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Editorial Response to “The unaffordability of the all-volunteer military” and “Military suicides exceed number killed in combat in 2012,” in the *Washington Post*, January 15, 2013

January 16, 2013

Dear Washington Post,

The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) finds it ironic that Walter Pincus' column of January 15 (“The unaffordability of the all-volunteer military”) rails about the high cost of defense personnel programs, while fellow *Washington Post* writer Ernesto Londono cites the record high suicide rate among military personnel in 2012. According to Mr. Londono’s “Military suicides exceed number killed in combat in 2012” article, the significant rise in suicide rates “underscores the toll a decade of wars has taken on the all-volunteer force.”

Both stories fail to mention the increasing demands and associated stress on personnel currently serving to defend our nation and neither article references the declining defense budget as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), particularly in comparison to past wartime periods. Drawing conclusions about military compensation and retirement by comparing military service to civilian employment neglects the level of risk and responsibility shouldered by the one percent of our population who serve in the armed forces. Just as highly-vaunted and growing entitlement and social programs are important to our country, military compensation, healthcare, retirement and benefit programs are essential to sustaining the all volunteer force and vital to maintaining military readiness and ensuring our national security.

Readiness and national security come with a price, both monetary and the incalculable costs of lives lost and/or altered by military service. It isn’t a question of the unaffordability of an all-volunteer force, as Mr. Pincus contends. It’s a matter of priorities and whether lawmakers find it unaffordable to defend our nation.

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