

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4103

October 22, 2002

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General Gordon Sullivan
President
Association of the United States Army
2425 Wilson Blvd.
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Dear General Sullivan:

I wanted to give you a quick update on my efforts to provide concurrent receipt for America's veterans.

As you'll recall, the Senate voted in June to allow full concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and VA disability benefits. The House voted in May for a different version (a plan to gradually implement concurrent receipt for those with a disability rated 60% or higher). Before it can be sent to the President, the House and Senate must agree on a single plan, and meetings are now being held to develop that agreement.

A month ago, our Senate negotiators believed a final agreement was near. Since then, President Bush and the House of Representatives have taken separate steps that reduce our chances of success.

First, the Secretary of Defense notified Congress that President Bush would veto concurrent receipt, even if it were passed by Congress. His letter said, "It does not appear necessary to offer such broad authority to address what may be a quite limited number of cases where hardship may exist." He added that concurrent receipt would "divert critical resources" from the Pentagon's \$355 billion annual budget, to the detriment of the war on terrorism and military transformation.

This is not a credible statement, since this week Congress approved the largest defense increase in decades.

Although I believe veterans enjoy strong support in the Senate and could win a vote to override any veto, House leaders have maneuvered to postpone further action until after Election Day. Clearly, they fear the reaction of veterans if this bill is vetoed.

Another obstacle was created in secret last week by the House Appropriations Committee.

While working on a separate bill, HR 5605, the House added a provision that would prevent the VA from adjudicating the claim of any veteran who would be eligible for concurrent receipt.

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This means that any soldier injured in a possible conflict with Iraq would be prevented from receiving both pension and disability pay. It would also block benefits for a current retiree who has not filed a claim with the VA, and would prevent a retiree with a service-connected disability from receiving a rating increase.

This is discriminatory, and it is unfair. Certain individuals would be singled out for reduced benefits, without any legal or logical justification.

This bill was approved by one of the largest and most powerful committees in the House of Representatives, and it raises questions about the intentions of House leaders. Also troubling is the fact that this provision was added with no public discussion or debate.

These setbacks and delays are troubling. When we resume work after the election, our fight will be more difficult. Still, you should know that Senator Johnson and I are determined to pursue a successful outcome this year. We will make every effort to win the support of the House and President Bush, and we urge you to add your voice to our efforts. We've made good progress this year, and it's not over yet.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Tom Daschle
United States Senate

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