
Defense Report

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Reserve Forces Manpower—Congress Begins to See the Problem

As the Defense Authorization and Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 1978 make their tortuous way through the legislative process evidence grows that the Congress is finally alert to the alarming manpower situation that exists in the reserve components of all the Armed Forces.

The Nixon/Ford and now the Carter administrations have attempted to save money and active military manpower by putting growing reliance on the availability of effective reserves to constitute a convincing Total Force. But the lack of draft-based motivation and the absence of impressive enlistment incentives have driven the number of reserve recruits steadily downward. Today all reserve components are feeling a serious manpower pinch.

A recent Congressional attempt to "help" the reserves took the form of a House Appropriations Committee proposal to create funds for reserve reenlistment bonuses by transferring 8,500 Army reservists into status that would eliminate their drill pay—a self-defeating move predicted to bring a mass exodus from the units affected.

But the Senate Appropriations Committee didn't agree with their compatriots in the House and struck the idea of saving money by depriving a few people of their drill pay. Both committees have now agreed on the lack of wisdom in that idea and have also approved a very small test of a reserve reenlistment bonus. The full Congress will work its will early in September.

The apparent shift in attitude is welcome but the limited scope of the bonus test—and the fact that it is just a test rather than a full-fledged effort to create instant improvement in reserve retention—leaves something to be desired. It is doubtful that the test will be a true measure of the effectiveness of what must ultimately be an across-the-board effort to help every reserve unit.

The Army has proposed a massive Reserve Component Readiness Improvement Package costing almost a half billion dollars each year after it is in full swing. The first year program for \$100 million was cut in half by Department of Defense budgeteers. The House dropped even that modest amount but did approve a reduced version of a reenlistment incentive program sponsored by several military associations.

The concept of reserve participation in the Total Force is both laudable and practical. It has already created many opportunities for fiscal economies. But economy must be restrained by reality. At some point we must spend enough money to make the Total Force workable.

If the draft is to remain dormant, the price of reducing active duty manpower requirements is a permanent, and admittedly costly, set of reserve incentives.