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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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CHAIRMAN,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DOMESTIC POLICY

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
GOVERNMENT REFORM

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

March 10, 2009

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John McHugh
Ranking Member
House Committee on Armed Services
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Skelton and Ranking Member McHugh:

I urge you to eliminate budget authority for the Virtual Army Experience (VAE) in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010. The VAE is a state-of-the-art, interactive recruiting tool used by the Army to give participants as young as 13 years old a naïve and unrealistic glimpse into the world of Soldiering.

The VAE allows participants to perform missions using adapted combat training technology meant to imitate the feel of real Army equipment through the use of air-pressured guns that mimic recoil and kickback, and Humvees that shake slightly from simulated IED explosions. Although participants score points for shooting people in uniform and lose points for firing on noncombatants, no blood or carnage is ever seen in the simulation. The VAE shields participants from the realities of killing while glorifying the taking of human life in a thinly veiled attempt to recruit new soldiers. Making matters worse, if a child wants to take part in the simulation, the Army collects his or her contact information, as well as an assessment of the child's performance in the simulator.

The VAE travels around the country to family oriented venues such as amusement parks, air shows and county fairs. When the VAE came to the Cleveland Air Show in 2008, I raised concerns and objections with the Army. Allowing children as young as thirteen years of age to participate in a simulation endorsed by the United States Government that glorifies and sanitizes extreme violence is unacceptable. Like many towns across the U.S., Cleveland is trying to do the opposite because of its very real struggles with violence. Exposing children to America's heroes is beneficial to both the children and members of the armed service. However, this exposure must be honest and complete, rather than portraying an unrealistic or incomplete picture of what choosing future service to our country might entail.

I appreciate the difficult job the Committee faces when setting the priorities for fiscal year 2010. I hope you will agree that it is irresponsible to continue the touring of the VAE exhibits. In 2007 the reported estimated cost to operate the VAE was \$9.8 million. This money can be better spent. I urge you to eliminate from the budget the Virtual Army Experience in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2010. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis J. Kucinich". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" at the beginning.

Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress