

# Legislative Update on Key Issues

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The following are key issues on legislation that we have been actively supporting in response to your inputs at the beginning of the year. Along with the support of The Military Coalition and the National Military Alliance, we have pushed for passage of these bills. Your active support is needed.

■ The Guard and Reserve Readiness and Retention Act of 2005, S. 337, is a bill to amend Title 10, United States Code, to expand health care benefits to all members of the Guard and Reserve and their families and to revise the age and service requirements for eligibility to receive retired pay for nonregular service. **Note:** S. 337 does not include the option for premium offset of private health insurance during a mobilization; also, the Reserve retirement age could be as low as 53, for 34 years service, under the proposal.

● The House Armed Services Committee approved, including permanent TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) for most drilling Reserve or Guard members, the FY06 Defense Authorization Bill (H.R. 1815), *but* the provision was deleted on a budget technicality and was not in the bill that passed the House on 25 May. The Senate will take up its version after the July recess. Senator Graham hopes to add this provision as an amendment to the defense bill (S. 1042).

■ Guard and Reserve Readiness and Retention Act of 2005, H.R. 558, is a bill to amend Title 10, United States Code, to expand health care benefits to all members of the Guard and Reserve and their families and to revise the age and service requirements for eligibility to receive retired pay for nonregular service. H.R. 558 does not include the option for premium offset of private health insurance during a mobilization; also, the Reserve retirement age could be as low as 53, for 34 years service, under the proposal.

● The House Armed Services

Committee approved including permanent TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) for most drilling Reserve or Guard members in the FY06 Defense Authorization Bill (H.R. 1815), *but* the provision was deleted on a budget technicality and was not in the bill that passed the House on May 25.

■ Hope at Home Act, H.R. 838. This bill would allow employers a credit against income tax for members of the National Guard and Reserve. The legislation also would allow a comparable credit for participating self-employed individuals. Full-time responsibility for call up and added training demands are placing stress on Reservists and families to reconsider their commitment to voluntary service. Incentives are needed to offer employers tangible support for the difficulties often associated with having Reserve and Guard employees.

● This bill was referred to House Committee on Ways and Means in Feb. 2005.

■ National Guard and Reserve Bill of Rights Act of 2005, S. 32. This legislation is intended to address growing stresses on National Guard and Reserve service members and to support their retention and readiness. S. 32 would ensure that all Guard and Reserve members and their families would become eligible for health coverage through TRICARE, the military health system, regardless of their mobilization status. During periods of mobilization, Reservists who opt to maintain private health coverage rather than TRICARE would receive assistance in paying their health insurance premiums, making it easier for Reserve families to maintain their existing health coverage. The legislation also would lower the Reserve retirement age to 55; phase in increases to Reserve GI Bill benefits to 50 percent parity with the active duty GI Bill; direct closer oversight of actions to fix Guard and Reserve pay problems;

require regulations to implement Reserve employment and reemployment rights under USERRA; and, for other purposes.

● The National Guard Reserve Bill of Rights Act of 2005 has been referred to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

■ Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act of 2005, H.R. 525. This bill would amend Title 38, United States Code, to provide for an assured adequate level of funding for veterans' health care.

● This bill has been referred to the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health.

These are some of the key legislative measures that are in Congress at this time that do address some of the legislative goals we had during the beginning of the year. We encourage you to write, e-mail, and call your Senators and Representatives soon. The Senate will bring the Authorization bill to the floor after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July recess. You can make a difference.

We recently met with committee staff members; and, of course, their major concerns were not Navy, nor Naval Reserve, issues. Why? The main reason is because of looming Army Reserve and Guard issues. However, if they do not hear from you, they assume you have no issues. Without your direct input, the staff members do not pay attention; but there are so many issues to get any legislation passed, you must be involved. I recommend that you take a few seconds and send your representative an e-mail on the items that concern you and on the legislation above. It will make all the difference, if you will take the time to e-mail your elected officials:

For Senators:

<[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)>

For Representatives:

<[www.house.gov/writerep](http://www.house.gov/writerep)>

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