



August 14, 2013

The Honorable Charles T. Hagel
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to express concern that the Department of Defense (DoD) is on the verge of harming a program that is part of the solution to major budget challenges. We are increasingly concerned about reports of proposals being considered by DoD that would diminish this critical earned benefit and set back the commissary program, which delivers tremendous value in terms of retention and quality of life benefits in relation to the resources it consumes.

Although we fully understand that all Pentagon programs must be reviewed for efficiencies, it is alarming that the commissary program – which has consistently stepped forward to cut costs – continues to be singled out by budget cutters despite being recognized as a model for other DoD programs to emulate. Commissaries have reduced costs some \$700 million a year through efficiencies and store closures over the past 20 years, downsizing proportionally with reductions in force and base closures. And, while commissaries are continuing to seek further efficiencies, we don't believe that their success should be penalized with reductions that would diminish the core benefit provided to 13 million patrons.

Commissaries represent one of the most efficient, accountable, and responsive agencies in the Federal government – creating billions of dollars each year in patron savings, which impact military household incomes and offset Government costs. Further reductions beyond those already imposed would harm a program that spins off a multitude of benefits beyond patron savings – including family member employment, support for a wide variety of socio-economic programs, and major cost avoidance by DoD.

Commissary employees and patrons are already sharing in DoD's budget pain. These employees – more than half are military family members, veterans, or people with disabilities – have been hit with hiring freezes, furloughs, and loss of pay, after years of going without cost of living increases. Patrons are also experiencing curtailed operations and furlough-induced store closures.

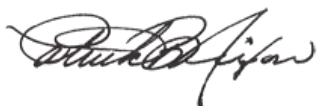
Commissaries and exchanges are the bedrock of our service members' earned benefits package. Drastically cutting these vital programs – which are a model of efficiency and give back so much to the Defense mission and military community – sends the wrong message to other Defense programs, which are seeking to gain efficiencies.

Support for quality of life programs for service members and their families during these difficult budget times is greatly appreciated. Your commitment to fund commissary programs in the fiscal year 2014 budget is a strong indication of this support. On behalf of the 1.6 million service members, veterans, and military families represented by our Coalition, we thank you and request your continued support for the military resale system.

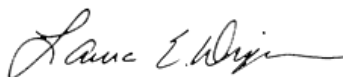
The President affirmed the importance of this benefit at Camp Pendleton on August 7th, stating: "...the commissary your families rely on closed a day a week. We can do better than that. That's not how a great nation should be treating its military and military families." We agree and urge you to protect this quality of life benefit for our military community.

Sincerely,

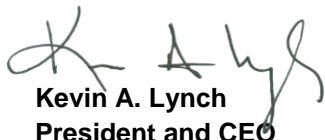
The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits



Patrick B. Nixon
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American Logistics Association



Laura E. Dixon
Chairman
Armed Forces Marketing Council



Kevin A. Lynch
President and CEO
National Industries for the Blind



MCPO Joseph L. Barnes, USN (Ret)
National Executive Director
Fleet Reserve Association



Mary T. Scott
Chairman of the Board
National Military Family Association



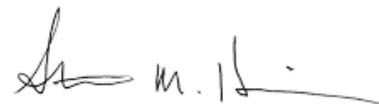
VADM Norb Ryan, USN (Ret)
President & CEO
Military Officers Association of America



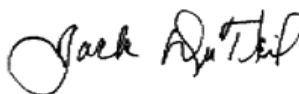
Deirdre Parke Holleman
Executive Director
The Retired Enlisted Association



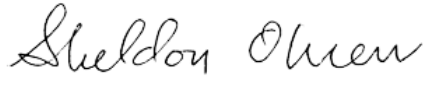
General Gordon R. Sullivan, USA (Ret)
President
Association of the United States Army



Major Stewart M. Hickey, USMC (Ret)
National Executive Director
AMVETS



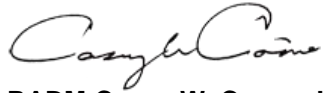
CW4 (Ret) Jack Du Teil
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