

Statement to the House Armed Services Committee

Representative Denny Heck

May 8, 2013

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I represent the Congressional district that contains Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the third largest military installation in the United States. Thousands of families in my district are connected to this Joint Base in some way. They are the families of active duty service members, reservists, civilian workers, veterans, and more. In the past few months, many of these families have begun to feel the negative effects of decisions the Department of Defense has had to make as a result of the sequestration cuts.

I want to read you part of a letter I received from one of the members of one of these families. It comes from a woman named Lacey, who lives in Olympia, the same city I do. Lacey's husband is stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. He has been deployed multiple times overseas during the last decade. Lacey and her husband have two young sons, aged 3 and 1. She writes of her family:

Our lives together have held surprises, both good and bad, thanks to my husband's military commitment. But I support my husband in his service - I know that for the bad days he has at "the office" that he has far more good days. He truly enjoys his job. My husband was put on orders to come here to Fort Lewis and we were told that this particular assignment, though chaotic, would actually result in more time home for him. More time with our two young boys, 3 and 1.

The first portion of my husband's assignment was wonderful. He was home for dinner. We could actually eat a family meal (for the first time since we've had children, I might add). He was able to actually do the whole bedtime routine for our oldest son, instead of barely skidding in the door to read him part of a story and put him in bed. My sons blossomed with this "extra" time with their father. My 3-year-old started actually talking: stringing together words and phrases, articulating complex thoughts, explaining feelings. My 1-year-old started to talk period, mostly saying, "Dada." It took my 1-year-old nearly six months to warm to my husband as he did not know his father.

In the few short weeks that these sequester cuts have been coming downhill, I can tell you that there has been a significant and miserable change in my children. Both of them are moody and

angry; at the gym, I am called in my often to get my children from care because they are unhappy and inconsolable. What had been great progress at potty training suddenly regressed back into diapers. My husband wakes up at 5:00 and isn't getting back home from work until 6:00 pm on a good day. Many days he is barely getting through the door at 7:30 pm at night, and that is with leaving tasks incomplete on his desk. We have barely two hours together before he is falling asleep exhausted on the couch. While I cook us a meager dinner, he works on his graduate course (he just started his master's degree in January).

I know my husband is a hard-working man. I have supported him through two Iraq tours, two assignments in Africa, and an assignment in a former Soviet territory. I have brought two children into this world with him. I have moved completely across the country with him, and I am putting my graduate degree and career on hold in order to support him and raise our children until they are of school-age. I know what kind of hours he works when he is deployed; it is the same daily hours as he is working now. My job, as I see it, is to hold this family together, to make sure that my children are connected to their father. But how can I keep them connected to a husk of a person? This schedule, this pace, will turn my husband into a shell of himself.

Mr. Chairman, often this town gets lost in the numbers and percentages and statistics that go into our federal budgeting process. We lose focus on the fact that the decisions we make here impact families in real ways. There are real people out there who have to deal with the consequences of this Congress's actions – or in this case, it's inaction in regards to replacing the sequestration cuts with a balanced, responsible alternative.

I know the committee does not have jurisdiction on this issue. I can guarantee that sequestration has affected the district of each member of this committee. Congress can still get this right. Congress can stop the unnecessary hardships that Lacey speaks about in this letter. It just needs to muster the will to act. I hope, for the sake of military families around the country like Lacey's, that this happens soon.

Thank you.