
Defense Report

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Reserve Component Training—A Case of Congressional Micromanagement?

In ordering the Secretary of Defense to study longer training programs for the Armed Forces reserve components, Congress may be involving itself in actions which could possibly upset the delicate balance that has permitted important increases in reserve strength in recent months. Army Reservists and National Guardsmen queried have indicated no sentiment for longer mandatory periods of training.

While there is ample evidence to support a willingness to train when the mission so dictates, additional mandatory requirements could have serious detrimental effects on the recruiting and retention potential of reserve component units. Fully two-thirds of the reservists who declined to re-enlist during 1983 cited conflicts with their civilian jobs or their family lives as the cause for opting out. There are many in the reserve components who can ill afford to devote more time to additional training.

Readiness training of reserve units has already been expanded effectively over the past ten years through a number of voluntary training programs. Similar requirements exist for additional training when reserve units participate in exercises at the National Training Center, and in overseas deployment exercises in Europe, Korea and Latin America. Last year more than 235 Army units participated in overseas training.

There are also hundreds of reservists attending service schools, special training programs, key personnel update conferences, mobilization planning sessions, junior leadership training, and affiliation meetings with gaining wartime commands—all activities needed to increase the proficiency of key reserve component members.

In short, reservists already train well beyond the legal requirements of 48 unit training assemblies and 15 annual training days a year. Not included in all this are the nonpaid hours many reservists donate to their units and the correspondence courses so many others take in their "free time."

Congress should continue funding the required additional training needed by specific units to improve reserve components readiness. However, no attempt should be made to legislate an increase in training days for all elements of the reserve components.