
Defense Report

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Undermining the National Guard and Reserve

Almost unnoticed, a number of actions and proposals affecting the National Guard and Reserve forces of the United States are underway which, if successful, will seriously impair recruiting, retention, morale, and combat readiness of the military's Reserve Components.

These proposals come in the midst of a significant improvement of Reserve Component combat readiness; in the Army, for example, over 50 per cent of the units reached acceptable combat ready status last year as opposed to only about 20 per cent just two years earlier. Even greater progress was anticipated for 1976.

A major blow at Reserve Component recruiting was inflicted by Congress late last year when it was decreed that as of 1 January 76, National Guard and Reserve newly recruited members would not be paid until they began their active duty basic training. This means they would have to attend drills prior to that time without pay—an obvious hurdle for recruiters.

Another adverse action is the pending legislation which will provide pay to civil service employees who are also members of the Guard or Reserve only to the extent necessary to assure no loss of pay due to Reserve duty participation in annual field training. Active duty pay would be limited to the amount by which summer camp pay exceeds civilian pay, if any. This proposal ignores the financial incentive which induces many first rate Federal employees to join and stay in a Reserve Component unit.

Another proposal would eliminate the presently provided additional pay (\$5.00 to \$20.00 a month) to commanders for handling the many administrative/command matters which cannot be taken care of during drill periods. This extra pay is already too small to compensate adequately for the considerable amount of work commanders must do on their own time. Taking it away will be another blow against retention of top notch people.

Still another assault comes from pending legislation which will permit Service Secretaries to prescribe less than 48 unit training assemblies a year for certain Reserve Component units. This will reduce the pay of individuals in such units and, with respect to the National Guard, might well infringe on the needs and wishes of the states to which the units belong.

The money saved by these proposals and actions will not be great, but the impact on the Reserve Components could be most serious.