
Defense Report

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Military Pay and Benefits—Barely Half-a-Loaf for 1985

When the budget crunch is on, military pay and benefit issues invariably take a back seat. The fiscal 1985 budget was no exception, and, while there were some meager pluses, many important issues were ignored or deferred to 1986.

It has long been recognized that travel allowances for military personnel are inadequate and that military families are forced to dig deep into their own pockets to cover moving costs, often in excess of \$1,000 per move.

In the 1985 budget, the travel allowance was increased from 13 to 15 cents per mile—still well below current standards. No action at all was taken on the much needed increase to 18,000 pounds in the authorized weight allowance for household goods.

These issues are expected to be addressed again in the fiscal 1986 defense budget to include an increase to 19 cents per mile for travel (federal civilian employees now get 20 cents), an increase in the weight allowance and a temporary lodging entitlement of up to \$110 a day for four days—all reasonable and defensible adjustments which are needed now.

Dental care for military families is also a pressing need. Projected in the fiscal 1986 budget is a proposal for commercial dental insurance for active duty military dependents with the government covering most of the cost, a system which is common in the private sector and which should be supported wholeheartedly in the military.

While the fiscal 1985 budget included a modest military pay raise of four percent, this still lags behind the private sector by about six percent (a figure that inflation will increase to nearly 11 percent by year's end). Initial budget planning called for a seven percent increase in military pay in 1986, but now even this is at risk given current White House talk of a federal pay freeze.

Comparability and equity are key principles in the military compensation and benefit package. There is no excuse for forcing the already financially strapped service family to pay a substantial part of their own moves or to receive mediocre benefits significantly less than those of the private sector merely to set a belt-tightening example for the rest of the country.