
Defense Report

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Robbing Peter to Pay Paul—It Has Never Made Much Sense

Just a year ago Congress, at the urging of the Administration, substantially reduced the social security benefits available to the widows and dependent children of service members who die while on active duty. The decision cut the period during which the surviving spouse can receive social security payments for the care of a child by two years, phasing them out at age 16 instead of 18, or two years before most young people complete high school. It also called for the gradual elimination of direct payments to dependent children who stay in school. These will run out at age 18 instead of age 22, the age at which many complete college.

This reduction has caused severe hardship on the part of many widows and has already begun to force some dependent children to abandon plans for college. It did not take long for this news to get back to Congress and it has already agreed to restore the cuts, *if the money to pay them can be found by the Defense Department rather than by social security.*

So, in the best tradition of taking money from one pocket and putting it in another, the DoD has surfaced a plan to find that money by taking it from other badly needed personnel programs. If approved, the plan would eliminate Army plans to increase the incentives paid to personnel who are willing to extend overseas tours.

It would kill long-sought plans to underwrite one round trip per year for dependent children of military personnel stationed overseas who are attending college at home. It would deny funds to reimburse service members for the storage of motor vehicles they cannot take with them on overseas assignments because of the nature of the assignment or a prohibition against shipping vehicles to the assignment locality. It would eliminate plans to increase the special pay for the recruiters upon whom the services rely to keep their ranks filled with volunteers.

All of these are needed improvements for our active-duty personnel that DoD had planned for the 1984 legislative program. Congress will now find it difficult to understand their importance if they are formally proposed in the future.