

TRANSCRIPT: Joel Arends: “Do what it takes to accomplish the mission”

Event: Providing for the Common Defense: The First Duty of the ‘Super Committee’

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My name is Joel Arends. I'm the chairman of Veterans for a Strong America. I also served in Iraq with the Army's First Calvary Division from late 2003 to early 2005. I served as an infantry platoon leader and also as a company commander during my time there. And what's interesting what Congressman Forbes started out with today is he said, what kind of national defense do we want to have in this country? Are we going to have the kind of defense planned around what kind of resources and what kind of economy we have? Or are we going to have a national defense based upon what the threats are? As a platoon leader, at the very most fundamental level of combat, we didn't—when I got a mission from my boss, we didn't devise our plan around how many humvees or how many M-16s or M-4s I had. We devised our plan around the threat and then went out and gathered the resources around there. We didn't always have all the resources we needed. But at the end of the day, a soldier, sailor, airman, or a Marine will do whatever it takes to help accomplish the mission. And so the first thing I want to talk about that we face with the specter of looming budget cuts is doing more with less. What we potentially face is a cut of two hundred thousand more troops from our force structure. That means doing more with less. It means soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines on the ground are going to have to bear a heavier burden. They're going to have to do with fewer replacements. Fewer and far between. They're also going to have to face the question of whether or not, because we're going to see a troop drawdown, or a reduction from forces, is they're also going to face the question of whether they'll be able to serve an entire career in the military.

You may have a platoon sergeant who's had fifteen years in the military fighting in combat right now wondering if when he comes home he's going to be able to make twenty years. Whether he's going to have a career. And so we don't need that kind of anxiety in the force. We need a strong, stable force prepared to serve a career. I mean, we're even—with these kind of personnel cuts, we are potentially facing bringing the draft back. And it's unacceptable to a career professional stable military. So again, we're doing more with less. The second thing I want to talk about is doing more with broken equipment. When I served on the ground in Iraq, I had a humvee that was built in 1985. Almost—and I served there in 2004. Number one, it's a testament to the durability of American military equipment. It's also a red flag. Not only do we have twenty year old humvees, we have captains in the Air Force, as late as 2008, who are flying airplanes that their fathers had flown before them. We have a United States aircraft carrier, the USS Enterprise, that's been sailing the seas since 1961. It's set to be commissioned here in 2013. We have an aging fleet. It needs to be replaced. It is going to take a certain amount of investment to do that. We will not be able to make any of those upgrades. In fact, we'll be drawing down two aircraft carrier battle groups in terms of the Navy as a result of these cuts. Now the last thing I want to leave you with is the fact—and Tom has mentioned this, Congressman Forbes mentioned this at the beginning, we are already going through the process, DOD is, of cutting four hundred and eighty-nine billion

dollars out of its budget. Cuts have been made. Efficiencies are being found. We're at the bone.

The next question is, do we want to cut into the bone? Do we want to start that amputation process? To follow the analogy through further. And the answer is no. We can't afford it. Cause as Congressman Lamborn said, we're then starting to cut into capabilities. You know, I have three little children at home. And every night, the last line in our prayer is praying for the soldiers and sailors who defend America. We pray for America. And certainly what VSA will be doing here in the future is organizing and mobilizing a vast network of veterans around the country to talk to members of the super committee, to talk to members of Congress in their districts to insure that they're voting with the kind of defense not based around what kind of resources we have, but based upon what kinds of threats we faced. Thank you.