

The announcement by Defense Secretary Robert Gates to make cuts at the Defense Department, specifically the decision to eliminate the Joint Forces Command, is shortsighted, devoid of strategic decision-making and could harm national security.

I strongly agree that we must find and implement efficiencies in both the department and throughout the federal government. However, I'm alarmed by two issues in these cuts: The Defense Department appears to be the only agency proposing cuts, and non-defense spending is growing exponentially and is unsustainable.

The bottom line? Federal spending is out of control, and we cannot find all the fixes for the deficit or national debt within the Department of Defense.

Gates' decision seems completely budget driven and will almost certainly weaken our national security.

The secretary highlighted the elimination of the Joint Forces Command, which is a functional combatant command providing coordination for our fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. The department has not provided an explanation for how closing this command would impact the war effort. Our ability to coordinate multiservice military efforts and conduct major operations in a joint environment gives our military a significant advantage. I cannot agree with a decision to give up that edge.

This decision appears to have been made without thoughtful consideration of the long-term strategic implications for our national defense. The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) law requires

congressional oversight of any decision to eliminate more than 1,000 jobs. This decision affects nearly 6,000 jobs. By announcing it, the secretary has circumvented Congress' constitutionally mandated oversight of the military.

After two years of study, the secretary provided Congress with the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, the Pentagon's plan for our military's strategy and structure over the next 20 years. There was no mention of closing the Joint Forces Command.

I challenge Secretary Gates to provide justifications for this drastic decision, or better yet, to work with Congress in an effort to find efficiencies within the Defense Department in ways that do not endanger our national security.

*Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., is a member of the House Armed Services Committee. His district is near the Norfolk, Va., home of the Joint Forces Command.*