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Health care will be top military personnel issue.

Health care in the armed forces will be at the top of next year's legislative agenda.

One sign of that is the recent inclusion of the service vice chiefs of staff into budget decisions being made in the more than \$16 billion TRICARE program.

Lt. Gen. David Ohle, the Army's deputy chief of staff for personnel, said, "We've got to raise health care to the same level that we raised pay and retirement — to the chairman and joint chiefs level. As we testify and talk to Congress, health care was always a top issue. ... I think you'll see health care be the number one issue for the next Congress."

Personnel officials in all the services have long testified that health care is part of military compensation. "You have got to consider pay raises, retirement, housing and medical as that core package that we must provide for our soldiers and veterans."

Ohle cited this Congress' action on raising military pay and overhauling the pay tables and restoring the retirement formula, improving the basic allowance for housing and privatizing housing construction as solid steps in raising quality of life for soldiers, veterans, retirees and their families.

The last piece is medical, Ohle said. "That affects everyone. When you don't get the proper medical service or what you believe should be the proper medical service in a timely fashion, those problems rise right to the top. We've got to do better."

Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, USA, Ret., president of the Association of the United States Army, said the fifth issue in the AUSA Torchbearer Campaign will address quality of life and health care.

Army sees 8,000 shortfall in active recruiting, 12,000 in USAR. The Army is expecting to fall about 8,000 recruits short of its goal for the active force and 12,000 short of its goal for the Army Reserve, but the service's personnel chief believes new programs and a shift to "localizing" recruiting will help turn the situation around.

He also sees the Army's strong retention program and the service's closer attention to attrition as critically important in manning the force.

Lt. Gen. David Ohle, deputy chief of staff for personnel, said, "The manning of the Army is the most challenging it has been in a decade. It's that way primarily because of recruiting. When you look at the other two components, retention is really the best of all the services, and attrition has turned around... after the high following Aberdeen."

Interviewed as Congress was considering extending the authorization for the Selective Service System, Ohle said the Army "believes the all-volunteer force is the way to go. The new chief of staff of the Army is dedicated to help recruiting, and we think we can turn it around" rather than return to the draft "even with the economy as good as it is."

Despite the shortfall in recruiting this year and fewer recruits in the Delayed Enlistment Program for next year, he does not see the need to lower the Army's authorized end strength. But Ohle added, "We are reviewing end strength levels."

(Editor's note: For the latest developments on Capitol Hill, check out the What's Hot and News Desk sections of the AUSA Web Site. Bookmark, www.ause.org. For AUSA's electronic legislative newsletter, E-mail John Molino at jmolino@ause.org.)

Army to test two programs to help recruiting.

Looking at the two test programs the Army wants to start in October, Lt. Gen. David Ohle said College First "fills a need. More and more young people are choosing college. Currently 67 percent of high school graduates go on to higher education."

This includes training schools, community colleges and four-year institutions. That number is expected to rise to 75 percent in the next five years.

"Before our programs were built, you would join the Army and earn your educational benefits after. But if these young Americans truly want to start their education before, we want to accommodate them. Let them start and then bring them into the Army and go back and finish (their education when their enlistment is complete) or on active duty. We will work with the recruits to ensure they get their education," the deputy chief of staff for personnel said.

The program, approved in the House and Senate conference report on the defense authorization bill, would allow recruits to attend a vo-tech or community college for two years and then they will come in.

The experiment, expected to last four years, will cost about \$6.8 million in the first year and rise to about \$20 million in the years following.

He said the College First and GED Plus programs "are a structured study to see how we can enhance recruiting."

Ohle sees GED Plus as a way "to provide an opportunity for those who, for whatever reason, did not have the chance to finish high school. We are not going after dropouts. There are many Americans who had to get out of high school to support a family with a job. We're targeting the ones who didn't have the opportunity to finish high school."

GED Plus, also a four-year test and approved in the conference report, is expected to cost about \$600,000 annually.

The 4,000 recruits accepted into the program will also be compared to recruits who entered the Army already holding a GED and those admitted with a high school diploma.

AUSA calls for \$90 billion investment in new equipment to end "death spiral in modernizing our armed forces." The Defense Department needs an immediate investment of \$90 billion for new equipment to end the "death spiral in modernizing our armed forces," the president of the Association of the United States Army said.

Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, USA, Ret., and president of the Association of the United States Army, warned in his Aug. 10 letter to association leaders that this investment was critical to the future of readiness of the armed forces. "Procurement accounts were to be increased as we approached the new century, but they fell victim to maintaining short-term readiness and funding the strategy of engagement."

The Defense Department is spending less than \$60 billion in procurement of new equipment.

In his fourth Torchbearer letter to 200 AUSA leaders, he cited a recent Congressional Budget Office report that the current investment target "will not allow us to replace or refurbish aging equipment and plow funds into critical technologies."

Sullivan sent his letter as House and Senate conferees are working on the defense appropriations bill. "Now is the time to invest in our space, air, sea and land forces. It is the obligation of Congress to provide for the common defense — and the responsibility of every American to demand no less."

AUSA's Torchbearer campaign was launched in February to foster debate on national security and defense issues.

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Army expects to be lead service in national missile defense. The Army expects to be the lead service for National Missile Defense, the service's top space and missile officer told a breakfast meeting of 150 national security leaders here Aug. 5.

Lt. Gen. John Costello, commanding general of the Army's Space and Missile Defense Command, said he expected the decision to be announced following a Joint Requirements Oversight Council meeting Aug. 30. Decision was pending at press time.

"There have been years of controversy over this, but I think on Aug. 30 the Army will be designated the lead service for national missile defense. Obviously, it is very complicated system and it's a very joint system, so it's going to be different from normal. ... It will be a National Guard organization."

