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*By Rep. Tom Rooney*

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As the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction - better known as "the supercommittee" - works to find at least \$1.5 trillion in savings over 10 years, our economy, national debt and credit rating hang in the balance. So does our national security.

If the committee fails to reach an agreement, or if Congress fails to approve its recommendations, a series of automatic spending cuts will be triggered. Of those cuts, \$500 billion will come from national security, on top of the \$465 billion already being cut from the Department of Defense over the next 10 years.

The federal government's first obligation is to keep its citizens safe. We live in a dangerous world with enemies who wish to do us harm, such as Iran, which is making significant progress toward developing nuclear weapons. How would cutting \$1 trillion from national security protect us from these threats?

These drastic cuts to our military would send a dangerous message to our enemies. Our military would be much smaller, our weapons systems more outdated, and our overall readiness greatly weakened, and the threats would be unabated.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said that meeting the \$1 trillion in defense cuts would require across-the-board, 23 percent reductions, which would end most of our ship and construction projects. We would be left with our smallest ground force since 1940, the fewest ships since 1915 and the smallest Air Force in its history. Mr. Panetta described these cuts as "devastating" and said they would "seriously damage readiness."

At a recent hearing in the House Armed Services Committee, on which I serve, we asked our military chiefs how these cuts would affect their branches' ability to protect the country. They did not mince words.

"Cuts of this magnitude would be catastrophic to the military," Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond Odierno told us. They would "require us to completely revamp our national security strategy," and "the nation would incur an unacceptable level of strategic and operational risk."

Adm. Jonathan Greenert, chief of naval operations, testified that "some of the actions we would need to take would have a severe and irreversible impact on the Navy's future." He added that "the Navy will have to rethink some fundamental aspects of what our military does."

Marine Commandant James Amos said these cuts would leave us with "a Marine Corps below the end strength that's necessary to support even one major contingency," which would pose "significant risk" for the nation. Air Force Chief of Staff Norton Schwartz testified that more cuts would mean "continued aging and reductions in the Air Force's fleet of fighters, strategic bombers, airlifters and tankers," resulting in "dire consequences."

I take the testimony of our nation's military leaders very seriously. As with all federal agencies, there may be wasteful spending within the Pentagon's budget that we could cut without harming national security, and we should do so. I led the fight to kill the extra engine program for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, saving taxpayers billions of dollars. However, we cannot cut \$1 trillion in defense spending without sacrificing our national security, as our military leaders have unanimously stated.

Mr. Panetta has stated that if these cuts are enacted, "We would have to formulate a new security strategy that accepted substantial risk of not meeting our defense needs."

I am unwilling to accept that risk. Our military leaders have made clear that the Defense Department cannot shoulder additional cuts without significantly damaging national security. Failing to heed their warnings is unacceptable. Both parties must work together, put all other options on the table, and reach an agreement to tackle our nation's deficit without crippling its

defense.

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