
Defense Report

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Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve — The Federal Government May Not Set a Good Example

When the United States abandoned the draft as its major source of military manpower it also removed one of the most effective incentives for enlistment in the National Guard and the various Reserves.

In the same year the draft ended, President Nixon established the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve in an effort to make sure that the jobs and benefits of reservists were protected while they attended military training and to encourage employers to ensure the reservists did not suffer a loss of income while away from the job, training. The federal government permitted its civilian employees to draw both reserve and civil service pay while training, setting an excellent example for other employers.

Because of some obvious parallels between their military and civilian occupations—law enforcement officers, for example—about half of all our Army Reservists and Guardsmen are employed by federal, state or local governments. On several occasions, federal budgeteers have recommended that reservists who are also federal employees be paid either their civil service or their reserve pay, whichever is greater, during training. In each previous instance Congress has seen the frailty of this argument and has rejected it. Quite obviously, state and local governments would not be inclined to be any more generous than the federal paymasters and most civilian employers would be convinced that the federal government, as represented by the Committee for Employer Support, was talking out of both sides of its face.

We now have a similar situation surfacing with the Reagan Administration, where part of the executive branch—the Pentagon—is wringing its hands about the sad state of reserve manpower while another part—the Office of Management and Budget—has resurrected the pay limitation as part of its frantic effort to reduce the budget. It would be both ironic and foolhardy if the Pentagon were to succeed in convincing Congress to increase bonuses and other incentives for reserve service while another action was concurrently taking money away from a major part of the reserve force.

It is to be hoped that Congress will once again see the light and help avoid this foolishness.