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## Benefit Cost and the All-Volunteer Guard and Reserve Force

The debate over the national budget deficits has taken on a not-so-new twist: How to cut the defense budget. This debate always brings another not-so-new twist: How to cut personnel and personnel cost. We have all experienced some amazing improvements in personnel benefits that were a long time coming for Guard, Reserve, and Active Duty. We are very grateful for what the Congress has recognized as implemental and important provisions.

At the same time, it is almost amazing that we hear the mantra of “the sky is falling” on what it costs to have an all-voluntary force. I am sure our predecessors discussed and debated these facts as we moved into an all-voluntary force. The eventual outcome of all volunteers would be some of what we are experiencing in compensation and benefits. Currently, we hear from DoD and certain uniformed leaders how expensive the benefits costs are for our historically professional military force. As we begin to use the Guard and Reserve forces at higher and higher rates (historically high outside of WWII), we have to ask ourselves: why are these leaders so surprised at the costs? Additionally, why would they be so resistant to improving Guard and Reserve benefits?

We need to be realistic with our national defense budget, currently running 3 to 3.5 percent of GNP. And, at the same time, we have to be realistic with our National Military Strategy and National Security Strategies, currently turned upside down since 9-11 events. If we are going to be the sole remaining superpower, and we want to maintain that status, these personnel costs are inevitable. If we are not going to have a draft and continue to use the Active, Guard, and Reserve, these costs will continue at unprecedented rates throughout

the first half of this century. Current wars or conflicts do not necessarily come with predictable start dates and manageable end dates. So, why are we so surprised with personnel costs?

Use of any assets requires resources. Use of any surge force, including the Guard and Reserve forces, requires resources. As a nation, we are bound by certain precepts as a world power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Following our guiding principles means we will continue to do those international and, now, homeland security missions that we are doing. We cannot or should not shy away from the actions we have started or from our position as a national and international power. To do the international and national actions that require our engagement, military action will be required. We now find (not so surprisingly) that our Guard and Reserve forces will be needed to maintain and sustain any international and national (homeland) action. I find it incredibly shallow that any DoD leader or uniformed leader publicly complains about any personnel cost or compensation. If they complain (at the highest level), does that mean the lower levels should

feel good about someone above them complaining about what it cost to have them do their jobs the right way, when the nation asks them to go to war?

As a first step, we need to provide to the American people why it costs so much and what it means to have the nation as a world power. National and international world issues dictate our involvement. The 1990's drawdown disproved our capability to predict. As a nation, we are entering into another year of national debate on all the issues. We have to have an understanding that “Freedom” is not cheap, and that national and international involvement is not cheap. If we are going to maintain our economic and world power status, the Guard and Reserve forces need to be treated in the way they are being used. It is not a mere fact of fairness, or just the right thing to do. It is a matter that our National Military Strategy, National Security Strategy, and (someday) Homeland Security Strategy require our Guard and Reserve forces as well as our Active forces. If we want decreased personnel cost and compensation, we better be ready for not being a superpower.

### Bills to Watch: [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov)

Please consider e-mailing your representatives on these now, since they are being considered:

- S. 2152 Reserve Retirement at age 55
- S. 2100 Selected Reserve MGIB improvements
- S. 2099 Education Assistance for Guard/Reserve member – Combat for College Bill
- S. 451, S. 1916, and HR 3763 – SBP – Survivors Benefit Plan improvements (These bills need your involvement now.)
- S. 2065 and HR 3474 “Keep Promise” Bill, waives Medicare Part B for Retirees before 1956
- S. 2035 Guard and Reserve Health Care and Retirement improvements