Adding, "We made a decision years ago that Army National Guard personnel would man and operate these systems." Where the soldiers will be placed and where they come from are questions now being worked on, he said.

"This is high-tech work, and it's going to take more of the Army's energy as we go down the road in the next few months."

The vice chiefs of staff from all the services make up the requirements council.

Costello added he expected the Army's Training and Doctrine Command to formally approve the new organization shortly after the announcement is made.

President warns air power cannot win every conflict. In marking the 50th anniversary of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Clinton said, "We know not every conflict will be like Kosovo, not every battle can be won from the air.

He called the 78-day air campaign "a truly remarkable military campaign. Over 30,000 sorties flown, no combat casualties. Still, we must not indulge the illusion of a risk-free war."

DoD urges standards for National Guard war-time readiness. The Defense Department in its latest study of reserve component use said the Army should establish standards for post-mobilization training and deployments so National Guard divisions can be fully incorporated into its war plan.

The Reserve Component Employment Study 2005 found it is difficult to determine how quickly National Guard divisions can be deployed because there is no schedule of where and when these mobilized units would be trained.

This was specifically aimed at the 15 enhanced brigades. Eight of the enhanced separate brigades are scheduled to fight in a second major theater war. There are four training sites for post-mobilization training. Each of those sites can handle one brigade.

The study recommended a role for reserve component soldiers in national missile defense, something Army officials say they will do. Among the other areas in the study were recommendations to reduce from 270 days to 180 days presidential call-up authority and shortening rotations for some occupations when reservists are called up.

Sites selected for pharmacy and TRICARE supplement demonstration. Okeechobee, Fla., and Fleming, Ky., have been selected as the two test sites for the pharmacy pilot program. Santa Clara, Calif., and Cherokee, Texas, have been selected as the two test sites for the TRICARE supplement demonstration that will begin in the spring.

Health officials said if a county has more than 3,000 people eligible for the two programs in those areas, all would be allowed to enroll. If there were not 3,000 people eligible — the number needed for the test — the area of coverage would expand.

For the pharmacy benefit, those eligible must also have bought Medicare part B outpatient insurance and pay an annual enrollment fee of \$250 per person.

The pharmacy test applies to both mail-order and retail pharmacies.

Conferees agree on \$288.8 billion defense authorization bill; 4.8 percent pay hike included.

Before recessing, House and Senate conferees agreed on a \$288.8 billion defense authorization bill that calls for a 4.8 percent military pay raise, overhaul of the military pay tables and setting military pay raises one-half percent above the annual increases in cost of living.

In addition, the bill provides members a choice in retirement systems — restoring the 50 percent retirement formula or awarding a \$30,000 bonus to those who remain under the 40 percent formula. It also allows both active and reserve component members to enroll in the thrift savings plan.

The bill, which calls for \$8.3 billion more in defense spending than the administration's request, must be approved by both the House and Senate. The money to pay for these programs is contained in the defense appropriations bill. Conferees have not completed their work on the bill.

The Association of the United States Army strongly supported these personnel issues. Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, USA Ret., AUSA president, testified in the closing days of the 105th Congress that the remedies then being considered to pay and compensation and near-term readiness could not be one-time fixes.

Army 'buys back' 4,700 NCOs. The Army will "buy back" almost 4,700 noncommissioned officers beginning in October, the Army's top personnel official said, and it also means a significant increase in promotion to sergeant E-5.

Lt. Gen. David Ohle, deputy chief of staff for personnel, said, "Filling the senior noncommissioned officer slots has been the biggest challenge outside of recruiting."

Adding, "On the readiness reports, most senior commanders report a shortage of senior grade NCOs." That shortage is attributable to a three-year-old program that kept the structure but reduced the manpower to fill the structure. "You didn't have the faces to fill the spaces. The chief of staff reversed that."

With a smaller Army, "you have got to have more 'leader-to-led' to allow the buildup of the force. As we buy back NCOs, the issue is how quick can we build sergeant E-5s. It's the hardest part of the buy-back program."

Hill will look at junior enlisted pay next session.

The Army's top personnel official praised Congress for what it accomplished this year, and said he expected Congress to look at junior enlisted pay in its next session.

Lt. Gen. David Ohle, deputy chief of staff for personnel, said "The theme of this Congress has been 'provide the necessary compensation packages that will enhance military service.'"

Ohle said this Congress' action would cut the number of servicemen and servicewomen on food stamps. "When you couple the \$180 per month (for those in the food stamp program), with the pay raise, that will bump a lot of them off."

Helping the junior enlisted soon will be a change in the law that provides money for soldiers on their first move from basic and advanced training to their first duty station. That change came as a result of field hearings of the House Armed Services Committee this spring.

A number of young servicemen and servicewomen marry when they complete training and move to that first real assignment in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

Crusader artillery system ready for testing.

The lead contractor for the Crusader system has completed the system's mobility test bed — a shell of the resupply vehicle that will examine its engine, transmission, tracks and road wheels. The tracks and road wheels are similar to those on an M-1 Abrams tank.

The tests, set to begin in late summer, will first be conducted at the Army's Tank Automotive Research and Development Center, Warren, Mich., and later this year at the Yuma Proving Grounds, Ariz.

Crusader is an automated self-propelled field artillery system designed to replace the M-109 Paladin starting in 2003. The Army hopes to buy 1,100 by 2014.

Crusader will fire a 155mm howitzer round. Tests on the howitzer will begin early next year. Crusader's rate of fire is predicted to reach 10 rounds per minute, United Defense LP, of Arlington, Va., the lead contractor, said. Paladin fires one round per minute.