

THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE



DON GAETZ
President of the Senate



WILL WEATHERFORD
*Speaker of the House of
Representatives*

June 3, 2013

The Honorable Jeff Miller
United States House of Representatives
336 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Miller:

Since the conclusion of the 2013 Legislative Session, we had the privilege of spending time with the men and women of our Florida National Guard. We were impressed and inspired, but we are also deeply concerned by what we learned.

One of the priorities of the Florida Legislature is to use state funds to refit and renovate our state's fifty-one National Guard armories so that they can function effectively as staging areas for deployment overseas as well as duties within our state. In the past two years, we also have undertaken an intensive effort to help our Guardsmen find jobs as they have returned from Afghanistan, Iraq, and other overseas deployments. A combined public and private initiative has reduced the unemployment rate of returning Guardsmen from 36 percent to less than 6 percent. All of that is encouraging news.

In visits over the past few days however, we learned that beginning July 8, our federal military technicians will be furloughed for part of each week as a result of federal sequestration. While not one soldier or airman complained or asked for special treatment, the consequences of these furloughs are obvious and significant for the people you and we represent.

Florida National Guard military technicians who are now deployed in war zones will soon be told that, upon their return to our state, they will be welcomed home with a furlough. All the tributes, resolutions and commendations which you and we offer our military tend to ring hollow when we thank them with one hand and cut their pay with the other.

The Florida National Guard has deployed over 17,000 members since 9/11, and we are very proud of their tremendous contributions. The suggestion that they are not uniformed military personnel, and thereby not exempt from furlough, is not only unjust, it is unconscionable.

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Ironically, these furlough notices are being issued just as hurricane season is starting. As we are all well aware, it is the National Guard we turn to for protection of lives and property and the restoration of services and order when storms destroy communities in our state. Historically, Florida, as much or more than any other state, suffers from hurricanes and tropical storms and therefore relies heavily upon the National Guard during and in the aftermath of these natural disasters.

It is not just troops who are affected by sequestration-forced furloughs; the equipment our troops depend upon must be maintained and serviced. We are told that beginning July 8, troops will not be on duty and equipment will not be maintained on Mondays.

One soldier said to us, "We'll always do what we have to do. But I hope there are no wars or hurricanes on Mondays."

We hope that on your next trip home, you will find the time to visit with Guardsmen and their families to learn about these issues firsthand, as we have. We respectfully request that you join us in asking Secretary of Defense Hagel to take seriously the consequences of sequestration on our Florida National Guard and to consider exempting this vital national and state defense force from furloughs, particularly during hurricane season.

To our minds, the readiness of our National Guard is a disproportionately Florida issue, is above partisanship, and demands the best efforts of all of us who represent the people of this state.

Respectfully,



Don Gaetz
President
The Florida Senate



Will Weatherford
Speaker
The Florida House of Representatives

Cc: The Honorable Rick Scott, Governor, State of Florida
Members of the Florida Congressional Delegation
Major General Emmett R. Titshaw, Jr., Adjutant General, Florida National Guard

