



# Two-year defense spending smooths the way to a ready military

BY JEFFREY E. PHILLIPS AND JOHN G. ROTHROCK, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS — 03/02/18 08:00 AM EST  
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The budget deal signed Feb. 9 by President Trump funds the federal government for two years and postpones further damage to military readiness, especially that suffered by our hometown members of the Reserve and National Guard, by exactly that length of time.

The House and Senate reached this compromise after a two-day shutdown drove a stopgap spending bill through March, giving members of Congress time to hammer out the legislation. The biggest winner is the Department of Defense with \$700 billion in defense spending in fiscal year 2018 and \$716 billion in fiscal year 2019, levels well above the sequestration caps mandated by the [Budget Control Act of 2011](#).

"After nearly a decade of asking our troops to do more with less," Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) [said in a joint statement](#) with Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), "we hope this agreement will allow the military to begin to rebuild and ensure that process can continue into next year."

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said because of the president, "we can now have the strongest military we have ever had." She said the deal "achieves our top priority — a much-needed increase in funding for our national defense. This deal also increases budget caps, ends the sequester, and provides certainty for the next two years."

This is a win for military readiness in the short term: assured funding begets predictability and, in turn, better planning, the potential of equipment modernization, and so forth. It is a win for the men and women of our armed forces, because it provides them with certainty, commitment and resolve.

For members of our Reserve and National Guard, who stand ready to leave everything — home, family, jobs — to serve the nation, it reduces the threat of cancelled drills, with their disruption to readiness, employment and family finances.

Yet, as Senator McCain and as Ms. Sanders pointed out, it's only for two years.

We must make it permanent.

The Reserve Officers Association has advocated a biennial military personnel defense budget for years. We're not alone: pressing for adequate and predictable funding, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis assured Congress the Pentagon would "spend the money wisely" if two-year funding could be enacted.

The U.S. military — and the Reserve and National Guard, in particular — long have been pawns in the federal discretionary funding game. So, in a shutdown, our Reservists and Guardsmen are hit with disproportionate impact. Training and readiness are degraded, inspections and operational mission support hampered, and deployments curtailed.

According to a Marine Corps Reserve officer, shutdowns and budget uncertainty limit a Reservist's ability to plan — one of the key skills our nation asks of them. Budget problems rob them of time, the most precious resource. They force training changes, range cancellations and rescheduling that reverberate into the next training year and often place tremendous burdens on the individual, the family, and the employer. This undermines readiness and violates our nation's pact with the citizen-warrior and those who stand with him or her.

Budget delays can drive higher attrition rates, as service members grasp the difficulty of getting the "drill time" and training necessary for promotion, and fret over keeping the goodwill of their employer.

The legacy of spending gaps, government shutdowns and sequestration is an underfunded U.S. military, ill-prepared to face the most complex and dangerous national security environment in our nation's history.

Budget problems won't ease with the oft-promised "end of war" in Iraq and Afghanistan. Operational tempo is high and likely rising — without the buy-in of the American people. Some members of Congress have taken notice. U.S. Reps. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) and Justin Amash (R-Mich.) lamented our "perpetual war" in an [op-ed in The Hill](#), echoing Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, who has cited the "abdication" by Congress in not declaring war. They wrote that not since Congress passed the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force after the 9/11 attacks has the legislature seriously debated its constitutional power to declare war, thus ceding power to the president.

Given the need for predictable, stable defense funding, the Reserve Officers Association applauds this first step by Congress to adopt biennial appropriations and we urge that two-year Pentagon funding become a permanent feature (as it has with Department of Veterans Affairs mandatory funding). After all, do serving members of our military deserve any less than their honored "alumni"?

Ultimately, it is our brave and dedicated citizen-warriors who pay the price of continuing resolutions and government shutdowns. For the sake of our military personnel and the defense of our nation, Congress must adopt a two-year defense budget.

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