,’ Engel said.”

If these last paragraphs had come first, this would not have been a bad article at all.

David Swanson's books include "[War Is A Lie](#)." He blogs at <http://davidswanson.org> and <http://warisacrime.org> and works as Campaign Coordinator for the online activist organization <http://rootsaction.org>. He hosts [Talk Nation Radio](#). Follow him on Twitter: [@davidcswanson](#) and [FaceBook](#).

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