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FRA's 2013 Legislative Efforts Focus on Major Threats to Benefits Sequestration Concerns All Members of the Military Community

The Fleet Reserve Association's (FRA's) top 2013 priority is to protect military and veterans benefit programs, which are threatened by automatic budget cuts required by the 2011 Budget Control Act (sequestration) and the possible enactment of another continuing resolution (CR). Major Department of Defense (DoD) budget cuts will occur on March 1st unless Congress acts to identify alternative reductions and the current CR, which limits federal spending at FY 2012 levels, expires on March 27th.

"These two deadlines have the potential to be the 'perfect storm,' impacting compensation and benefits, particularly for military personnel and retirees," says Joe Barnes, FRA's national executive director. "Half of the sequestration budget cuts must come from the DoD and there is serious concern these reductions will not only negatively impact readiness, but also compromise pay, healthcare, retirement and other quality-of-life benefits earned through military service. The Association is also closely monitoring how the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) budget will be impacted, especially as it relates to those receiving VA medical care and disability compensation."

In a recent FRA online survey, more than 81 percent of the 1,893 current and former service members who participated said they were "very concerned" about sweeping cuts to the federal budget. Comments made by survey respondents reflected frustration and anxiety over the uncertainty of military and veteran benefit programs, many of which referenced the nation's need to honor its commitments to those who served in the past.

The annual survey also asked all segments of the military community – active duty and Reserve personnel, retirees, veterans and their spouses – which military and veteran benefits are most important to them. For the past several years, access to healthcare has consistently been a top concern and was again ranked as the second overall priority for all respondent groups.

Retirement benefits were among the top concerns for active duty and Reserve respondents. Those serving in the Reserve Component cited retirement as their most important benefit, while active duty personnel listed it third on their list of most valuable benefits, behind base pay and healthcare access. Reservists cited education benefits as their third most important benefit.

Healthcare dominated the priorities for military retirees, with quality of healthcare benefits topping access to the benefit. Medicare benefits and the cost of TRICARE premiums ranked a close third and fourth, respectively. Veterans were similarly concerned about healthcare services, ranking quality of VA healthcare as their primary concern, followed closely by access to VA care, pharmacy benefits and the timely processing of disability claims.

This and other FRA-sponsored surveys gauge the concerns of the military communities and help determine the Association's top legislative priorities. FRA shares data from its surveys with legislators and military leaders to inform them about the impact legislation may have on these groups.

FRA is urging its members and others to express their concerns about sequestration with the White House, their U.S. representatives and senators via the FRA Action Center at www.fra.org.

"Survey responses and communication with elected officials strengthen FRA's efforts to preserve the value of military and veteran benefits, and advance an ambitious and important legislative agenda," added Barnes. "Our members' concerns are consistently addressed in FRA's congressional testimony, correspondence with key legislators and military leaders, and in one-on-one meetings with lawmakers and their staff."

About FRA

FRA is a congressionally chartered, non-profit organization representing the interests of current and former enlisted personnel of the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. As the collective voice for all Sea Service personnel since 1924, FRA speaks on behalf of its members on Capitol Hill. Visit www.fra.org; follow us on Twitter at [@FRAHQ](https://twitter.com/FRAHQ); or Like us on Facebook at www.fra.org/fb.