

Defense Report

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Support of the Reserves—Penny-wise, Pound-foolish

Military reservists who are also full-time federal employees have once again been singled out for special attention—a substantial cut in the amount of pay they can earn while attending summer training sessions.

Last year the Ford Administration proposed to cut back on the amount of pay Federal employee/reservists can earn during the annual two-week summer training periods. They would have been limited to a combination of military and civilian pay no higher than the civilian pay they would have earned during that period. When the proposal hit Congress in the form of a Fiscal Year 1977 Budget item it was summarily rejected, along with other plans to cut back on defense costs by shrinking reserve expenditures.

President Ford's "lame duck" budget which he has left with Congress as he heads for retirement resurrects the so-called "dual compensation" idea at a time when the reserves of all the services are having an increasingly hard time recruiting and keeping people in their ranks. It also seems to counter the efforts of the President's Committee on Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve which is struggling to get better treatment for reservists in their relations with their civilian bosses.

Reserve leaders are concerned that these repeated efforts to cut compensation for reservists employed by the federal government could spur the various states and municipalities into parallel action for their employees. At a time when all echelons of government are hard-pressed for funds this potential cost avoidance might be inviting.

A recent nationwide survey showed that 26 percent of civilian employers of reservist continue to pay their full salary while they are away at summer training and do not charge the time against vacation allowances. The same survey also showed that 55 percent of the employers just make up the difference between employees' military pay and what they would have been paid while on their civilian jobs.

Several years ago the reserve components were integrated more closely with the active elements to create a more effective "total force." But personnel strength in the reserves has been declining in spite of concerted recruiting efforts.

One of the reasons for declining interest in reserve service may be the "penny-wise, pound-foolish" attitude of past administrations in support of the reserve forces. We hope the new administration will not follow this example.