

THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE



DON GAETZ
President of the Senate



WILL WEATHERFORD
*Speaker of the House of
Representatives*

June 3, 2013

The Honorable Charles T. Hagel
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hagel:

We are writing to urge you to immediately consider exempting federal military technicians from the Department of Defense furlough that will begin on July 8, 2013.

Since the conclusion of Florida's 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.

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.

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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.

Ironically, these furlough notices are being issued just as hurricane season is starting. As you are 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.

We have also contacted Florida's Congressional leaders who we believe share our serious concern for the drastic impact sequestration will have on our Guard's ability to defend lives and property. We believe the readiness of our National Guard is a disproportionately Florida issue. We respectfully ask you to consider this request to help Florida preserve the ability to rapidly respond to disasters by exempting federal military technicians from furlough.

Respectfully,



Don Gaetz
President
The Florida Senate



Will Weatherford
Speaker
The Florida House of Representatives

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