
Defense Report

AUSA



Military Pay—It Should Be Based on Equity, Not on Recruiting Success

In a recent press release Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.) argued against Reagan Administration plans for an across-the-board military pay raise of 5.3 percent beginning in July, 1981, because military recruiting is now going well and the retention of trained personnel seems to be improving. In essence what Mr. Aspin is saying is that the pay of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines should be set by its success as a lure to serve, not by any comparison with the earnings of our nonmilitary citizens. If Mr. Aspin has his way, equitable comparability between civilian and military pay would be forgotten.

Actually, the planned 5.3 percent raise will not regain the comparability last achieved in 1972. In the intervening years, military pay has fallen 14.7 percent behind the upward path of inflation and 19.5 percent behind increases in civilian administrative, clerical and technical occupations in setting the 5.3 percent figure. Only about 12 percent of the military skills are truly parallel. It would have been better if the comparison had included pay for civilian blue collar skills, which can be compared to about 75 percent of military jobs. The combined comparison would have dictated an immediate military raise of 11.4 percent.

The lack of comparability is easily demonstrated by a couple of examples. For instance, a newly hired bus driver for the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority will earn an annual salary of \$16,827 while a college-graduate second lieutenant will earn a total of pay and allowance equaling \$16,708. Similarly, a new recruit will earn just 86 percent of the federal minimum wage if he or she performs just 40 hours of duty each week. A typical week in basic training is likely to be more than 60 hours and frequently will approach 80 hours.

It is totally contradictory to encourage volunteerism on one hand and then tell those who volunteer that they will not be compensated on the same basis as their fellow citizens who choose not to serve. To do so is to tell the men and women who wear the military uniforms of the United States that they are second-class citizens.