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Mr. James Rosen
McClatchy Newspapers, Washington Bureau
700 12th Street NW, Suite 1000
Washington DC 20005

Dear Mr. Rosen,

As the former commander-in-chief, North American Aerospace Defense Command (CINCNORAD) and United States Space Command (USCINCSpace), and commander, Air Force Space Command, I disagree with the overall premise of your article, "Did the Pentagon Cry Wolf Over Sequestration?" In my discussions with many senior military leaders, it is crystal clear that sequestration has had significant impacts in this fiscal year and it will have ever-increasing impacts as the Budget Control Act of 2012 mandates deeper cuts in the years ahead. As you accurately stated in your article, because of sequestration, Defense was reduced \$42B in FY13 and will be reduced another \$45B in 2014. It is important to remember that the annual cuts are additive and will continue every year for the next eight years, from FY14 for a total of nearly \$500B and that is in addition to the \$487B that has already been taken from Defense as a result of agreements reached in 2012. So no one is crying wolf here. The combination of these two cuts amounts to real money that if realized, will gut our military.

Already in 2013 sequestration has caused the Air Force to "break faith" with many of its civilian employees. From maintenance professionals to civil engineers to program managers, civilian employees will lose up to twenty percent of their pay over the last quarter of the fiscal year. These professionals are essential to mission accomplishment, and it's important to remember they have not seen a pay raise in the last three years. The work done by these employees will either not be accomplished, or our military personnel will be diverted from their work to accomplish essential tasks.

On the operational front you stated in your original article that 12 of the Air Force's 171 squadrons have stopped flying – none of which are active duty. It is important to remember that the Air Force fights as a Total Force made up of active duty, National Guard and Air Force Reserve forces. If you look at any operation since the First Gulf War, Guard and Reserve forces were as involved as our active duty forces, so to intimate that shutting down those units is somehow less important than grounding active duty forces is to not understand how the Air Force fights. And besides, the fact is the number of units that stopped flying was thirteen and all were active duty. For example, the 336TFS which flies highly capable F-15E Strike Eagles has stopped flying until at least the end of September 2013. Other squadrons not flying are also made up of front-line aircraft such as F-16s, B-1Bs and additional F-15Es. So already because of sequestration active duty flying squadrons are grounded, space assets have been shuttered, and critical training events have been cancelled. The corrosive impact of these actions, while not immediately obvious, lessens the readiness posture of our Air Force. Should the Air Force be called upon for a major operation, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to assemble the required forces for major combat operations and that is just the result of FY13 cuts. If sequestration cuts continue it will only be a matter of time

before we reach a point of no return -- our military will be hollowed out and incapable of providing for the national defense.

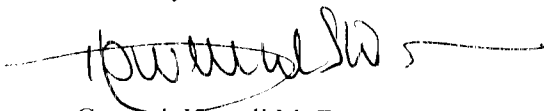
The impact of sequestration is not always apparent. For example, across the Air Force, sustainment of facilities and weapons systems has been reduced drastically. Needed repairs are being pushed down the road into fiscal years which will have even less operation and maintenance funding--the work simply will not get done. In my former command, Air Force Space Command, weapons systems sustainment funding, which pays for depot maintenance and logistics support, was cut \$145M out of an \$805M budget. The result is deferring and eventually eliminating required fixes and needed software upgrades to vital satellites that support the President in his role as Commander-in-Chief. You'll also find that these same systems have been critical to warfighter and intelligence analysts in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past decade.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, your point that the Pentagon has had flexibility in applying its share of the automatic cuts is not supported by the mechanics of the Budget Control Act. The law requires that sequestration be implemented as reductions to all appropriations--there is no flexibility in the law. While the FY13 Appropriations Act did provide eight billion dollars of reprogramming authority (\$1.8B for the Air Force), this is a miniscule amount when you consider that the DoD budget is \$525B. This "flexibility" is clearly insufficient to solve the structural problems created by a law that has both immediate and lasting impacts.

To be clear I am not one of those pushing for the status quo. Our nation has severe budget problems that must be resolved if we are to get our economy back on track. Defense needs to do its part, but the level of cuts and how they are currently applied will result in a military that is incapable of providing "for the common defense" as called for in our Constitution.

I believe a more in-depth look at the sequestration-related problems across the entire DoD would lead to a far different set of conclusions than you reached in your article.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Howell M. Estes III', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

General Howell M. Estes III, USAF Retired