

[By Nicole Gaudiano](#)

Rep. Peter Welch is pushing back against Republicans who want to roll back defense cuts that were agreed to as part of an August deal to raise the nation's borrowing limit.

The Vermont Democrat on Thursday released a letter he wrote to President Barack Obama, signed by 100 Democrats, rallying behind his threat to veto any legislation designed to unravel automatic, across-the-board spending cuts of about \$1 trillion over nine years. Those cuts, starting in 2013, were triggered when a "supercommittee" failed to come up with a plan last month to reduce the debt.

"The failure of Congress to act must have consequences," Welch wrote. "We stand ready to work with you over the next year to put America back on a firm financial footing and will vote to sustain your veto of any effort to repeal all or part of the scheduled sequester."

Half the cuts will come from defense and half will come from non-defense programs. Social Security, Medicaid, veterans' benefits, the Children's Health Insurance Program, unemployment insurance, welfare and other programs benefiting low-income Americans are exempt.

House and Senate Republicans have proposed finding cuts elsewhere in the budget so that defense programs can be spared.

Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, introduced a bill that would reduce the federal workforce by 10 percent through attrition and apply the savings to pay for defense -- and non-defense programs -- for one year.

"The troops simply don't have any more to give," McKeon said in a statement. "It is time we address our debt crisis sensibly, by literally shrinking the size of government."

Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona is leading a group of senators who say they will identify "other responsible offsets" to reduce the deficit without endangering security.

"Defense funding should be driven by our national security needs, not by arbitrary fiscal arithmetic," he and four other GOP senators wrote. "Funding levels should be based on U.S. security objectives, which are defined by an assessment of our current and future threats and risks. We cannot responsibly allow across-the-board, Draconian defense cuts to go forward at the expense of our national security."

During a news conference, Welch said the only way Congress should unravel the cuts is if lawmakers can come up with a "balanced approach" to deficit reduction that includes increases in revenue. Otherwise, the deal should stay in place.

"A deal is a deal," Welch said. "They can't have their cake and eat it too. And failure has consequences."