



ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

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General Gordon R. Sullivan
United States Army (Ret.)
President

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On behalf of the more than 105,000 members of the Association of the United States Army, I write to thank you and the Armed Services Committee for your efforts to protect the interests of service members in the FY2010 National Defense Authorization Bill.

We are grateful to both chambers for their support of increased end strengths, a 3.4% military pay raise, TRICARE coverage for “gray area” Guard and Reserve retirees, and additional initiatives to improve conditions and benefits for wounded warriors and their families and caregivers.

In conference we request that you consider the following:

End Strength

AUSA very strongly supports the Senate provision that would authorize a 30,000 end strength increase beginning in FY2010, rather than waiting until FY2011. We believe these additional troops are needed as soon as possible to ease operations tempo stresses on members and families and better meet the needs of commanders in the field.

Concurrent Receipt

AUSA very strongly supports the House provision phasing out the disability offset to military retired pay for all members whose service-caused illnesses and

injuries forced their medical retirement from active service. This plan was a key feature of the President's defense budget submission, and AUSA urges its retention in the final Defense Authorization Act.

Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)

AUSA very strongly supports the Senate provision that would end deduction of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from SBP annuities when the member's death is service-caused. Congressional leaders have repeatedly cited fixing this "widow's tax" as a top priority, and AUSA believes aggressive action is essential to substantively address that commitment.

TRICARE Fees

AUSA very strongly urges retention of Section 706 of the Senate bill as a "Sense of Congress" provision in the final bill. This section acknowledges that military health care is a primary offset for the unique demands and sacrifices inherent in a military career, that career service members have earned coverage levels commensurate with that sacrifice, that much of defense health cost growth reflect readiness requirements that are a "cost of doing business" for the Defense Department, and that the Department can and should pursue a range of other options to reduce health costs and rather than seeking to impose large fee increases on military beneficiaries. This statement of congressional intent provides a vital foundation for discussion on this important benefit issue.

Reserve Retirement Age Credit for Post-9/11 Active Service

AUSA very strongly supports the Senate provision that would provide retroactive credit for active service since September 11, 2001 for the purpose of reducing the Reserve retirement age. Current law authorizes a

three-month reduction in the standard retirement age for each cumulative 90 days served on active duty, but credits only active service rendered since January 28, 2008.

Military Parent Custody Rights

AUSA very strongly supports the House provision that would help protect the custody rights of military parents while deployed.

Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA)

AUSA very strongly urges retention of Senate section 658 as a “Sense of Congress” provision in the final bill. We are perplexed at the continued resistance of the Department to providing currently serving uniformed services beneficiaries the same FSA option afforded all other federal and corporate employees. No one has greater need for dependent care than service members subject to frequent and extended deployments. Thousands of Service families experience significant out-of-pocket expenses for dental care, eyeglasses and contact lenses, medication copayments, over-the-counter medications and more. AUSA urges the Committees to pursue every possible effort to end the current discrimination against service members on FSA eligibility.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide AUSA’s views on these important issues.

Sincerely,

GORDON R. SULLIVAN
General, USA Retired