
Defense Report

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Cutting Military Retirement Sends the Wrong Message to Our People In Uniform

Congressman Les Aspin seems bent clearly on making drastic cuts to the retired pay earned by members of the Armed Forces. Mr. Aspin sees the present system as too costly and says it encourages many experienced people to retire at an early age.

Through some deft maneuvering, Mr. Aspin has adjusted the military retirement accounting base so that his committee could cut \$2.9 billion from the 1986 accrual investment to the retirement fund, with the actual "savings" to come from the benefits to be earned by people who retire 20 years hence.

The proposed changes to military retirement are not supposed to affect people who are now retired or those currently serving. However, the near-term effects on armed forces readiness has many servicemen and women uneasy and are cause for anxiety among the leadership of all services. A survey of senior Army noncommissioned officers reveals their widespread concern that these changes could be just the first step in a series of cuts which would deprive them of earned benefits for which they have performed faithful—and often dangerous—service.

Defense Department officials estimate that the proposed changes would result in about an eight percent loss in the 5-to-20 year segment of the enlisted force. That would indicate a return to the levels of manning that gave us the "hollow" Army of the 1970s, created gaping petty-officer shortfalls and gutted our combat strength.

The people now in uniform have already witnessed changes that resulted in 13 percent reduction in retired pay. They perceive these new cutbacks as a still further erosion of entitlements and as a signal of decreasing appreciation for sacrifices made while in the service of their nation.

The civilian and military leaders who are charged with the responsibility of maintaining national security have made clear to Congress the dangerous consequences that reducing retirement pay could have on military readiness. By disregarding these cautious warnings, Congress falls far short of the full exercise of its power and responsibility to raise and support armies.