

Association of the United States Army

Voice for the Army—Support for the Soldier



Supporting a Relevant and Ready Army at War

AUSA + 2nd Session, 109th Congress = Some Good News, But . . .

Boots on the Ground—the boots of American Soldiers—are crucial for confronting the many challenges presented by today's complex and uncertain security environment. More than 600,000 active, Guard and Reserve Soldiers are on active duty today defending our nation, and almost half of them are deployed in more than 120 countries. Now more than ever, well-equipped and well-trained Soldiers are vital to our national security.

In its 2nd Session, the 109th Congress made some progress toward allocating much-needed resources to the Army. Through the use of supplemental appropriations as well as authorizations and appropriations to the base budget, Congress provided resources for continuing current operations worldwide, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, and for resetting the force; protected Soldiers against predatory lenders; blocked Department of Defense efforts to offset rising health care costs on the backs of retirees; and took steps to ensure that military children receive high-quality education.

However, in many areas its actions fell short of the mark. A gap remains between Soldiers' pay and that of their civilian counterparts; the 2.2 percent pay increase for Soldiers (even with targeted raises for more senior Soldiers) does not close that gap. By delaying increases in TRICARE fees, cost shares and pharmaceutical costs for retirees, Congress merely postponed making the necessary decisions to ensure affordable health care for those who, even after retirement, continue to serve as key influencers helping to encourage and sustain the nation's all-volunteer force. Moreover, reducing the required funds for the Future Combat Systems, the Army's major modernization program, will delay insertion of technological advances into the current force and escalate program costs.

If the nation wants relevant and ready land forces, resources must follow. The Army has calculated that, for Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, it will need approximately \$139 billion in its base budget to organize, train, equip and modernize units, as well as tens of billions in both FY 2007 and FY 2008 supplementals to prosecute the Global War on Terrorism. The best efforts of all AUSA members will be required to guarantee funding of initiatives to ensure Soldiers and their families quality of life equal to the service they provide and to secure resources for the Long War and force modernization plans.

Each member of AUSA is a Torchbearer, carrying this message to our elected representatives and the American public. Help keep our Army Strong. Your voice matters!

Here are some of the major objectives achieved during the last legislative session:

AUSA and others spoke out for:

- Increasing active Army endstrength to 550,000.
- Closing the pay gap between Soldiers and the private sector and providing pay increase parity for Department of the Army civilians.
- Enhancing life insurance benefits.
- Providing increased access to health care for reserve component personnel and their families.

Congress responded by:

- Temporarily authorizing active Army endstrength up to 512,210 and to 532,400 between 2007 and 2009 **but without funding.**
- Maintaining the current pay gap by approving a January 2007 pay raise of 2.2 percent for military personnel and some targeted pay increases up to 8 percent beginning 1 April for warrant officers and certain mid-grade non-commissioned officers (NCOs).
- Providing \$400,000 Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance coverage free of charge for servicemembers in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Simplifying TRICARE coverage for all drilling reserve component members, eliminating three levels of cost sharing and establishing one premium at 28 percent of cost.

People

People Readiness/Future Force

AUSA and others spoke out for:

- Not increasing TRICARE fees/deductibles.
- Legislating protection for servicemembers against predatory lenders.
- Funding reserve component endstrength at 350,000 for Army National Guard and 205,000 for Army Reserve.
- Repealing in its entirety the Department of Veterans' Affairs offset on retired military entitlement (concurrent receipt).
- Increasing full-time Army reserve component manning endstrength and Army dual status military technicians.
- Funding the Federal Impact Aid Program to preclude children of military families from being disadvantaged in public schooling.
- Funding active and reserve component recruiting initiatives to attract high-quality personnel to military service.
- Maintaining the Army's strategic advantage and advancing modernization in its current force.
- Funding for Army procurement items deemed essential for continuing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Ensuring adequate stocks of munitions to support training and the warfighting stockpile.
- Developing the Future Force for the transforming Army.

Congress responded by:

- Barring the Defense Department from increasing any TRICARE Prime or Standard Fees, pharmacy copays or TRICARE Reserve Select premiums, **but only through 30 September 2007.**
- Capping interest rates by lenders to servicemembers at 36 percent.
- Authorizing and funding Army National Guard at 350,000 and Army Reserve at 205,000.
- Providing no changes, so AUSA will continue to press the issue with Congress.
- Authorizing a 4.3 percent increase for both Army reserve component full-time manning and Army dual status military technicians.
- Maintaining the current level of funding for Impact Aid by authorizing \$30 million for schools that benefit dependents of servicemembers and Department of Defense civilians and an additional \$5 million for schools that benefit dependents with severe disabilities, as well as an additional \$8 million for districts experiencing a change in student load due to rebasing or base realignment.
- Significantly increasing active and reserve component recruiting and retention funding.
- Authorizing helicopter upgrades and modernization for Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles; \$409 million for Army night vision equipment; \$3.6 billion for procurement of Army aviation assets; \$878 million for Stryker vehicles.
- Authorizing \$1 billion to up-armor additional HMMWVs (High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles); more than \$17 billion for reset (replacing, recapitalizing and repairing equipment), including \$2.94 billion for the Army Guard and Reserve; \$800 million for personal protection and gear such as body armor; \$2.1 billion for improvised explosive device defeat equipment.
- Authorizing \$1.7 billion for Army ammunition programs.
- Authorizing approximately \$300 million less than requested for the Future Combat Systems.

Take up the torch and join our crusade!

BECOME a member STAY a member RECRUIT a member



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